



IAWS

Indian Association for Women's Studies

**XV National
Conference on Women's Studies**

**"Women in a Changing World:
Restructured Inequalities, Countercurrents and Sites of Resistance"**

**22 to 25 January 2017
University of Madras, Chennai**

**35
Years 2017**

XV NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES

**WOMEN IN A CHANGING WORLD:
RESTRUCTURED INEQUALITIES, COUNTERCURRENTS,
AND SITES OF RESISTANCE**

22-25 JANUARY, 2017
UNIVERSITY OF MADRAS
CHENNAI



Celebrating 35 years of
**THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR
WOMEN'S STUDIES**

2017

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INTRODUCTION

While initiating preparations for the XV National Conference of the IAWS in Chennai, January 2017, the Executive Committee of the IAWS noted that the Association would complete 35 years in 2017. These years have marked a long journey involving both the envisioning and creation of a platform where scholars, students, activists, policy makers and experts drawn from diverse streams, meet to discuss perspectives and strategies with regard to taking forward discussion on women's status and issues. The mid 1970s and the crisis that India was moving towards, the varied movements – food movement, anti-price rise movement, the struggles for land reforms, the campaigns against violence on women in different regions of India - formed the background to this process. The government appointed Committee on the Status of women in India (CSWI, 1974) and its report Towards Equality (1975) - was somewhat lost owing to the political Emergency that was imposed. The CSWI's startling findings indicating a decline in women's situation post-independence, provided the much needed critique and data base, the growing mobilization and organization of women, not just in the metropolitan areas, but in almost all regions of India, led to the beginning of a unique journey-of women's studies and the women's movements shaping each other. Also, the UN Conferences on Women since Mexico (1975) and upto the mid 1980s, the Non- Aligned movement and its conferences, informed the debates, with a focus on national policies and mechanisms that were needed to transform the status of women, in post-colonial countries in particular.



To map the trajectories of this process, it was decided that a special effort be made to recall memories and contributions from previous office –bearers. This was also in continuation of similar efforts made by previous ECs in the past, which had offered interesting glimpses of what entailed charting out new paths in the building of Women's Studies in India.

This was also in recognition of the fact that in recent years it has been noticed that a sizeable section of the participants are drawn from a younger age group. The setting up of more than 150 Women's Studies Centres in India over these past three decades - as well as the teaching undertaken at the Masters and research level - have fed into this steady stream of young participants, who bring fresh perspectives and a new energy at the level of both the movement and the scholarship. Many of them are unfamiliar with the history of the IAWS. There is a curiosity about debates in the past as well as the issues that preoccupied an earlier generation.

There is also an urgent need to convey to the new members the process by which this path of Women's Studies has been carved out with the active involvement of the IAWS in the effort to open up new areas for enquiry at the level of Higher Education. The IAWS journey marks one of the most positive stories of introducing new perspectives in the formal education curricula and streams, drawing upon the rich experience and energy of the women's movement in India. It needs to be recognized that it also reflects the deep commitment of Indian intellectuals and scholars to critical social enquiry and using their academic training to address the challenges facing the forces which sought to bring about democratic changes in the social, political and cultural fabric of India. These were some of the finest women and men, drawn from the foremost educational institutions as well as those who had honed their skills in social movements, ranging from the Gandhian to the left-socialist.



IAWS acknowledges its debt to these pioneers who dared to think differently in order to bridge the gap between educational institutions and society at large; who recognized that social interactions were undertaken in the complex and complicated terrain of existing and prevailing inequalities which included deep divides based on gender, caste, class, region, ethnicity, language and diverse cultural histories in a pluralist society such as ours. They challenged notions of objectivity which ignored entrenched hierarchies to paper over differences which were staring us in the face and posed a challenge to attempts made at social transformation.

We, who were assigned this responsibility had ourselves traversed much of this journey together with the IAWS. However, the varied trajectories, the diverse personal histories that wove into a dynamic movement of women studies, on the one hand, and on the other, more sustained and collective long term planning and resources by IAWS, need to be documented. The reflections as well as thematic contributions carried in this volume offer an insight into this complex but historical journey.

We would like to acknowledge the support received from all those who responded, as well as those whose contributions which could not reach us due to various compulsions. We pay our tribute to the pioneers who set us going on this track. Many of them are no longer with us, even as we have fond memories of the times spent together. We also take this occasion to thank our sisters across South Asia, some of whom have walked this journey with us, across borders, even as the political climate often turned hostile. We are sorry that many more who were approached could not send us their contributions in time. We hope there will be other occasions and better times to share our experiences from this region.





We are grateful to the EC for entrusting this responsibility to us and offering support at different levels. We would like to acknowledge the support provided by Sonali Sharma, Sundaresh, Neeru Mehta, Bhaswati, the CWDS library staff and the inimitable Nandan who also forms part of the story!

Indu Agnihotri
Meera Velayudhan

January 2017





**1981 MUMBAI:
FIRST NATIONAL CONFERENCE**



From Women's education to Women's Studies The long struggle for Legitimacy

Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar and Kamalini Bhansali

The passage from acceptance of the legitimacy of education for women to the recognition of women's education as a critical instrument in the educational process, has been long and protracted. The process has been marked by recurring challenges and struggles and reluctant concession of legitimacy, immediately followed by resistance or apathy. Obstacles in this context are raised by the following dominant ideologies:

1. Social construction/perception of gender roles in civil society;
2. Educational system that create structural rigidities/resistance;
3. Politics and economics of educational policy; and
4. Determination by market forces in all activities, whether pertaining to mind or body.

The Emergence of Women's Studies

The urgency for improvement of women's status in developing countries emanated from the process of development, but it took considerable time to realize that the process of development itself had an adverse effect on women's lives and roles in society. The world Plan of Action for the Decade gave a high to research activities, analysis and data collection regarding all aspects of the situation of women, since adequate data and information are essential for formulating policies and evaluating progress about attitudinal as well as basic socio economic change. It was found to be necessary to get systematic information on the existing conditions, and also to look into the causes of discriminatory practices, attitudes and beliefs which impede women's contribution to development policies. Simultaneously, the GOI had also drawn up a Draft National Plan of

Action for Women, Where emphasis was given to research, which could identify problems and help in bridging the information gap. ICSSR and particularly the late J.P. Naik, had personally facilitated the functioning of the CSWI in a number of ways. However a more conscious, deliberate and committed action came up when ICSSR constituted an Advisory Committee ON Women's Studies (specifically using the term women's studies instead of research on the status of women). As mentioned in the booklet, 'the main objective of the programme of women's studies is the generation and analysis of data with a view of uncovering significant trends in patterns of social and economic organization which affect women's position in the long run. Probably for the first time, it was categorically started that 'all over the world the social sciences studies on women had been focusing on the middle class; the new stance emphasized the study of women belonging to the poorer or the 'less visible' sections of society. It also stressed that the purpose of the studies was to renew the debate on the woman's question. SNTD Women's University probably pioneered the use of the term 'women's studies' for academic and action-oriented activities connected to women's issue. Looking back, it seems that this could only happen in a women's university searching for an identity for itself. The university had its roots in social reform, and specialized in organizing educational programmes to suit the diverse needs of women. It was also a place where innovations and experiments were encouraged.

Extract from Women's Education to Women's Studies - The long struggle for Legitimacy from the book 'Narratives from the Women's Studies Family: Recreating Knowledge, edited by Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, Sage publication , New Delhi, 2003, p. 46, pp. 53-55.



PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



IAWS – THE EARLY YEARS

*S. Anandalakshmy**



In the early seventies, I was working at Lady Irwin College, teaching Child Development in a new Master's course I had helped establish. I also took up a part time assignment assessing the applications for grants in Psychology at the Indian Council for Social Science Research (ICSSR). It was a period in which Sri J. P. Naik was the Member Secretary of the ICSSR. He was wise and large-hearted and under his leadership, the ICSSR became a nucleus for planned gatherings of many kinds, as well as for serendipitous meetings.



Vina Mazumdar had been assigned a room next door, where she was putting together the reams of data from several studies and writing up the draft after the completion of the nation-wide landmark study on the status of women in India. The document that emerged was titled "Towards Equality", now recognized as a milestone publication in social history.

We would meet casually for tea breaks and in the corridors, exchanging thoughts and ideas. That was the beginning of our long association and friendship.

*General Secretary, IAWS, 1991-93



Vina-di felt the need for consolidating the relationships among scholars and practitioners which had developed in the course of the research and the writing up of it. J.P. Naik was a builder of institutions. He always seemed to know the right moment to start something. He advised and supported Vina Mazumdar to register an association and the Indian Association for Women's Studies was born.

Vina Mazumdar had written up the objectives and found almost all the signatories for its registration. The last and seventh one was me. Vina-di summoned me in her characteristic voice of authority, and a lovely smile, and asked me if I wished to sign. Thus, fortuitously, I became one of the founding members of the IAWS, by simply being available at the right time! Some years later for a 2-year period, I was General Secretary of the IAWS, when Devaki Jain was the President, and we organised the Conference in Mysore. Again, my being there was one of those 'accidental' factors. That year, Maithreyi Krishnaraj had been made President, but she got an appointment at the Institute of Social Studies at The Hague and she temporarily opted out of her lead responsibility in the IAWS. Devaki Jain took on the role of President and I was roped in as General Secretary.

I felt privileged to be part of the early years of the Association. We interacted closely with Phulrenu Guha, Lotika Sarkar and other stalwarts. My acquaintance with women activists widened as Conferences and seminars were held across the country. If I named them here, it would be a Who's Who of the women's movement in the 80's and 90's. Aruna Asaf Ali, Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, Hansa Mehta, Madhuri Shah, Ela Bhatt, Neera Desai, Vasantha Kannabiran and so many more from different parts of the country. It was a veritable festival of outstanding women. I feel truly blessed to have known them and interacted with them.

Now IAWS is celebrating 35 years of effective scholarship in the cause of gender equality! All power to it! May it grow in strength and outreach.

* * *

FEMINIST ENGAGEMENTS WITH DISABILITY IN INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN STUDIES



*Anita Ghai**

A Personal Journey

A feminist engagement with disability has been a major preoccupation of the last three decades of my life. I must admit neither my personal predicament, nor my self-proclaimed standing as a feminist gave me the courage to carry the basic assertion of the “personal is political”, of my disabled existence. The disabled woman was in the unconscious, not daring to debate with the societal formulations about my inner world of disability that experienced oppression and anxieties of disability. Owning disability took almost two decades. A deep yearning was to ‘pass’ as a ‘normal’ person. Before I underscore the potential of Indian Association for Women’s Studies (IAWS), let me foreground some of the challenges that I believe have led to an evolution of understanding disability. As a disabled woman, my own location in the field is complicated because it raises perturbing yet important questions: What is my stance as an activist? With what





* President, IAWS, 2008-2011



authority can I speak about disability and Women's Studies? And why? Am I speaking with disabled people or about them? What language do I use to describe disability? Who has the power to name and label? How does understanding of disability exclude others from speaking out? Similarly, how will I negotiate with issues of diagnosis and certification? In doing so, I hope to share some ideas that make disability more as an epistemology rather than only a concessional category within both academia and activism.

My own understanding is that disability is not really a fixed category most clearly signified by the white cane user or a crutch user. Disability, like most dimensions of experience is polysemic — that is ambiguous and unstable in meaning — as well as a mixture of truth and fiction that depends on who says what, to whom, when and where' (Corker, 1999, p. 3) (emphasis mine). Many categories such as muscular dystrophy and myalgia encephalomyelitis are not as fixed as perhaps the polio is. Even polio changes its character as is evident from the development of post-polio syndrome in young polio survivors as they become older. Thus, a collective of disabled people have coagulated to fight the hegemony of the normality. The understanding is that the battle can be won only if the disabled act as unified subjects in their own right.

Therefore, the need is to bring the disabled together, appealing to a common language, common consciousness and common experience that each disabled can identify with. It is imperative that the understanding is in terms of identity: the political subject being one who remains identical to it-self in all circumstances. To be a political subject, then is to have a politically recognised identity, an identifiable self, and a consciousness to claim as one's own. Taking over from disability studies, this approach requires that not only would each disabled individual be a subject, but also all disabled people would partake in a common political identity called disabled. Thus, the politics





that proceeds from this emphasis on disabled as subjects, united in a common struggle, usually going by the name identity politics thus becomes a viable methodology to gain a voice which was hitherto silenced. Both my experiential reality and academic understanding is tied with IAWS. I must acknowledge that my testimony (if I can call it) begins from the year 2000.¹ I grew up in the vibrant IP College, in which there were many feminist scholars, who made the students connect with critical questions that were/are raised about patriarchy, Sati, eve teasing, rape and violence.

Disability as an Epistemic Location

Although Women's Studies within the academy has opened up new understandings of gender, sexuality and their interactions with various systems of oppression, it has, like its activist counterpart, been critiqued—and rightly so—for leaving certain people out. My intimate connection with IAWS can be understood as a reflection of my life situation as a disabled woman, who sees IAWS as a transitional space in Winnicott's terminology. Winnicott first used the term 'holding environment' (1953, 1971) to describe the optimal environment for 'good enough' parenting. IAWS gave me a holding environment, as my personal predicament was adapted slowly but surely. IAWS clarified my stance not only on disability, but made me engage with questions of race, gender, caste and class, labor, state. Infact, the state has been one of the most provocative topics among women scholars who have an interest in marginality.

Am I not a Woman? ²



My association with IAWS goes back to the late 1980's. My first interaction with IAWS was in Hyderabad. The theme of the conference was on public policy. Despite attempts by activists to include the issue of disabled women in the agenda of the national conference on public policy in Hyderabad in January 2000, the organisers expressed their



inability on the pretext that there were more pressing concerns to discussed. Couched in politically correct language, the message of course was clear that the disabled women do not count as significant. While there was/is a strong emphasis on mainstreaming women's concerns for self-development in the national policy documents on empowerment of women, the paradox of a hierarchy within a hierarchy is evident because discussions about certain groups of women considered lower class and caste, tribal, and minority, and disability continue to be couched in 'welfare' terms. This reflects the skewed attitude of mainstream feminists, who while sensitively exploring distress as a major component of a woman's life experience, conveniently leave disabled women out of their focus. There have been changes in the last decade as issues of disabled women have been included in the Women's movements. There have been some gains in participation as well as inclusion in the decision making of some organizations. To survive as a disabled woman in such a scenario meant coming to terms with unequal power relationships. This was reflected clearly by an absence and invisibility in the most forward-looking social movements and dialogues in India including the women's movement. The dejection in a way made me struggle further to include the issues of disability in creating a dialogue with academic scholars and activists who were prominent in the women's movement. A couple of books were important contributions in 2003 and the Goa conference historically became the most significant from the perspective of disability.

Symposium on Disability in Goa Conference

Prof. Asha Hans was the coordinator for organizing the symposium on disability in 2005 in the Goa conference. The Goa conference included disabled women, but created a symposium in which disabled women were speaking mainly to the converted, but being in a conference did provide the opportunity to listen to other disabled





women talk about their lives and to understand that there are feminists with disabilities who were ready to work together to bring about change in the lives of their fraternity. Though, IAWS took a step further for recognizing disability issues, it was/ is still not yet fully cognizant of the lived realities of the disabled women. The idea that the sharing of issues could be collectively understood so that “nondisabled” women could understand disabled women as well as let the unconscious connect with the hidden disabling parts. It was almost like a roller coaster and what Arthur Frank (1995) would call a ‘quest narrative’ in which the introduction of disability can be accepted and used to derive personal meaning. As Frank explains, ‘the genesis of the quest is that some occasion requiring the person to be more than she has been, and the purpose is becoming one who has risen to the occasion’ (1995: 128).

In the recommendation, many of us articulated the distress that we experienced in 2005, and suggested that lived reality of disability could be shared in a bigger platform of IAWS. In retrospective I understood that women’s movement would always retain fluidity as some agendas would seem to hit deadlocks and yet on account of collectivity will always hold its basic character. IAWS therefore never ceased to create academic spaces for understanding and theorizing the lived realities of marginalized sections.

Lucknow: a Milestone



An invite to share my thoughts on disability by IAWS through (Prof. Nivedita Menon) would always remain a memorable moment. To be in the plenary created immense responsibility, anxiety and excitement, as it would have repercussions on what I will share with almost 500 women in the audience. In my humility and pride, the applause meant as if I have connected the existential realities of my fellow disabled in a meaningful way. I could not but note that there were only two fellow



disabled in the audience so the political work to connect with disabled women was a task that was imperative. I was nominated and was selected as the President of IAWS (2008-2011). Had I been chosen as a token, rather than as real, contributing, valued member was to be comprehended.

This was where my internal struggle began. I also realized that this - I couldn't leave this connection - as the ally would be women's movement. So the IAWS platform would always remain the place in which an engagement with the disability issues is possible. As an executive member of the IAWS, there were many lessons that I learnt not only about disability but also about politics and the relationship with women studies. However, my identity as the President was contingent on the category of 'woman' as it was evident that both the women's movement as well as women studies had been about women largely. And yet, speaking for disabled women in this present scenario epitomizes an entirely new challenge for many of us in India. My affiliation with women sometimes puts me in a self-conscious state as my tokenization as a disabled person becomes evident. What is stressful in the part, which feels that can I provide voice to people who are also at margins? Can I claim their issues? I cannot help being conscious that I am not them.



The deliberations for the 2011 conference changed its pattern. We moved away from the politics of identity and attempted to underscore resurgent efforts to resist and challenge hegemonies in the spheres of the state, natural resources, labor, 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. This formulation afresh in a way looks at experiences from the field, rethinking several of the old questions and seeking new alliances in the face of emerging challenges.



As I became a part of IAWS, a certain objectivity entered my worldview and I was connected to many other intersecting identities. In a lighter vein, there were some lessons worth learning for all of us. CWDS could not have discussion in the basement, and a decent ramp was in place. For the first time, the mainstream Indian Journal of Gender Studies brought out a special issue on Disability, Gender and Society (May/ August 2008, Volume 15, No 2, published by Sage). Though a lot more work needs to be done, this is a welcome starting point. While there are sensitive women who have heard the voices of their disabled relatives, colleagues and friends, within the broader feminist discourse and practice, a certain tokenism prevails. For instance, to go to the toilet in the University of Lucknow was a humiliating experience and yet that made me understand that to certainly hear disabled women's voices, the women's movement had to acknowledge the social, economic, communication as well as architectural barriers that prevented disabled women from sharing their stories and engaging in a public discourse. It's time that the women's movement interrogated able-ism.

Wardha: an Uncharted Journey

Wardha for me became a trajectory in which I understood the hegemony of the state when it chooses to go against "marked" people. While I engaged with disability, I also registered a deep understanding of the state's propensity of giving up on democratic norms. The rally in Wardha appeared as a political move and the state did not take much time to create chaos. An open letter was written to the then Hon'ble Home Minister, Govt. of India, Mr. P. Chidambaram. We expressed our dismay and shock in the face of experiences of intimidation and harassment at the hands of the Anti Terrorism Squad during the XIII National Conference of the IAWS in Wardha at the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalaya (MGAHV), from January 20-24th 2011. While I coped with disability, I was not attuned





to understanding hegemony and the ways in which the state can powerfully marginalise ordinary citizens. Yet the enriching part was that we did resist and managed to respond to the political domination exercised by the ATS. For me, I understood that despite the intersecting systems of oppression, my colleagues in the women's movement collaborated and resolved the crisis. In this negotiation, I understood new conversations and perilous political configurations.

Gauwahati: So Far and Yet So Close

Women's Studies is a field that hasn't fully answered all the questions, and it's often in a mode of self-analysis and capability for change. Disability is a feminist issue and the silencing of disabled voices and experiences does not further the feminist cause. This makes us think about making the study of disability a part of the women studies programs in different universities. The IAWS sought to focus on some of these issues by hosting a pre-conference event along with its XIV National Conference. The effort was to bring into the discussion the issue of recurrent violence, which has been common to all women, and among Northeast Indian disabled women, where this fear is heightened by the situation in which they live. It stems not merely from the horror of physical assault and vulnerabilities, especially those unleashed by state forces that are permitted to do so without impunity, but also from the subsequent traumas, social stigmatization and many other inexpressible feelings.



This preconference therefore, sought to address the concerns of women with disabilities especially in the additional context of conflict-induced trauma. The objective was to highlight the issues of women with disabilities as well as to initiate a dialogue within and between young women within members of IAWS. The goal was to identify the gaps in both, acquiring knowledge and information regarding statutory provisions of the State and the existing scenario such as issues of



support services, resources and advocacy that are critical. However, the issue was whether access again would become a “converted” dialogue. Though IAWS executive members were sensitive and did attend the preconference for some time, the interaction, which was visualized in our plans, did not happen. The disabled person’s functioning in society has been tied to the extent their impairments can be normalized. What is critical is that the built environments have no understanding of bodily multiplicity, thereby producing ‘standard-fit’ designs. For the IAWS that everyday reality of the disabled women — of physical and attitudinal barriers, which thwart their effortlessness of mobility and access — is not comprehensible. Thus, the imagination of the collective remains elusive. As part of the executive, I lived alone in the university and had no way to stay with the other members. Notwithstanding the sensitivity of my colleagues, I did not play a role in the participation of the decision-making through out the conference.

I wonder whether my loneliness was perceptible to my colleagues. The isolation and pain of being included and yet excluded remains a serious consideration for a full feminist engagement with disability. Maybe this ablest gaze determines not only the architecture, but the internal psyche too. IAWS is still the only organization, which is ensuring representation of the disabled women. Despite the sincerity of all these collective efforts, what is important is that appealing to exclusionary identity categories should become more meaningful.

Feminist engagement with disability can offer new possibilities for an understanding of women’s studies as a whole, but powerfully illuminate issues that have traditionally been important to feminist theory in new and exciting ways, including abortion and prenatal testing, assisted suicide and the right to die (or live), pace-of-life issues, media representations that carry cultural messages about the body, the experience of chronic illness and pain, the social construction of



“normative” versus non-normative bodies, the medical establishment, labor, and sexuality.

Archival Work: a Learning Lesson

My association with the archival work made me create a project on the interface between the women’s movement and the disabled women’s struggle through interviews with representatives of both. What I understood was that the body per se is always part and parcel of feminism, but somehow the abject body remained alive in the psyche of the different scholars and activists, but did not go beyond the intricacies of disability. All narratives³ indicate fascinating stories of women who spoke about body, difference, vulnerability, interdependency, sexuality, reproductive health and political participation, issues of selection and abortion. The project made a significant contribution to the study of disability framework within a context of inclusion and accommodation.



While disability might not have been formulated from the vantage point of women activists, feminists who interrogated patriarchy did not muster enough energy to question normative hegemony. The transcriptions are significant though fraught with a range of different kinds of politics in which a dialectic of absence/ presence, inclusion/ exclusion medical/social are clearly evident. This interconnection remains for me a memorable grasp of the struggle in engaging with the normal versus disabled narrative. The narratives gave me immense joy, sadness, regret, questions, but what is fascinating is that hope remained a certainty, that the women’s movement would campaign for the lived realities of women with disabilities. As archival research, this work can serve as a benchmark in an honest, thoughtful and considerate understanding of disability.



Interconnection between Women's Studies and The Study of Disability

It could be argued that I am creating a fantasy in which there would be a “real” dialogue between the women's studies groups and disabled women. It isn't that I am ignoring the possibilities of resistance, which in the face of no recognition can only be attributed to a sheer will to survive. Taking this into consideration, I could argue that women with disabilities have formed support groups and are in the process of challenging dominant constructions of disabilities. Also IAWS created funds, which helped in creating a module on gender and disability. It also went to the University Grants Commission and in a way the module was accepted. However, women's studies departments will take a long time to address disability. A feature of some of the archival research carried out by me has been poignant and was the recurrent use of disability as an analogue for other kinds of limitations. For example, one respondent stressed that “Being a woman is the biggest form of disability”. Another observation was that: “Disability is like belonging to the lowest caste possible”. There are several ways of understanding these analogies. One option is to look at the socio-cultural meanings ascribed to female bodies and those assigned to disabled bodies. Both the female and the disabled body are excluded from full participation in public and economic spheres; both are conceived in opposition to a norm that is assumed to possess natural superiority. Such comparisons can be both emancipatory and oppressive. If the objective of invoking such comparisons is to understand different people's lived experience and grasp their authenticity, the potential is immense. However, if the underlying realities of the categories serve only at a metaphorical level, it can lead to a total erasure of the category, which is being invoked. It is true that analogy is a theoretical device that is meant to enable the move from more familiar to relatively unknown terrain in order to understand how a set of relations evident in one sphere might illuminate the other.







However, if a comparison or the parallel pits one set of relations against the other, as is the case of women against disability, the strategic advantage of the analogy gets lost.

Without devaluing such metaphorical moves, I wish to focus on what gets 'valorised' and 'suppressed' in the process of understanding women's studies. My submission is that such analogising results in a suppression of the exacting reality of disabled women's lives, which are limited by conditions that are much more difficult than ordinary to transcend. A shift from the theoretical/metaphorical to the material is essential to render visible the 'culture constructions' that have supported the currently flawed understanding of disability as an epistemology. In fact a careful analysis of such metaphors is required to unearth their meanings and functions, so that their power can be subverted. Till the popular refrain that women's studies is going to understand disability as a marginalized category and not as a way of enhancing knowledge production, the road to emancipation/ empowerment is going to be a difficult one.



Also, owing to the absence of discussion among disabled women themselves, no group exists to collectively pursue the concerns of disabled women, and thus to influence both the disability movement and the women's movement. Right now the voices of disabled women are restricted to academic settings, where double oppression hypothesis is expounded. This hypothesis takes the standpoint that disabled women experience a double disadvantage, as they fare worse than either disabled men or nondisabled women socio economically, psychologically and politically. Disability compounds their already marginal status as women.

The absence of disability from the mainstream women's studies academia creates and maintains a status quo where the 'disabled woman' is incorporated within the existing social patterns as a



“problem”. Disability thus remains as an out-and-out state, both politically and academically — it is the source of its own oppression. Such an understanding suggests that more is at stake than a problematizing discourse of specific categories. By not exploring this relationship, women’s studies programs at large have delimited inquiry and pursuit of knowledge of disability. Possibly the reason is that schools, colleges, Universities (over all community), remain sites where not only knowledge but also a middle- class orientation with its patriarchal, neo-liberal and normative values are produced and reproduced. A feminist understanding of disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon, is central to counter the notion of disability as an inherent, unchallengeable trait located in an individual. Such an approach rejects the view that disability is solely a medical problem or a personal tragedy. Women’s Studies curriculum has to create possibilities, where conversations with the disabled women are prioritised. When I say “conversations” I mean that disabled women can have conversations about nuanced, complicated issues that matter to all women. It is only when we have the potential space and the support to reflect critically on disability issues, that we will enable women’s studies to challenge stereotypes and disability concerns become palpable in a way in which the “able-bodied” women can understand the vulnerabilities experienced by disabled women. Women’s Studies will then place the responsibility for re-examining and repositioning the place of disability within society not on the individual, but on women’s studies as well as society itself. A study of Disability may be many things to many people, but if it’s full potential is to be realized, then it must avoid being seen as simply a new bottle for old wine.

The purpose of making the study of Disability an academic discipline is to create a body of knowledge, which can provide challenges towards rethinking and reflecting upon aspects of our comprehension of disability and social marginalization. Disability exists at the uneven



boundaries of the social, concurrently rebellious and celebratory in its insistence that disability is neither tragedy nor inspiration but a satisfying and enjoyable way of “being in the world” ...if only the (ablest) world would not get in the way! Just like the unforeseen possibilities of a new day, reflecting on the field of disability is also loaded with an unknown. For instance, knowledge of disability has to be engaged in ‘the unlearning of traditional thinking’s privilege. So that, not only is one marginalized constituency in a position to listen to another, but

rewrite the relationship between the margin and the center.

There are no easy answers to these never-ending questions of identity and inter-connections. There is no easy way of drawing boundaries between who should be in and who should be out; no easy inventory of heterogeneity of innumerable disability communities. Both as an academician and an advocate, I believe that an impassioned study of disability makes these questions relevant to everyone, whether they identify as disabled or not at any given time. Lack of comprehensive data on women with disabilities both adds to their ‘invisibility’ and marginalisation and keeps them out of the ambit of engagement and interaction with women’s groups and movements. Within the women’s movement, women with disabilities have not been included systematically in women’s movement to their homes and are thus less likely to access the state’s mainstream programs or services. Many factors compound their situation, such as terrain, weather, lack of mobility aids; being single and female in a traditional setting; and, fearfulness, prompted by experiences of stigma or harassment.

Notwithstanding the current inclusion of disabled women within the Indian women’s movement, I would argue that simply deciding to include them is insufficient. The problem cannot be resolved so easily by merely adding on disabled women as another category to the list of matters or kinds of issues requiring attention. Offering a feminist



account of disabled girls is problematic because it requires including them in the discourse. However, writing a subject (for example, disabled women) into the on-going discourse necessitates a certain exercise of power to construct that subject in some form, to give her shape, and to breathe life into her. This cannot be accomplished without knowing how she might construct herself. This process thus requires certain reflexivity.

It seems to me that the identity of disability is not an idle insertion into feminist discourse; rather it has critical implications for how the understanding of disability can expand and thrive within academic and activist women's studies as well as movement. As an insider I find that the ideas are wide-ranging with the most radical re-imagining of possibilities. They produce few answers but rather embrace the practice of constantly troubling the questions. They make even the radical seem quite conservative. For instance take any theory—humanism, psychology Marxism, critical race theory, feminist theory, LGBT/queer theory, etc. You bring the study of disability in its midst and pose questions such as- what are the conceptions of the normal? What is autonomy? When exactly is life not worth living? Why does rationality have to be the sole determinant of our humanity? How do we define limit? Issues such as euthanasia, institutionalization, trans-humanism, cochlear implants, special schools/sheltered workshops are critical in women studies discourse. To explore the possibilities authentically and adequately requires that the process has to have a dialogical character. It is vital that both feminist discourse and practice engage in a concerted dialogue with the disabled women and the disability movement, so that a more inclusive theory as well as practice can emerge.

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WHY I LIKE IAWS?

*Chhaya Datar**



Reflecting on my days as the General Secretary of the IAWS during 1996 to 1999 is an exercise which involves not only recollection of fond nostalgic memories of colleagues and friends working together to organize two national conferences and four regional conferences but also scrutinizing what we could contribute to the efforts of production of feminist knowledge by using the IAWS platform.



You will be surprised to know that during this period we could organise two conferences instead of one which was the general practice for IAWS. But it was a true phenomenon. Since 1997 happened to be the 50th year of celebrating India's independence achieved in 1947, our Executive Committee shouldered the responsibility to organize a special seminar on the topic, "The Early Years of Indian Independence" at the University of Baroda. The second conference, which was the regular biennial conference was organized in S.N.D.T. Campus, Pune.

* General Secretary, IAWS, 1996-98.







The first conference had a special fascinating feature for which we could invite six veteran activists from the era of Freedom Struggle and could film their testimonies. We did not have money to edit the film and make it into a documentary. But later their transcripts were made available which could be printed together with the summary of seminar papers in the form of a booklet. It was distributed at the time of the National Conference in Pune in June 1998. It was an emotional experience for all who were present in that small hall to listen to these veterans. Though old and fragile, they were quite spirited when they narrated their experiences of participation in the freedom struggle.

The Pune conference had another exciting feature. Just one day before the conference was to start, the second nuclear bomb test was held by Vajpayee government at Pokhran in Rajasthan and it threw our plan of hosting Pakistani feminists off-gear. The Pakistan government prevented them from traveling to India. They had been invited for the special session of South Asian feminists, which had become a special feature for IAWS conferences. We took this opportunity and with the local activist groups, men and women, organized a Peace March, protesting against the nuclear test and the competitive war - mongering going on with Pakistan. India had never signed the non-proliferation treaty. The women's movement worldwide has always resisted nuclear armaments. All the 500 participants joined in the march. It helped to get publicity for IAWS in the local papers. Kamla Bhasin took the initiative in this and spoke in the public meeting on our behalf. The feminist walk was an innovative feature introduced at that time. Our local collaboration was with Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth and they came forward to organize this walk.



Early morning of the second day of the conference a two kilometer walk through the city took us to the Phulewada where Savitribai ran the school. Savitribai Phule, the first lady teacher in Maharashtra, who along with her husband Jyotiba Phule ran a school around 1857 where



dalit and Muslim female students were invited to attend. Along with very inspiring plenary speeches, we had a good response for two extracurricular events. One was the exhibition and sale of women's crafts including textiles and the other one was the screening of movies made mainly by women as well as those made on women's issues, which were going on in the campus, parallel to the subtheme sessions. The Exhibition of books also got a tremendous response. Some women had brought their newly published books for release on this occasion. I would like to say proudly that my book called, "Nurturing Nature" too was released by Prof. Vina Mazumdar, Founder member of IAWS. A good number of participants presented papers in the subtheme sessions and they were found to be quite substantive.



When I got elected in 1996, I was a little nervous because I did not know how to raise funds for the activities of the IAWS, including funds for administrative expenses. But Kamla Bhasin who was the General Secretary in the earlier term assured me of help. She had already lined up a Ford Foundation grant for administrative expenses for the next five years and hence we could start our Executive Committee meetings and planning for future activities immediately. However, we realized that because of the practice of a roaming office as per the new Secretary's location every time shifting bank accounts and looking for a new chartered accountant every time was creating problems for account keeping and required clarifications from the previous Secretary and the Treasurer. Also, every time all the old files containing accounts, correspondence and the membership forms and list etc. had to be packed and sent to the location of the next secretary at, where again there were issues of space to store those big boxes. Fortunately in my case I had a garage and I could store those fifteen boxes at one place.

I was teaching at TISS but could not get much space for this purpose except to keep day-to-day files in my cupboard. TISS allowed the office assistant to occupy one table and computer in a pool of assistants



for many departments. I realized that it was important to have some institutional back-up for these extra activities which are voluntary. Also those were not the days of smart mobile phones, internet and WiFi which creates ease of communications. I remembered using my own landline at home to call Nirmala Banerjee, our President, early morning before she left for work. TISS was generous enough to allow me to spare my time for the activities of the IAWS. However, I must say that my presence at TISS as the General Secretary of IAWS was not very useful to convert many of my colleagues from social work, health and media backgrounds to become IAWS members. My own departmental colleagues, such as Lakshmi Lingam and Nishi Mitra were already members of IAWS and I encouraged Lakshmi to stand for elections during the next term. Somehow many women academics feel that Women's Studies is a specialized academic field and IAWS is a professional body, where they have no space. Our interdisciplinary approach, as well as zealotness of feminist activism could not convince them that they could attain gender sensitivity in their work by attending the biennial conferences of IAWS where academics from different disciplines and activists working on different issues related to women gathered and shared experiences formally through papers and also through informal conversations. The conference does provide the ethos of the feminist movement which is still alive and kicking.

I thought by being a part of the Executive Committee of the IAWS during that period I could focus on environmental issues, which was my dream. Going through earlier conferences I realized that thus far very little space was provided for the issues related to environment and women. Kamla Bhasin had made efforts to invite Vandana Shiva who came with some members of the Chipko Movement and asked them to narrate their stories of struggle. Many felt that this was not the appropriate forum to call them and show off their bravery, amidst a large academic crowd, where they could get embarrassed. Medha Patkar was invited to talk about displacement of adivasis due to big





dams like Sardar Sarovar, the prominent symbol of development at that time. But somehow there was no scope for discussion around the development versus environment debate.

Looking at our themes for plenaries I feel that we could fulfill my dream of getting some of the environmental issues on board. The main theme was 'Survival and Sovereignty: Challenges to Women's Studies'. I think in 1991 the Government of India had adopted the policy of globalization, liberalization and privatization, which had threatened the local production processes, making survival of the working people difficult. Many activists felt that liberalization and globalization would bring the sovereignty over natural resources into question, which the traditional tribal communities survive. Feminisation of poverty was being discussed as a new phenomenon. There was a sense of entering into a new era in history. Under this broad theme the following four plenaries were planned:

- I Stable Livelihoods versus Pursuit of Profit: Micro and Macro Issues Related to Globalisation and Food Security.
- II Ecology and Economy
- III Our Households, Ourselves: Bodies, Subsistence, and Resources
- IV Culture and Resistance

We invited speakers of eminence who were also a part of the struggles. All the four South Asian speakers were given space each in one of the plenaries, which was appreciated since they could relate their struggles in contexts, similar to the Indian experience. I think it was a little unusual to have so many men among the speakers.

Another dream could, however, not be fulfilled because of many reasons. I wanted to bring about a strong linkage between Women's movement and women's studies and I thought that one way to achieve this was that IAWS should encourage and help women in the movement, i.e. activists and NGOs to organise their conference



immediately after or with some overlap with the IAWS conference. It should be planned in the same city, so that many academics would be able to attend some of the sessions in the movement conference. The activists would also benefit if some of them could attend the Women's Studies conference. This was one way to reduce the expenses for the movement conference. Also much more substantive give and take would become possible if the two forums physically interacted with each other more often. My own colleagues were suspicious of this suggestion as well as there was no warm response for the coming from the women activists. I suspect that women academics were considered elite and not having a sufficiently feminist perspective which could emerge from the grassroots level organizing work.

I must say that three years of administrative experience was so overwhelming that once it was over I felt empty. I was living, breathing, dreaming, and hoping that there would be no gaps in the management so that the conference experience would be memorable despite its timing in the summer. I have always felt satisfied with the way IAWS conferences are conceptualized and implemented so that the feeling of sisterhood gets strengthened at all levels. We had some glitches, such as that the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS) although a part of S.N.D.T. Women's University, due to its location in Mumbai could not participate actively in organizing. The Women's Studies Centre in Pune University was also absent due to some personal reasons. But Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth women came to our help providing local volunteers. The whole IAWS team of elected members were very cooperative and offered to work also backstage. We had a very few violent differences. I must give extra credit to the Executive Committee members, President Nirmala Banerjee - a stalwart in her own right - who was always available for consultation, Vice President Sunita Pathania from Kurukshetra, Rohini Gawankar Treasurer, who had prior experience of being Treasurer, Kalpana Kannabiran with young blood as a Joint Secretary and Kavita Panjabi as an editor of the



Newsletter. My gratitude will not be complete till I mention Gabriele Dietrich who also had a passion for environmental issues and would support me to bring those on board.

I wish that IAWS should survive and encourage young scholars and activists to explore the subordinate status of women from diverse angles and increase critical thinking among young women from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. In the present situation women are finding that space for freedom of expression is shrinking, democracy withering and thus the challenge to assert their voices may get tougher. I am sure IAWS will continue to provide a platform to diverse voices which unite to give expression to critical thinking in the present situation.

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MY LIFE WITH THE IAWS

Ilina Sen *



In many ways, the journey of the IAWS for me mirrors my own, and as I sit down to write today I find it difficult to separate the narratives in my own head. I am sorry if this sounds presumptuous, it is not that I was central to the history of the IAWS. My own life and work began to take shape around the time I left University in 1981 and ventured to the wilds of central India. 1981 was also the year IAWS began its journey; it formed a central plank of my confused and mixed up trajectory that is only now beginning to acquire shape.



The birth of Women's Studies in India preceded that of the IAWS by a small margin. The indomitable group of women- Vina di, Neera ben, Lotika di, Ela ben, and many others- who gathered together around the 'Towards Equality' report were the life forces behind both. I got to know and interact with them during my student years, when exciting things were happening in Delhi around women's issues. As I began to work on my doctoral research on the Indian sex ratio Vina di became one of my mentors. It must have been her doing that I became the first recipient of the ICSSR doctoral fellowship for Women's Studies.

* President, IAWS, 2011-2014.





Talk of organizing the first national conference on Women's Studies was already afoot when I left Delhi for data collection in Madhya Pradesh, and I actually turned up for the conference at Mumbai from Hoshangabad. The spirit and atmosphere at that first conference was electric; I have later met many first timers at IAWS conferences who have commented on the spirit and ambience of our gatherings. I like to believe that this is an intangible heritage that we have carried through the times. The association was conceived at the first conference and took formal shape shortly after.

IAWS was held together and nurtured from the beginning until now by an extremely dedicated support group. A snowballing group of women's movement activists, academics who anchored their research on a gender axis, journalists, cultural activists and others came together to steer the organization through the earlier (and somewhat chaotic) years of moving secretariats and disappearing documents to relative stability. There have been a host of challenges and strong camaraderie on the way. The older members of this group have slowly begun to leave us; those who were young in 1981 are now arthritic and full of groans and moans. There is an acute need for young blood to join the gang of retiring oldies to guide us forward through the challenges that are yet to come. Fortunately, every conference and every new location has aroused great enthusiasm and brought forth new talent into the EC.

We are currently getting ready for our 15th National Conference. I have attended most of the earlier conferences, having missed for personal reasons only the ones at Chandigarh, Mysore, and Hyderabad. The thematic contents have always opened new windows to ongoing work by colleagues, but IAWS conferences have always been more than just academic gatherings. At each conference I have looked forward to meeting old friends and reopening unfinished discussions. This has inevitably happened, as friendships have deepened and each





conference has led to new friendships and some insights. Personally for me the conferences also played an important role in keeping me connected to academic discourses before the time I came back into full time academic engagement. Most of us old timers feel very emotional as we recall our solidarity of the years. Recalling this long journey today, there are some memories I would like to share, and some issues to flag.

In the early years, there appeared to be some issues of trust and compatibility between the activists and the academics/policy makers who made up the constituency of the conferences. While the close connect between the women's movement and the field of women's studies was acknowledged by all, in practice, a certain element of tension could be seen at many levels. Whether this was the issue of conference registration fees or of the coordination of thematic sessions- the differences in understanding would sometimes spill into the open, and were debated in several early conferences.



At the Trivandrum conference one unstated issue that many participants had in mind was the relationship that this series of conferences did or did not have with the series of so called 'movement ' conferences that had begun around the same time as the series of IAWS conferences. In 1981, the city of Bombay that had hosted the first national conference for Women's Studies had also hosted a 'Feminist conference', and some of the participation had been common, rather in the nature of intersecting sets. In 1984, the year of the Trivandrum conference, a second 'Feminist conference' was held at Bombay. While both sets of networks, the women's studies one and the feminist had been bringing together women grappling with issues of their subordination, marginalization and struggle, there were important differences in the politics of their organization as well as participation.





The general perception of some 'feminist' activists was that the IAWS network was modeled on the traditions of academic conferences and welcomed academics as well as activists to present analytical papers. Women from divergent political affiliations including the official left parliamentary parties participated in them. The other set of conferences, while also having theme based discussion sessions, were not structured necessarily around paper presentations. The second network was also more open to the active engagement of women with diverse views ranging from the unadulterated feminist to representatives from the far left. The third conference in this series, the one at Patna in early 1988, made a conscious effort to connect with women in the many mass struggles working in tandem with these forces. Women's organizations with affiliations to the parliamentary left groups generally stayed away from this series out of a sense of distrust for anarchist tendencies of avowed 'feminists'. The tension actually peaked after the Trivandrum conference. However, even in Trivandrum some of this unstated tension spilled over as a somewhat acrimonious discussion about the relative spaces of academics and activists in the IAWS.



For many of us, these undercurrents were difficult to understand and to negotiate. Having grown up in Kolkata in the time of splits and more splits in the left movement, and having witnessed the sectarian violence that brought life in the city to a halt in the early seventies, I always found it very hard to take categorical positions, and over the years kept up my relationship with the autonomous series of conferences up to the last one in Kolkata in 2004. In the process, one saw the efforts by one or other political tendency to dominate the proceedings, and witnessed the increasing penetration of NGO funds into this network. The IAWS remained a relatively stable platform through all of this, and to the credit of all, over time the fissures and differences among groups diminished perceptibly, and there was much



more openness to working together while recognizing differences. It was in this spirit that we were able to learn from an impassioned intervention about majoritarian cultural domination in our functioning at the Jadavpur conference. The one time when there was throwback to the past was during the Lucknow conference of 2008, when a late night discussion on the choice of development paradigms, state policy, and definitions of 'public' interest saw participants take highly polarized positions.

I have been on four different IAWS ECs over the years. The first time was in the EC that organized the Jadavpur (Kolkata) conference, in 1991, which is now fifteen years into the past. The last three terms have been consecutive, including the present one, in which I am not an elected, but an ex officio member. From my experience, I feel that each executive committee has had its own particular chemistry and a special bond which has begun to gel after the first few months of working together. Each bond has been unique and special, the subject of memories which I will carry with me for a long time. During the Wardha conference EC, apart from the challenge of dealing with a host University vice chancellor (he was also my boss since I was teaching there at the time) who had distinguished himself by patriarchal comments regarding women writers, we also came up against the state in a big way, which had perhaps never happened before in the history of IAWS conferences. In retrospect, the experience was both scary and funny.

For our South Asia panel in this conference, we had invited the noted Pakistani feminist writer Zahida Hina, who had been given a visa that exempted her from police reporting, which is generally mandatory for both Indian and Pakistani citizens when visiting each others' countries. We had also carefully done all the required paperwork and obtained all necessary government permissions from different ministries. Our other cardinal sin was the rally spontaneously taken out on the campus



by the conference delegates protesting the conviction of Dr Binayak Sen for sedition, who also happened to be my significant other. I myself was signing conference participation certificates in my room while the *joshila* rally was traversing the campus trail, and Zahida had actually left Wardha, but these facts were of no consequence. These two events were enough to alert the Nagpur office of the Anti Terror squad (ATS), who swooped down on the conference on it last night, raided the residences of conference delegates, arrested hoteliers who were hosting foreign delegates, and filed an FIR against me under the Foreigners' Act. The conference itself ended under somewhat chaotic conditions. Many delegates had actually left Wardha by this time, and only learnt of the events on their way home. There was much indignation, and IAWS comrades in Delhi and Bombay immediately got into action to speak to the higher ups in the state and central home departments. In this situation Samita, our then General Secretary, extended her stay to as it were 'woman the barricades' and deal with police, media, and *tamashbeen janta* on a war footing. Her spirited e mails proclaiming the musketeer slogan 'One for All and All for One', were a great source of comfort in those bleak times. Eventually, the state backed out under pressure from the IAWS troops, which was one more victory for our solidarity.

The last conference, the XIVth, was in Guwahati and was organized by the the EC in which I was President. Having spent my adolescence years in Shillong, and having many friends and more memories in the north east, this conference was particularly close to my heart. Unfortunately, I was seriously ill at the time of the conference, and in the run up to the event an unfair load had to be carried by our General Secretary Indu and the secretariat. They were extremely generous about this, and I am glad that today, IAWS as an organization, has a significant presence in the area, as a result of the mobilization for the conference. Many young organizing committee members from Gauhati



University gained confidence in their own organizational talents as a result of the way they held the conference together. One person who kept us all rooted and going during the tenure of this EC was Kumkum with her poetry and gentle wit.

An IAWS conference is never all about logistics, organization, political debates, or even academic papers. While these have been important, conferences have always been spaces for fun, laughter, music, and friendship. For me there have always been friends from afar, whom one has met at every successive conference, and with whom the friendship has slowly deepened over the years. Krishna Soman was one such person, always quiet, but always there at an IAWS conference. In the Bhubaneswar conference, we actually ended up staying together, going on long morning walks up the nearby desolate hillside near our place of stay. Many ideas were shared and many plans made during that last time we really met and talked. Sadly, Krishna succumbed to cancer sometime ago. I still miss her at every conference, just as I will continue to miss Jashodhara di, Vina di, Neera ben and many others who were part of my journey. Today many new friends have come into IAWS whose ideas and perspectives are perhaps different from that of ours, but equally rich and meaningful. I am sure their collective solidarity will keep our organization strong and vibrant in the years to come. For IAWS I want to quote Browning as I end:

“Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made.”

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LOOKING BEYOND FEMINISM: REFLECTIONS ON MY JOURNEY WITH THE IAWS

Indu Agnihotri *

Looking back on my association with the IAWS what stands out for me is a long engagement with issues and debates.



This started with the first National Conference on Women's Studies at the SNDT, way back in 1981, in what was still Bombay. I was young then and attended the conference as Convenor of the Women's Committee, JNU. We were a fairly large group of students from the university. Since then, I have traversed this journey in different capacities: as paper presenter, discussant, a panelist in plenary/special sessions, sub theme organizer, EC member and then again as General Secretary, coming down to the present conference in 2017, as an ex officio member of the EC. However, the more formal presence and presentations represented only a fraction of what I gathered, learnt and absorbed in all this. I would not be wrong that— as also happens in our formal educational process— one learnt more from interaction with such a diverse group comprising some of the best minds in Indian academia

* General Secretary, IAWS, 2011-2014.





and those drawn from the women's movement in the immediate post Emergency years.

While my association with women's issues preceded and went beyond the platform of the IAWS, it is this association with the IAWS which introduced me to the significance, as well as the potential, of incorporating Women's Studies perspectives in the academic domain. It also ensured that classroom interactions with my students, through these decades, were enriched due to the introduction of a women's perspective. This started prior to the revision of the formal syllabus in the history curriculum at Delhi University and enabled me to bridge the gap between the formal structures and the social milieu within the space that the educational institutions including women's colleges offered. The relevance for such an initiative was visible in the college where I was teaching and the students in the early years were, mostly, undergraduate students who were first generation learners. The fact that the College was selected for the setting up of a Women's Development Centre in the very first round in 1984, only proved to me that interventions planned from the IAWS platform could be used to reach out to sections where these mattered most.

Drawn inadvertently into this process, I have seen Women's Studies evolve in India for over three decades now. In engaging with the debates stemming from the IAWS platform, I learnt many things, due also to my long- term involvement with women's issues in the movement. Above all, I learnt that the state and governments were not always inured to innovative ideas coming from below. Also, the need to dialogue with the institutions and agencies of the state and to explore possibilities of effective interventions. Coming from a background of a mass-based militant movement, this did not always go down well with me to start with. However, I came to realise that with persistence and planning there was scope to develop a Women's Studies' perspective and find a space for this within existing educational





curricula and to persuade as well as convince fellow teachers that our social sciences needed to both reflect and address social concerns. Those who were part of these processes in the 1980s would recall how much energy went into sensitizing our own colleagues, students and those who could make a difference at the level of decision - making. Throughout the 1980s there was an identifiable set of names and people who were constantly on the move, visiting virtually every other college and university in India generating public awareness and creating space for discussion on women's issues within the educational spaces, while also specifically reaching out to the youth. In the 1990s CWDS initiated a move to bring the research on Women's Studies into the teaching curricula by proposing to UGC, then headed by Armaity Desai, that a Refresher Course in Women's Studies be developed as part of the faculty improvement programmes. I was personally involved with planning and design of the Refresher Course during 1995-96 and drew immense satisfaction from the fact that the format developed by us provided the core syllabi for many Refresher Courses in Women's Studies held across India. This in fact initiated the process of teaching by women's studies centres, since the late 1990s. This struggle went alongside engaging with the University establishment and the UGC for democratization of the institutional spaces in Higher Education. While we often acknowledge the role of individuals located in the education establishment, there is hardly any recognition of the significant role played by the teachers' movement in raising issues and advancing struggles. These movements provided the context for our efforts to attain a degree of success. All this of course was still located in the context of the 1980s.

The IAWS discussions also made me understand how concerns emanating from experiences in the movement could be taken forward, to develop perspectives on issues to go beyond our individual 'experiential' modes. Education/ curricula, women's work/economy, violence, political and legal rights remained perennial concerns. State





and state policy, particularly in the context of development, as well as their role in providing pathways to equality and equal opportunity or vice versa, were aspects which both complicated as well as informed our discussions.



Equally significantly, it remained a platform where I often disagreed with the framework within which issues, or the strategies for solutions to these were being discussed. Interestingly, this situation hardly ever arose from personal differences or criticisms. Rather, it was an indication of the times we lived in as also of the diverse locations from which many in my generation addressed the challenges we faced. Often I did not know the persons with whom I was entangled in heated arguments in these sessions. Over several conferences, they became familiar names, sometimes friends and even colleagues or comrades in common struggles.

I have never been particularly enamoured by the slogan 'the personal is political,' in terms of the analytical framework that it offers or advances. Ironically, however, the imbrication of the circumstances or my manner of living out my daily life by virtue of a deep involvement in women's struggles, it is perhaps best encapsulated by tweaking the slogan to its reverse: the political was most certainly also personal. For, even as I disagreed with the formulation, the very choices I made in my personal life, charting out largely unknown paths for middle class women of my background, I was drawn into events unfolding in the backdrop of a larger political canvas, which shaped both my consciousness as well as responses. My training in history and my exposure to student politics from diverse ideological perspectives, in the precincts of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, ensured that I would never accept the narrow confines of a feminist frame as the answer to the problems that had loomed large in my mind from the early years of my childhood.





What drew me to all this? Was it the fact of my being born in a family which represented a heady mix of the vestiges/ remnants of feudal authority and power, in small town UP and a very ordinary, urban, middle class existence in the capital city, with its upper caste baggage? This came with a peculiar ethos of what I later came to understand as the spirit of the Protestant Ethic thrown in. Or, perhaps, the fact that I was singularly blessed with a storehouse of memories based on an extended family network where the personal and the social merged on an everyday basis. What exactly it was, I do not know? But by the time I entered my teens I had become acutely aware of dowry, dowry related suicides, child marriage, domestic violence, denial of choice in marriage and, a familiarity with stories of crime involving the everyday negotiation of the various axis of power in rural India as well as the ravages and stress of urban poverty. I knew of women from very wealthy families suffering indignity, discrimination and violence on a regular basis. I witnessed a situation of a near 'honour crime' being committed in the wake of an impending inter-caste marriage, long before we came up with that vocabulary. Arguments with my immediate as well as my extended family over some of these issues were everyday fare. I remember reading in the papers about the Prime Minister of an East Asian country, who was reported to be indulging in wife- beating, which resulted in an argument with my father, which I ended with a statement that a man who beats his wife should never be the Prime Minister of any country! He balked at my views, even as he shuddered, thinking about his daughter's future in an India where women experienced this every day! My mother, who straddled both these worlds in a very personal way, would never fail to speak up for what may be described as urban modernity as against the declining fortunes of feudal families in her natal home. Modern India, she firmly believed, opened up a vast new world for girls and opportunities to change their lives by asking questions which most in her generation could never have dared to. When I entered the hotbed of Marxist debates in JNU,





I had my own opinion on many issues, except that these were never publicly articulated since I shuddered at the thought of taking the mike. To say that this was Stage fright would be a gross understatement.

But what was already clear and was reinforced by my lessons in history as well as the political debates that I was exposed to was the fact that the material basis of social relations was critical to both, present circumstances and the imaginings of alternate futures. The road to revolution was a path I was still very hesitantly beginning to tread.

The IAWS provided a mid- way path to discussing issues which bogged my mind. It also often pitted me against the large community of my feminist friends.



Looking back, these discussions spread across several conferences, meetings and late night debates with others, as well as amongst ourselves— since I often went with a group comprising old student friends who also worked together in the Janwadi Mahila Samiti, the Delhi unit of the AIDWA. What stands out is a long engagement with issues and debates drawing upon different ideological traditions. Also, not surprisingly, these often stemmed from different positions being taken along the axis of Marxism and Feminism and perspectives arising from these ideological divides on the issues being discussed.

This started with the very first conference in SNTD, Bombay in 1981. While there were discussions all through the conference, including in what was the concluding session which was conducted more like a general body even prior to the setting up of the formal Association, the most vigorous and heated debate was sparked off by Gail Omvedt's presentation in a special session which focused on Marxism and Feminism.





Starting from this time for me one aspect of the engagement with the IAWS focused around what I think represented one of the most creative tensions running through the spectrum of political engagements of the 1980s and early 1990s. This was the difference of perspectives emerging from the left –socialist stream in India’s political history spanning both the pre and post-independence years on the one hand and, the emerging voices from what came to be abelled as the autonomous feminist movement.

In a different way, this featured in sub theme discussions in Trivandrum, in 1984, especially where K. Lalitha, Rama Melkhote and Suzie Tharu presented their first thoughts on women in the Telangana armed struggle. If I remember correctly, the title of the working paper they presented was ‘we were just individuals..... But these women were making history, I observed as one of the discussants in that session. There were other issues: of how the mass peasant uprisings of the 1970s mobilized women, opening up new vistas for activism, how far ahead they were of the other movements of the time, and what were the constraints? Also, one asked, how does memory get recorded, especially in a movement which at that time was seen as having failed, leading to massive repression driving thousands underground or behind bars for years, while driving some back into their families in the absence of other possibilities. Oral history, as I have always maintained, requires caution in terms of the questions we ask, the answers we get, as well as who asks, what and when? For women who walked out of their prescribed roles to pick up arms in the 1940s, how do you record memory, when you approach them in their twilight years? Especially when the movement they were a part of suffered major setbacks –if not failures? These questions persist, even as new and interesting work on women’s involvements in social movements comes out. Sessions on oral history have now become a regular feature of IAWS conferences/activities and are part of sustained efforts to build





documentation around women's history and narratives. One such effort that I initiated from CWDS and was happy to be part of organizing was the session on oral history, held in Baroda, in 1997, when the IAWS organized a National Symposium to mark Fifty Years of Indian Independence. Nevertheless, the question today is, how do students read history and historical movements in Women's Studies? Do we read them only through the prism of the feminist lens focused on an exclusive oral history methodology? If students in Women's Studies do not feel and internalize a revulsion for feudal exploitation as also the brutality perpetrated by the State against mass movements, and instead mark out only the patriarchal mindset of left parties based on a feminist reading of the history of the Telangana movement, should we not ask ourselves whether we have done justice to our work, as teachers, leave alone as feminists?

Trivandrum was also about fireworks around the question of funding and the agendas of foreign donors. Even as I have myself subsequently steered institutional processes involving core funding based on foreign grants, many of us have drawn a distinction between research and movements and been wary of foreign grants, especially when these are used to influence and shape political agendas. But the context of these debates has vastly changed from the 1980s when we were still prone to taking positions within the post-independent anti colonial model, which foregrounded the role of the state and public sector funding, including especially in Higher Education. Dependence on the Bretton Woods institutions and their prescribed model has changed the ground beneath us. As Vina Mazumdar famously quipped to my voicing concerns on this count in the 1990s....*arre baba, who do you think funds the Bharat Sarkar and the UGC, from where you draw your salary?* Admittedly, today the issue is both more complex and complicated, but the questions have not died down.





The Waltair Conference, in 1988, was different in other ways. I recall a panel on state policies in which C. P. Sujaya and Ilina Sen spoke, and perhaps, Yugandhar himself, if my memory is correct. Even as there was some prevarication on issues such as the nature of the state by some of the speakers, the panelists did not fail to take note of the State, which seemed to be moving one step forward and one or maybe several steps back even on its proclaimed 'welfarist' goals.

Again, there was a heated exchange in the plenary coordinated by Bina Agarwal on Feminism and Being a Feminist in India, where Madhu Kishwar, Govind Kelkar and I spoke, even as Ela Bhatt was unable to make it. This was when Madhu proclaimed 'Why I am not a feminist.' I had my own different take on how mass organisations approach the women's issue differently, drawing on my association with the AIDWA, a left-oriented mass organization from its founding years in Delhi. While disagreeing with Madhu on her take on not believing in any of the 'isms...' I argued that the women's movement in India needed to look beyond a narrow feminist perspective based on the experience of the 'autonomous' groups, to understand how the state, policy and social formation converged and coalesced to curtail democratic rights and deny equal citizenship. In this, patriarchy was one of the tools used to perpetuate inequalities and, reinforce caste and class hierarchies, especially with regard to the experience of women from the working class. The interrogation of patriarchy in urban working class families follows a different trajectory from what we tend to identify from our normative middle class locations. I drew upon incidents from the lives of working class women in what was still an industrial working class, where AIDWA had made a conscious effort to build its units and organizational strength amongst families of textile mill workers to build a more democratic social base for the emerging women's movement in Delhi. The primary activists and leadership of AIDWA's Delhi unit from its early years emerged and were drawn from these





backgrounds, which also ensured a more diverse caste and class background than represented in some of the other women's groups formed in Delhi in the same years. It also gave a distinct edge to the forms of protest, mobilization and the search for alternate perspectives on issues. These included violence and discrimination, including the campaign against dowry, the issue of maintenance as raised in the Shah Bano case, or sati, in the aftermath of the Deorala incident. I mention these three because the years between 1982-1987 had seen extensive mass campaigns on these issues in the years preceding the Waltair Conference.

Another debate, which has resonated in the IAWS, certainly since Trivandrum, (1984) if I recall correctly, is with regard to women's legal rights and, more specifically the issue of customary rights and personal laws. This came up in different ways and different viewpoints were expressed on the issue throughout. While Lotika Sarkar and Vina Mazumdar themselves carried forward the issues that Towards Equality focused on in the 1970s, both women's studies and the women's movement had to continuously negotiate their positions during these years. There was a huge polarization prompted by the unlocking of the gates in Ayodhya in the same month that the new Bill on Protection of the Rights on Divorce (Muslim women), in 1986. This was a subject on which no unified position was taken by women's organisations during 1985-86. In fact Woman's Role in a planned economy—the pre independence committee of the NPC – had also seen differences on this issue, as was also visible from the fate of the proceedings of the B.N Rau Committee. All these went into the debates on women's rights, the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and the issue of Personal Laws in the Constituent Assembly. While in 1985 the AIDWA took a single point position for retention of Section 125 of the Cr. PC, challenging the Bill on account of it being discriminatory towards women from the Muslim minority community and diluting a secular provision which formed part





of the criminal law, there were others who wished to adhere to the demand for a UCC. The effort made towards mobilization of Muslim women for retention of the criminal provision was phenomenal for those times, and new platforms sprang up to provide space for articulation of these positions. I recall that in April 1986 AIDWA and others handed over a petition for retention of Section 125 Cr. PC signed by more than 10,000 Muslim women to the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. Many drew in public opinion from amongst the Muslim community to both articulate the need for reform as well as counter the propaganda that the women's movement did not reflect the voice of Muslim women. However, the Act was passed, compelling re-visiting of the debate in subsequent years, even as the political climate in the country changed in the early 1990s. So did the discourse on women's rights in the context of personal laws. These were still early years of contending with anti-reform as well as fundamentalist opinions in the contemporary phase of the movement. The 1990s prompted continuous re-thinking on these issues. The alternative slogan, raised by the AIDWA in the early 1990s was, 'Equal Rights, Equal Laws.' This sought to negotiate women's rights from a commitment to equality as per the constitution, including perspectives of reform within the framework of personal laws of communities, even as it countered the efforts by the majority community to push for changes in personal laws of the minority community from a plank of uniformity. The autonomous women's groups also continued with similar debates and some of these discussions were reflected in the Jaipur IAWS conference, where a special session was held focusing on this issue.

This issue is once again being debated and, much more widely so today in the context of the politics of the current regime. The most heartening development in this period is the galvanization of an informed opinion from amongst Muslim women, as is visible in the media debates, and as also articulated in the recent regional workshop





held by the IAWS, in Ranchi. I am sure that this will feature as a major issue in the Chennai conference and in the coming months. Here again, as we know, there has been no one feminist response on the issue. This requires constant re-negotiation in the face of the larger political context, wherein fundamentalist politics has consistently tried to set the terms of the discourse on women's rights in the name of unity, uniformity and a singularly defined Nationhood while oppositional voices from the Muslim community claim that they represent *the* standpoint of the Muslim community. However, the difference today is that the debates feature articulate Muslim women who effectively and forcefully counter the patriarchal interpretations as the only authentic different approaches arising from their community. However, this remains an issue on which wider alliances need to be built, if the possibilities for democratic politics and secular issues are to be explored.

Interestingly, the 1990s re-defined the context of our debates both in the IAWS and in the wider on –going movement. This is been most visible in terms of the political context in which we function and, at several levels. The policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization have resulted in a vastly changed world and the frames within which women are both perceived, as well as trying to negotiate their rights. This is seen in the economic sphere with the Congress itself abandoning the Nehruvian model —of state developed capitalism. It has not only resulted in an adverse impact on women's status and livelihood as documented by successive documents from the movement, but has also negatively affected both the opportunities for finding work for women as also the terms of negotiation of wages and work conditions for all workers. While work participation rates are indicative, more alarming is the story of the sectors in which women are concentrated, non –recognition of their status as workers, denial of rights by the state and endorsement of this non –worker status by the judiciary. The volatility and vulnerability in the lives of workers,



especially women have increased manifold, even as the power of capital has grown enormously.

Interestingly, while we in Women's Studies are visibly engrossed with some of these debates, there are serious gaps. Hardly any attention has been paid to the nature of changes, shifts in capitalism, industry or the impact of the global financial crisis/ meltdown and how the structure of both, industry and capital, are changing, to adjust to a situation of continued crisis. A critical focus area that has emerged is unpaid work. There is considerable discussion on aspects of social reproduction. However, can we adequately analyse these aspects without building on our analysis of macro policies and the structures? Would we be doing justice to women if we were to adopt a laissez faire towards the state and its policies and approach the emerging areas of work, including surrogacy and sex work by giving the go-bye to the macro structures that have spawned and shaped their emergence? These remain concerns for some of us. Also, rural India and agriculture seem to be given the back seat in the teaching and research on-going in Women's Studies Centres, despite the continued agrarian crisis and farmers suicides. Can we envisage a serious improvement in women's status if these phenomena continue? Land rights for women have emerged as a key concern, but these often remain embedded in NGO- led agendas and are not related to macro-processes. In our teaching of Women's studies, aspects of political economy are insufficiently foregrounded, nor are the historical and development concerns. Sometimes we pay more attention to alternate readings without allowing students to become familiar with the fundamental concepts that they wish to critique, both for lack of time and perspective. Further, the necessary links between features of political economy and the persistence of discrimination - rooted in class divisions and social hierarchies- are often glossed over. This remains, despite an increased focus on caste in some of the major teaching programs in Women's Studies.





It is not possible to capture all the debates that have informed and enriched my mind through all these years from interaction in the IAWS platform with an ever-growing community of scholars, researchers and activists. Even as we have disagreed, I have learnt from these debates and the articulation of diverse voices.

However, there is a specific concern to which I wish to draw attention. As Women's Studies becomes more and more identified with feminist approaches and an assumed feminist research methodology –singularly constructed and defined—I worry for the voices that are being silenced, marginalized and I daresay, consciously or unconsciously erased, in the process.

Women's Studies and the women's movement in India emerged from the inherited legacy of the social sciences in India. This included a rich and vibrant debate among social scientists drawing upon a range of philosophical and intellectual traditions. The most visible impact in the discipline that I was trained in was that of Marxist methods, the focus on scientific enquiry and developing evidence based research tools and methodologies. As the years progressed, particularly in the 1990s we saw the emergence of other perspectives, which often brought new insights, particularly to the study of cultures, identities, representation and mentalities and consciousness. Interestingly, today the emphasis on interpretation is often not backed by sufficient attention to field or document/ evidence based research and ends up becoming a re-interpretation of earlier interpretations. This seriously impairs historical analysis.

Further, the conflation of women's studies, perspectives with feminism is troublesome, to say the least. Presently, to be a woman or to talk about one's rights as a woman is assumed to be in itself an assertion of feminism - and to be located in Women's Studies is assumed to be doubly so. The assumption that everyone who enters the precincts of



Women's Studies Centres is sensitized to even basic gender concerns rests on shaky ground. Even if we were to ignore some of the rumblings within the Women's Studies Centres expressing concerns about democratic functioning, it may be said that such assumptions would not hold. The institutionalization of Women's Studies, the world over, points to the need for both caution and greater self- reflection in these matters.

Lastly, for someone who came into Women's Studies from a women's movement background, the erasure of the multiple voices in the study, teaching and envisioning of Women's Studies, is most disconcerting. We cannot forget that the neo-liberal world of the 1990s has been built on the defeat of other imaginations of the world, including also suppression of the history of socialist projects aimed at revolution and transformation of society. In the absence of even egalitarian –leave alone socialist –concerns, and the erasure of left –socialist interventions on women's rights, we may actually end up handing the platform of feminism to the neo liberalism dominated world....where no other thought prevails...nor does it have the right to be! The push towards a singularly constructed feminist envisioning of the women's movement would be unacceptable in a movement which celebrates diversity in other spheres. This coalescence of a non – ideologized debate on women's rights with the context of post- cold war era has forebodings of pushing feminism into the neo liberal discourse, driven by the needs of a crisis-ridden capitalism. That would surely mark the failure of all that the women's movement in India has stood for and the institutional processes it has sought to initiate and build, including the IAWS. There is a need to be wary of a project that consciously seeks to align feminism with the search for an apparently liberal political formation within the framework of a non-left/ socialist alternative. Does the vast, amorphous middle class formation on which this project rests its hopes, with inclusion of sections of the new social media, allow for such optimism to be sustained?



As someone who has grown up with these debates in the IAWS, I would express apprehensions about and against an attempt to present such a unified voice in the name of feminism. This is particularly so given the context of a neo-liberal world order and rising fundamentalisms in a uni-polar world, where the powers that be constantly seek to marginalize and erase other, different voices. The IAWS has developed by providing an inclusive platform for critical social enquiry. This has allowed it to attract younger scholars whose participation has increased substantially over the last few conferences. As someone who now forms part of India's story of an evolving reverse pyramid with regard to sex ratios, I find the spirited defense of women's rights from a much younger set of activists exhilarating. As the struggle goes on, I draw energy from the questions they ask and the answers they seek, in their own unique and different ways.

* * *



SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF MY INVOLVEMENT IN IAWS

Kalpana Kannabiran *

Entering the Executive Committee of IAWS

When I entered feminist activism in 1980 as part of one of the first feminist groups in the country, Stree Shakti Sanghatana, I did not imagine that I would someday be responsible for organising an IAWS conference. In 1984, at Trivandrum, the beginning of my active association with the IAWS, I was star-gazing. In 1996, I was Joint Secretary and sub-theme coordinator for the Pune conference in 1998, and General Secretary in 1998 and the organising secretary of the 2000 conference in Hyderabad that marked the beginning of the new millennium. When I look back, I realise that my term as General Secretary was challenging to put it mildly — work, organising and thinking through collective conversations like never before; pregnancy and the birth of my second child (6 months before the conference), and a new full-time teaching position in a new university. As if this was not enough, I was, at 37 years, perhaps the youngest general secretary in the history of the IAWS, and therefore straddled a generational shift in leadership – the age line, even in



* General Secretary, IAWS, 1998-2000.

feminist spaces, was kept firmly in place for ever so long. My biggest supports in IAWS at that time were Neera Desai, Divya Pandey, Rohini Gawankar and Pushpa Bhawe. I stayed on course because of their warmth, affection and understanding. On hindsight, I realise I have been the proverbial 'bull in the China shop.' But we know that family courts, revolutionary spaces, activist addas and academia are only rendered more robust and inclusive through disruptions, big and small.

In this short account, I look back at my term in the Executive Committee, especially my tenure as General Secretary, and (a) reflect on our conversations around issues of women's studies in the IAWS; (b) our public engagements on specific debates at the national level (I focus on sexual harrasment in university campuses); and (c) recall unforgettable moments in the 2000 Hyderabad conference.¹

(a) Conversations in the Executive Committee, 1998-2000

Being part of the Executive Committee, especially as General Secretary, opened out opportunities for me to participate in intense discussions on the state of women's studies and reflect on possible future directions of research and writing. Vina Mazumdar's observations at the end of her term as President are pertinent:

'any struggle or movement has to respond to major changes in the broader environment if it wants to survive. It calls for vigilance, broad-based participation and organisational strength. Above all it needs allies in all groups who stand to lose their dreams for a future in a

¹ Acknowledgements: My thanks to Indu Agnihotri and Meera Velayudhan for the invitation to write this piece. I am especially grateful to Indu for her patience and gentle persuasion and persistence – she coaxed me to a point where it was impossible for me to decline despite several other overrun deadlines. I hope this is something along the lines of what she expected from me. This account draws on reports written by me as part of my work as General Secretary, all of which are available on the IAWS website.

*world and a nation threatened by too many destructive forces and sharpening inequalities.*²



The challenge – even in 1998-2000 — was to build and *sustain* a women's studies movement – politically and organizationally.

On the subject of research our discussions centred on honing women's studies *within* disciplines as well as strengthening the legacy of interdisciplinary research that was so unique to women's studies since its inception in India.³ One of the ways we believed the IAWS could do this would be to build closer ties with academic staff colleges in universities and intervene more effectively with the UGC.

A brief detour into the history of the IAWS, would demonstrate the inseparability between the IAWS, the UGC and the growth of Women's Studies in India in the early 1980s. At a time in the late 1990s when the UGC had announced the withdrawal of support to university based women's studies centres across the country, Madhuri Shah's role in institutionalizing women's studies in India, and the manner in which she deployed the machinery of the University Grants Commission to provide the momentum, was remarkable. The recommendations that came out of the First National Conference on Women's Studies in 1981 were picked up by the UGC [as Madhuri Shah reported in her Conference Address in Trivandrum in 1984]. The UGC addressed a letter to universities in 1983, suggesting that universities incorporate women's issues and concerns within different disciplines through restructuring

2 Vina Mazumdar, Presidential Address, IX General Body Meeting, Hyderabad, 10 January 2000. <http://iaws.org/wp-content/themes/pdf/national%20conference/NCF09.3-Office%20Bearer's%20Reports%20to%20GB,%202000.pdf>. Accessed on 25 December 2016.

3 Based on the Report of the General Secretary, IX General Body Meeting, Hyderabad, 10 January 2000. <http://iaws.org/wp-content/themes/pdf/national%20conference/NCF09.3-Office%20Bearer's%20Reports%20to%20GB,%202000.pdf>. Accessed on 25 December 2016.



of courses, curriculum development, research activities and extension work. The UGC was able to actively push the agenda of women's studies forward, backed by the IAWS, in those early years. That was also the critical period when the legitimacy of women's studies as an independent discipline had to be established.

Vina Mazumdar was the architect of many innovative strategies to accomplish this at multiple levels. I knew of this of course from women's studies folklore – but her presidency of the IAWS in 1998-2000 offered a rare proximity to these accounts and to her. Over two years I was able to hear praxiological accounts of the growth of women's studies in India in her voice, and witnessed her frequent and animated ploughing into her memory archives to provide precious anecdotes with much humour of those collective endeavours at gate-crashing, subversions, disruptions and creative engagements by the founders. What she tried to emphasize through her 'old' stories was that

*'in the eyes of the political establishment at least, women's studies came to acquire a political identity as well as an ideology which challenged the status quo and vested interests, in academia and society at large - at the theoretical/philosophical - or the purpose, value or content, as well as at the operational, organisational or structural levels.'*⁴

The founders of the association repeatedly stressed the vital role of statutory bodies like the UGC, ICSSR, ICHR, ICMR, DST etc. in the active promotion of women's studies. Further, the founding members of the IAWS had a keen understanding of the critical intellectual, political and activist role that Women's Studies should play. To quote Madhuri Shah from her Trivandrum address,



4 Vina Mazumdar, Presidential Address, IX General Body Meeting, Hyderabad, 10 January 2000.

*'Women's Studies has emerged as a powerful challenge (a) to the existing marginal position of women in society and (b) to the intellectual perceptions of the most dominant section of our people, which includes both men and women, that contribute to perpetuate the marginal role of women.'*⁵

The women on the Executive Committee in the 1998-2000 term were pioneers in the field – Vina Mazumdar, Nirmala Banerjee, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Rama Melkote, among others. Most members had been experimenting for long years with new and innovative ways of teaching Women's Studies, not always as part of university based women's studies departments. There were several in the EC, like myself who were part of NGOs engaged in research and writing in Women's Studies – and part of the setting up of centres of women's studies in universities as students and research scholars. Clustering such centres and organisations with university based centres, developing curricula, designing foundation courses and producing multi-lingual materials in women's studies were seen as urgent needs.

In terms of research priorities, regional histories, health, and the history of the IAWS emerged as specific points of emphasis in our deliberations. The regional histories workshops – in Guwahati, Kolkata, Mumbai and Hyderabad – were memorable, to say the least, and drew in scholars of literature, history, economics and performance to reflect on the significance, textures and specificities of regional histories in India – exploring the intricate interconnections between histories, women's movements and women's studies, searching for our pasts in a manner of speaking. On the history of IAWS, the 1998-2000 EC saw the end of one millennium, the beginning of the next – and IAWS was about to complete 20 years. The concern, therefore, was to preserve and document institutional memories and record oral histories of people

⁵ Cited in Report of the General Secretary, IX General Body Meeting, Hyderabad, 10 January 2000.





who had been active in the association at various points in its history, for we could scarcely forget that this would in fact be a history of the women's studies movement in India – what were the different voices? What was the texture of the debates between activists and academics?

(b) Hostile Environments in Higher Education



Being a membership based body, the IAWS has always stood at the intersection of the work of academic scholars and scholar-activists, underscoring the indispensability of an activist orientation to scholarship – and the centrality of feminist politics to the practice of women's studies. The rise in sexual harassment and violence against women on university campuses and in institutions of higher learning in the mid and late 1990s was increasingly becoming a matter of concern that preoccupied the members of the EC. Incidents in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chennai and Hyderabad, ranged from causing injury and rape to death of women on campuses. Apart from these incidents, there were the everyday encounters that women students, faculty, and non-teaching employees reported in private conversations – encounters with fellow students, colleagues and teachers. While it was been possible to raise these issues in public and campaigns against them outside, most campuses were cloistered communities – 'private spaces'— that actively resisted 'outside' intervention even in the gravest instances. Redressal was seen as a matter of discretion, not mandatory. The worst hit were women students – especially research scholars. With the Vishakha judgement, the time was right to open out a public debate in university campuses. This national consultation was held in January 1999, in collaboration with the Human Rights Programme, University of Hyderabad.⁶ Looking back at the discussions, what is striking is the similarity with situations in the present.

⁶ National Consultation on Sexual Harrassment in University Campuses: A Report, University of Hyderabad & IAWS, 23-24 January 1999. <http://iaws.org/wp-content/themes/pdf/other-conference/DOC008-National%20Consultation%20on%20Sexual%20Harassment,%201999.pdf>. Accessed on 25 December 2016.



What were the conversations like in this consultation? Several students felt that the issue of caste figures centrally in several issues of sexual harassment on campuses, with several cases of dalit-non dalit sexual harassment cases (involving men and women on both ends). Yet, there was undoubtedly a polarisation of interests, which could scarcely be ignored. From the accounts at the consultation, differences in caste-class location and participation in student politics complicated negotiations around cases on a day-to-day basis. The drafting of policy, students and faculty felt, the constitution of committees, and more importantly the devising of strategies to get students unions to formulate policies and codes of conduct, must be based on dialogue and debate around complex concerns of location, politics and interpersonal conduct. For instance, when there was an incident of rape on a campus a few years prior to the consultation, some dalit students suggested monetary compensation as a remedy. The (non-dalit) women students reacted very sharply against this suggestion, to which dalit students responded by marking monetary compensation as common remedy against caste atrocity. The question of representation was articulated in complex ways – caste in some instances, region, and religion in other instances.

While there seemed to be agreement that no committee can be totally representative, procedures for induction to and removal from committees were not firmly in place, making most committees open to the charge of arbitrariness and unfair procedure. The dilemma arose it was felt, because even elected members and representatives from elected unions veered towards right wing politics, undermining the work of the committees in far reaching ways. In thinking through possible resolutions, a suggestion was made that there could be special cells for women on similar lines as the special cells in universities in Maharashtra for addressing issues of discrimination against dalit students. Alternately, it was suggested that the jurisdiction of the special cells could be extended to both constituencies, necessitating a



consciousness of and commitment to both issues on the part of those who assume responsibility in these cells, which would exist alongside mandatory committees and not substitute them.

In looking at the detailed report of these deliberations, what is striking is how cyclical our actions on this issue have been. The further we move ahead, the more we need to constantly retrace our steps. We are at a point where hostile environments have proliferated in higher education far beyond sexual harassment – markedly in the times of right wing Hindutva governments and their allies. The movements in University of Hyderabad, especially after Rohith Vemula, and the movements in JNU and beyond have forced us to reckon with discrimination based on caste, community, political belief, place of birth, sexual orientation and disability on campuses across the country. But even if we return to a restricted understanding as originally set out in *Vishakha*, have we moved closer to fixing the problem of hostile environments and sexual harassment in universities 20 years after the 1997 Vishakha judgement?

**(c) The IX National Conference on Women's Studies,
Hyderabad, 2000**

The conference focussing on *Women's Perspectives on Public Policy* in January 2000 ushered in the new millennium. This was an opportunity for us to put together a conference with a difference. Organising this conference and planning every detail was a thrilling experience – exhausting too, but very rewarding for all of us in Asmita.

This conference was special for a number of reasons. The most important reason was that it was being held in Hyderabad, in the heart of Telangana. Vasanth Kannabiran welcomed delegates,

'to the historic city of Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, to Andhra where ...the IAWS [has] been before and to Telangana where

[it has] not. And each of these places, each a part and yet not a part of the other, the ease and dis-ease with which these identities divide, connect and oppress us mirror our fragmented realities and selves in India today⁷

– words that were prophetic when recalled in our present times of state reorganisation and after.

Every conference has an opening session and a cultural programme – being a collective focussed on creative writing, these spaces offered us a wonderful possibility to open conversations in the conference in new ways and to explore new areas of writing, performance and creative expression. Given our own past involvement in the women's history project, and the location of the conference in Telangana, we decided in Asmita to open with bilingual readings from *We were making history: Women in the Telangana armed struggle* by Mangai and Volga. This immediately provided a perspective without parallel – feminist historiography; women's voices; the politics of organising; women's resistance; the significance of the region from a feminist standpoint; and feminist performance, all came together beautifully. Now the conference would roll on without a problem. Even while the preparations for the conference were underway, we wondered if we could present a cultural programme with a difference. We began an exploration with Kuchipudi drawing on mythology, partition narratives (Menon & Bhasin and Butalia) and feminist accounts of war as our point of departure. This was our first attempt to meld feminist historiography and feminist poetry with Kuchipudi. *War and Peace* was produced and performed for the IX National Conference on

7 Vasanth Kannabiran, Welcome Address, IX National Conference on Women's Studies, Hyderabad, 8 January 2000. <http://iaws.org/wp-content/themes/pdf/national%20conference/NCF09.2%20Welcome%20Speech,%202000.pdf>. Accessed on 25 December 2016.



Women's Studies and subsequently travelled to every district in the state.

My most enduring and cherished memory of the Hyderabad conference was the Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture by my dear friend Sunila Abeyasekera. I end this journey down memory lane with lines from Sunila's speech:

*'We know that it is women in the conflict ridden parts of our sub continent who have come forward to challenge patriarchal norms of war and conflict and to replace it with a humane norm of dialogue, consensus and negotiation... [W]omen belonging to different communities that are in conflict with one another have been the pioneers of community based peace building efforts, balancing their individual concerns as members of a particular community or group with their collective interests as women.'*⁸

Yet again we have returned to the criticality of feminist organising in times of conflict that she speaks to so eloquently.

* * *

⁸ *IAWS Newsletter*, November 2000, p. 11. <http://iaws.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/NLBO28-2000.pdf>. Accessed on 25 December 2016.



**WOMEN'S STUDIES:
WALKING ON TWO LEGS OF THEORY AND ACTION AND
GOING BEYOND NATIONAL BOUNDARIES**



Kamla Bhasin *

The first sentence under 'Women's studies' on Wikipedia is, "*Women's studies* is an interdisciplinary field of *academic study* that examines gender as a *social and cultural construct*, the social status and contributions of women, and the relationships between power and gender."



If women's studies is a field of academic study, then I am afraid that I am an outsider to women's studies. However, I have been part of the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) since 1984, when I attended the 2nd National Conference of Women's Studies in Trivandrum, Kerala. Since then, I have attended several IAWS National Conferences and in 1993 *decided to devote two years of my life to IAWS* by accepting my election to the position of *General Secretary of the Association*. The post of General Secretary of the Association is a full time job, if one wants to do it well. I did this work in addition to my full time work with the Food and Agriculture Association of the United Nations (FAO/

* General Secretary, IAWS, 1993-95.





UN), where I was running a capacity building and networking program for development activists across South Asia.

When looking at the list of IAWS office bearers, I realize that *I am perhaps the only non-academic member to have become an office bearer, that too in the post of General Secretary*. In December 1995, other office bearers and I organized the 7th National Women's Studies Conference in Jaipur.

I have a Master's degree in Economics from Rajasthan University and studied Sociology of Development for two years in Muenster University, Germany without a degree. Upon completing the program in Germany, I realized that I did not have an interest in (or perhaps the brain for) academia. Thus, I decided to go into development work and joined *Seva Mandir, a non-governmental organization based in Udaipur, Rajasthan*. Seva Mandir was working in a comprehensive way with marginalized people in largely rural, but also urban, areas.

After four years of working at a grassroots level and writing popular articles on development issues, in 1975 I was invited by the FAO/UN to run a training program for development activists in Asia and later in South Asia. I have been doing this work in South Asia for the last 41 years. Although I have no connections to "academic study", I do have connections to trying to understand women, men, gender, patriarchy, human rights, caste, and class and seek to discuss these issues with others as well as write about them.



I neither knew much nor thought much of theory/academic work at the start of my development work. This was perhaps either because of my ignorance of the importance of theory or because of my activist snootiness. Also, I found I could not understand most theoretical writings. I felt academics wrote for each other rather than for the general public. I feel the same about most academic writings even



today, although *I now realize that theory and action must go together to have any meaning or relevance.*

In 1975, I began organizing workshops/trainings for development workers from Asian countries, as part of my FAO work. It was then that I came to feel that a good conceptual understanding of all issues was necessary. In 1984, I organized the first all-women's course for 25 development activists from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The objective of the course was to establish people-to-people contact and sharing across our national borders and create South-South cooperation. This course was seven weeks long and we travelled from Bangladesh to Nepal to India to visit participants' innovative projects. The last ten days were spent in Madras, India, where we learned poster making, body work and street theater. Our gurus here were the iconic dancer, choreographer, feminist, and activist *Chandralekha*, journalist and art critic *Sadanand Menon*, and theater activist *Tripurari Sharma*.

It was at this course that I first organized a three day interaction between development practitioners and activist academics. *Kumari Jayawardena* and *Bina Agarwal* served as the resource persons for this interaction. Initially, I was unsure how the activists and course participants would respond to sessions on concepts and social theory. I was delighted when almost all of the participants were fascinated with and appreciated these discussions. One of them wrote in her evaluation, "a thirst for theory was created in us but there was not enough time to quench that thirst." This response convinced me further of the need for activists *to walk on two legs of action and theory*. Since then I have been organizing four week long feminist capacity building courses for women's rights activists in South Asia. These courses have been like women and gender studies for us, where we create an *interface* between feminist activists and activist scholars like *Kumari Jayawardena*, *Amrita Chhachhi*, *Nighat Saeed Khan*, *Rubina Saigol*, and *Charlotte Bunch*.





In 2016, I organized the 21st of such feminist courses. The first seven were organized while I was with FAO, and the last 14 have been *organized through Sangat – A Feminist Network*. Although these courses are primarily for women activists from the eight countries of South Asia, we have had participants from Myanmar, Iran, Turkey, Sudan, Australia and Ghana as well. These courses are held in different countries of South Asia, and normally in NGO training centers. In addition to lectures and discussions, we do yoga, learn feminist songs and slogans, watch many films related to the issues discussed and share our personal and work related stories. We laugh and cry, sing and dance. Our day starts at 6:30 am with yoga, and never finishes before 10 pm at night. *These courses are consciousness raising sessions.*

Because these month long courses are in English, activists who do not know English started complaining and *demanding courses in Asian languages*. For the last ten years, we have been organizing annual two week long courses in *Hindi/Urdu* for women participants from India and Nepal, in *Tamil* for women from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka, and in *Bangla* for women from Bangladesh and West Bengal. In the last two years, *men* working on gender and human rights issues have been admitted to the Hindi/Urdu and Bangla courses.

Entry into the World of Feminist Books, Posters, Songs, Banners and Feminist Publishing

My capacity building work with activists and my involvement with the women's movement in South Asia has made me a song writer and a singer of sorts, a street theater artist, a slogan writer and slogan chanter, a poster maker and even a writer of feminist books. I felt we needed simply written books on concepts and actions on feminism, patriarchy, gender, and others. I had to educate myself in order to teach these courses. The participants would ask many questions which



needed to be answered. This is how my first booklet on Feminism (titled *Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia, and published by Kali for Women in 1986* and now in its 13th edition by *Women Unlimited*) was born. I wrote this booklet with my friend *Nighat Saeed Khan* from Pakistan. Since then, my friend *Ritu Menon* has published several books/pamphlets written by me through *Kali for Women* and subsequently *Women Unlimited*. All of these books are in question-answer format and have been translated into over 20 languages by women's groups in Asia. I was delighted when *Indira Gandhi National Open University* published four of my books for their courses. These books are used in many women and gender studies courses in India, South Asia and other countries. I suppose that now I **am** a part of women and gender studies. I think my work as a facilitator of capacity building courses turned me into a *bridge between feminist activism and women's studies*.

I am Learning How to Read so that I can Read the World

I believe that the aim of education is to liberate us from all hierarchies, inequalities and injustices. I believe women's studies is born of the women's movement and the only purpose of women's studies is to challenge patriarchy and bring about gender equality. Expressing these sentiments, I penned the following lines which were turned in to post cards by the *International Women's Tribune Centre, New York* and into posters by *Jagori, Delhi*.

I am learning how to read so that I can read the world
I am learning how to write so that I can write my own destiny
I am learning how to count so that I can take account of my rights also.

I wrote a poem in Hindi on why a girl should study, which also defines what I believe to be the purpose of women's studies. Here is the English translation of that poem:

Because I am a girl, I must study

A father asks his daughter: Study? Why should you study?
I have sons aplenty who can study
Girl, why should you study?

The daughter tells her father: Since you ask, here's why I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study
Long denied this right, I must study
for my dreams to take flight, I must study
Knowledge brings new light, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study

To avoid destitution, I must study
To win independence, I must study
To fight frustration, I must study
To find inspiration, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study

To fight men's violence, I must study
To end my silence, I must study
To challenge patriarchy I must study
To demolish all hierarchy, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study

To mould a faith I can trust, I must study
To make laws that are just, I must study
To sweep centuries of dust, I must study'

To challenge what I must, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study

To know right from wrong, I must study
To find a voice that is strong, I must study
To write feminist songs I must study
To make a world where girls belong, I must study
Because I am a girl, I must study

My Participation in IAWS Conferences



I have attended five IAWS national conferences; at Trivandrum in 1984, Chandigarh in 1986, Jaipur in 1995, Pune in 1998, and Bhuwaneshwar in 2002. My organization Sangat was at the Goa conference in 2005, but I was not able to go because of an illness in the family. I found all of the conferences to be vibrant and most useful for meeting friends, interacting with them, learning and sharing. *Some of us took it upon ourselves to create a joyous and celebratory atmosphere and bring passion and bonhomie by singing in all of the breaks, lunches and dinners.* For the Chandigarh conference, I actually prepared a small song book with Hindi and Roman scripts to involve everyone in the singing and merry making. Since we were in Punjab, I wrote and sang a song based on Punjabi tappas, a tongue in cheek song, about academic research and the tensions between activists and academics. People loved the song and *Vina di* (Vina Mazumdar, one of the founders and pillars of women's studies in India) made me sing it every time she and I met in feminist gatherings. After Vina di passed away, her colleagues, especially *Indu Agnihotri*, asked me to sing it at the memorial meeting organized for her. As I was not in Delhi at the time, they asked me to send a video of my message. Because of my love and admiration for Vina di, I did precisely that and the video was played at this event.



The Seventh Conference in Jaipur: A Sangam (Confluence) of Academics and Activists, Discourses, Music, Poetry and Art

Many activists have been a part of IAWS from the beginning, but we, the organizers of the Jaipur Conference, made a concerted effort to make it a true confluence of academia and activism, art, culture, music and poetry. The Jaipur Conference was the first to be organized outside a university structure, mainly by women's and human rights organizations. The theme of the conference was *"Looking Forward, Looking Back: In Search of Feminist Visions, Alternative Paradigms and Practices"* In keeping with the theme, we sought to make the conference participatory, and an example of pluralism and collective leadership and decision making. More than 35 organizations were part of the Conference Organizing Committee. In addition to the over 700 participants of the conference, there were about 75 crafts women and men and 40 women folk artists who attended and made this gathering truly special.

Here is what Kavita Shrivastava, one of the main local organizers of the conference, wrote in the conference report when reflecting on organizing the conference: "From the beginning, it was clear that the objective of organizing the conference was not merely to provide the space and facilities for a national group to come together and interact. The conference was also meant to be an opportunity to spread the women's studies movement in the city of Jaipur and in Rajasthan. With the help of pamphlets, booklets, seminars, discussions and film shows, we interacted with students and teachers of many colleges. A pamphlet in Hindi, introducing women's studies and the theme of the Jaipur Conference, and a booklet, "Mahila Adhyayan Kya hai?" (What are Women's Studies?), were prepared by the Publications Committee for the contact program. Creative activities were also planned. Students were invited to send their entries for a poster and/or a poem on the theme of the "New Woman". This did evoke enthusiasm among students



and it resulted in bringing out an IAWS publication of poems by women poets, entitled “Karuna aaye magar is tarah naheen”. On the suggestion of the media committee, an all women Kavi Sammelan was also organized by the Jaipur Door Darshan for their viewers.”

I got a special and very colorful poster designed for this conference, a copy of which was given as a souvenir to every participant. The Other India Bookstore organized an information mela at the conference. During the conference itself, an exhibition was held of paintings, sculpture and graphics by Indian women artists in collaboration with Jawahar Kala Kendra, a prestigious art and culture center in Jaipur. Some volunteers organized a craft mela of products by over 50 artisan, women’s groups and NGOs from Rajasthan, Gujarat, Haryana, Manipur and Delhi.

The West Zone Cultural Centre, Udaipur responded to our call and facilitated the participation of seven groups of folk artists for the evening performances.

In true compassionate feminist fashion, the local organizing committee provided support to mothers with young children by running a **crèche**. Twenty-seven children registered for this facility.

This is what Kavita Shrivastava wrote about the atmosphere at the venue, (which was a boy’s school): “Saint Xavier’s School looked festive and cheerful, with colorful banners and flags with messages of welcome and about the conference and the IAWS. They were hanging from every tree, bush and pillar on the pathway. The conference poster was pasted on the walls of all the buildings. Rekha and her team of College of Art students and Kamla Bhasin worked round the clock to give this festive look and feeling.

For us organizing this conference was a celebration of resilience, mutual cooperation, feminist principles and solidarity.”



South Asian Presence at the National Conferences

IAWS is committed to the creation of a peaceful South Asia and has always sought to promote cooperation and solidarity among women's groups, feminist scholars, people's organizations and NGOs working in different countries of South Asia. From its initiation, there were always some South Asian scholars at the IAWS conferences. For example, my friends from Sri Lanka, Kumari Jayawardena and Chitra Maunaguru, attended the conference in Trivandrum. As I was working at the South Asian level, had many contacts, and was keen to promote cross border cooperation, we organized the first South Asian panel at the conference in Jaipur in 1995 and made special efforts to bring participants from the neighboring countries. The response was very positive and there were 33 participants from the neighboring countries, 16 women from Nepal (who were setting-up the first women's studies course in Kathmandu), one woman from Bhutan, six women and one man from Pakistan, four women from Sri Lanka and five women from Bangladesh. The South Asians actively participated in different sub theme workshops and in all the other events.

I coordinated the special South Asian plenary on the theme "Women's Visions and Strategies for a Peaceful and Democratic South Asia". This panel brought together four women and one man from different South Asian countries to share stories of resistance and struggle against various kinds of violence and their visions of just, democratic, peaceful and sustainable communities, countries and region. Meena Acharya (Nepal), Khushi Kabir (Bangladesh), Karamat Ali (Pakistan), Sunila Abeyasekera (Sri Lanka and Veena Das (India) were panelists, and they made it abundantly clear that women in the region have not remained silent in the face of violence, oppression and exploitation. They have resisted and challenged family violence, violence unleashed by the religious extremists, violence in and by the media, and state





violence. Women have also tentatively expressed their dreams and visions of a peaceful and democratic South Asia.

South Asian feminists have always stated, in different fora, that because of geographical, historical and cultural interconnections, the future of South Asian countries is a common one. Therefore, hostility and tensions between South Asian countries must end if the region is to move forward.

With the friendships and networking created in this conference, I was able to facilitate ongoing cooperation between Padma Kanya Campus, Kathmandu in Nepal and feminist scholars from India, such as Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj who helped them in formulating the women's studies curricula and training of teachers.

It is very heartening to see that the cross border relationships and networks that we built slowly and steadily have flourished. There is a great deal of coming and going and sharing of ideas and experiences across borders by feminist academics, activists, writers, artists and others.

It is also wonderful to see how women's studies has expanded in India and in the neighboring countries. The beginnings made in India by feminist stalwarts like Madhuri Shah, Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, Gita Sen, Sardamoni, Leela Gulati, and many others have come a long way.

* * *



**IAWS:
TO PROVIDE DYNAMIC AND RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IN
CURRENT TIMES**

*Lakshmi Lingam**



Introduction

While I was recovering from a long bout of administrative overrun of working non-stop for five years to set up Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Hyderabad (now with multiple academic programs, a fairly large student, Faculty and administrative communities), I had received an email from the organizers of



IAWS. The email said that they are inviting past Presidents and General Secretaries to write a thematic piece in the field of Women's Studies and wanted me to write on the trajectory of public policies *vis a vis* women in India. I spent the next two weeks mulling over the idea with an apprehension whether I can put together a paper between my existing travels, project commitments and top it all a writer's block that I seem to be nurturing.

* General Secretary, IAWS, 2000-2002.





For the past five years, much of my time went in writing funding proposals for seeking grants to construct the campus, preparing power point presentations, filling UGC formats for getting an off-campus recognition, working with teams of Faculty preparing new course outlines for Academic Council approvals, working on brand building, website content development, boot camps for new Faculty recruits to align the young faculty personal career plans with the growth plans of the new Institute, coordinating and spearheading admission procedures, speaking to parents of students, dealing with complaining neighborhood societies about students and their expression of freedoms, visiting police stations to lodge complaints along with students on street harassment and reworking hardwired institutional bureaucracies and so on (the list is endless). I have not been trained to do most of these either as a PhD student or as a Faculty member at TISS. However, I felt like fish in water and had the guiding values of Feminism, of being an empirical researcher, my life experience of being part of women's movements and the amazing experience as a General Secretary from 2000-2002. I am keen on writing about charting new ground as a feminist administrator sometime soon!

This is a free wheeling note covering almost three decades of my association with the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) at various stages of my academic engagements. I have attempted to study the trajectory of IAWS in terms of the various conference themes to provide us insights to a powerful movement that is dynamic and responsive. This is a work in progress which will be developed further.

My journey: In a Nutshell

I wish to share my personal journey in women's studies. I had registered and attended the Second IAWS conference that took place in Trivandrum in 1984. I was a young research scholar pursuing my Ph.D. with the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay. My research was on





traversing the twin fields of Rural Sociology and the upcoming field of Women's Studies. I tried to present a paper but was too nervous to meet the Sub theme Coordinator for a time slot. I looked up in awe at all the senior feminists. Attending each IAWS conference, was a dream come true, where you could meet your favourite authors, chat with them while standing in a queue for lunch, receive feedback on your presentation, dance with them in the evening informal gatherings.

I presented my first paper at the IAWS Conference held at Visakhapatnam in 1988 on Family Survival Strategies based on my study on women migrants. I was then a young Lecturer with Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Twelve years down the lane, I was nominated and then elected as the General Secretary of IAWS from 2000-2002. I worked closely with Zarina Bhatta (President), Rameswari Varma (Treasurer), Pushpa Bhave, the Late Jasodhara Bagchi, Seema Sakhare, Vidyut Bhagwat, Gabriel Dietrich and Asha Hans. At the organization level, during my term, the IAWS website (an earlier version) was developed, the logo had been designed, the entire membership had been streamlined and amendments to the Constitution had been carried out, apart from all other Association activities. I have not been regular at the Conferences after 2002 but have been in touch with the ongoing discourses. This piece is a homecoming for me.

Introduction



Women's Studies as a 'discipline' is at the intersections of academic and activist discourse, engaging with undoing hierarchies in knowledge production and dissemination as well as critically engaging with power, hierarchies, gender based discrimination in various institutions in society. Apart from working towards strengthening the field of women's studies' perspectives, theoretical moorings, research methodologies and knowledge production, the IAWS attempts to nurture the political



edge that women's studies brings to bear within Universities. The IAWS is expected to interface with Women's Studies Centres in Universities and Colleges, Government departments, national and international NGOs and autonomous women's movements to straddle the twin horses of knowledge production on the one hand and play an advocacy role on women's issues on the other.

The IAWS conferences provide a democratic platform for women's studies researchers and activists, young and old to participate, dialogue, debate, share, nurture and grow across generations. I personally feel that IAWS regional workshops, meetings and conferences chart a different set of objectives compared to other professional associations. Most professional academic associations and their meetings/conferences are often subscribed from the point of view of individual careers and networking opportunities. In the case of IAWS, subscription to the Association and attending the bi-annual conferences qualifies as *rites de passage* for several young entrants and a platform to articulate collective concerns and positions in the case of senior researchers and activists. The IAWS platform therefore is a space that is actively claimed and nurtured.

The genesis of the IAWS comes from the coming together of women from the autonomous women's movements and women academicians who have observed the limitations and inadequacies in the body of knowledge across most social sciences and humanities disciplines that had virtual absence of women's voices and perspectives. The autonomous women's movements that emerged in late 1970s from the critique of the traditional left and its shortcomings in dealing with the women's question in contemporary society, economy and polity had centre-staged the significance of a mode of knowledge production that brings in the perspective of the women, vulnerable and marginalized groups. This consciousness imbued the pursuit of women's studies as a critique of main-stream disciplines and their





limited conceptualization of Indian realities and that of women. This awareness and consciousness had steadily lead to breaking the conceptual and political binaries of subjective-objective; public-private; inside-outside; production-reproduction and later male-female in research enquiry, tools of research and the outcome of research.

The past three decades had witnessed an explosion of publications on the one hand and a wide range of spin offs in the realm of art, theatre, cinema and literature. Researching, writing and publishing have broken fresh ground with works emerging from the vantage point of multiple subject positions that women occupy. Knowledge production is not limited to Universities and research institutions. There is a vibrant culture of writing and publishing across the country.

The steady growth of Women's Studies centres across the country with funding from University Grants Commission has provided an opportunity to reach larger number of students through academic programs and on-campus engagement on issues of gender. Women's Studies during the past decade as a discipline with Masters, MPhil and PhD degree programs being offered from several Universities has created a new pool of Faculty with careers in Women's Studies and young students attempting to sharpen their analytical skills and their political vocabulary. These developments provide new opportunities for the IAWS and also fresh challenges that ensue with institutionalization of Women's Studies raising concerns of de-politicization of the agenda of reworking disciplinary boundaries, democratizing research, building stronger linkages with the movements, struggles to influence society, institutions and the state.

Women's Studies and Women's Movements

It is often said that Women's Studies is an intellectual arm of the Women's movement. In India, several feminists owe their allegiance



to both. However, in various IAWS conferences there have been discussions on the mutuality of women's studies and movements; the tension between the academic and the activist, the threat of appropriation of the knowledge from the field by the academic through the activist. This schism has persisted over the decades and is seemingly getting diluted in recent times. A close examination of this will be undertaken towards the end of this paper.

The autonomous women's movements identify themselves as that stream of the women's movements prominently focusing on women's issues from non-governmental, non-political party-based, secular platforms, struggling against patriarchy and for justice and equality. The women's movements do not have an association but operate through a National Coordination Committee formed through a network of organisations and struggle groups across the country. Seven conferences have been held to date between (1980 to 2014). The history of these conferences begins with the first conference and second conferences held at Bombay in 1980 and 1985; the third at Patna in 1987-88 followed by Calicut in 1990 and the fourth in Tirupati in 1994. The sixth conference was held at Ranchi in 1998 and the seventh at Kolkata in 2014. The women's movements' conferences see the participation of activists as well as struggle groups and individuals inhabiting particular subject positions – women with disabilities, transgender, sex workers and so on, thus affirming diversity, voice and inclusion¹. This is uniquely a distinctive feature of the women's movements' conferences.

1 Meena Gopal (2006): "Affirming Diversities, Resisting Divisiveness." Report of the Seventh National Conference on Women's Movements in India. Downloaded on 1 Jan 2017. www.esocialsciences.org/Download/repecDownload.aspx?fname...doc.



Conferences as a Reflection of Changing Times

From its inception in 1981, the IAWS has worked towards a formal Constitution, membership, elections, region workshops culminating into a national conference. It is pertinent to note that each thematic of the IAWS was a reflection of the growing concerns of women's studies scholars and activists over the years.

First decade: Visibilizing the Invisible Women

The first decade, had a focus on gaps in knowledge, deficiencies in conceptualization and its impact on women in various facets of their life. The close association and umbilical connection with women's struggles and movements is also evident in this decade.

Conference Titles

- 1981: Mumbai: First National Conference
- 1984: Thiruvananthapuram: Gender Justice
- 1986: Chandigarh: Women's Struggles and Movements
- 1988: Visakhapatnam: Rural Women: Poverty, Survival, Struggle and Change

One could call this a decade of de-mystification and visibilizing the invisible and placing a finger on issues of violence and systematic marginalization. This was also a period when changes to legislations in area of dowry and rape took place. The controversial Shah Bano case and the enactment of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, 1986 and the Sati of Roop Kanwar (1987) in Rajasthan brought to the fore the issue of women's rights embedded in cultures and communities and the role of State. A Committee headed by Ela Bhatt had submitted a pathbreaking report titled – *Shram Shakti* - with a focus on women in the unorganized and self-employed sector.



Second decade: Markets, Mandal and Masjid

The conferences in the second decade (1991–98) – reflected the changing Indian economy with structural adjustment and globalization, the Mandal and Masjid politics and politicization.



1991 Kolkata: Religion, Culture and Politics

1993 Mysore: The New Economic Policy and Women

1995 Jaipur: Looking Forward, Looking Back: In Search of Feminist Visions, Alternatives, Paradigms and Practices

1998 Pune: Survival and Sovereignty: Challenges to Women's Studies

The deep-seated divisions among women and the cultural plurality closely entwined with caste, ethnicity and religion had begun to surface in feminist discourses. Hegemonic, universal envisioning of social transformation from women's perspective had come under severe challenge. The singular reference to women's movement has been replaced with the term women's movements recognizing the multiple subject positions and experience of hegemony, violence, exploitation and subjugation as spaces for reflection, theorizing, mobilization and articulation. The conference themes and sub-themes began to focus on economic, political questions of development/globalization and simultaneously also on the issue of religion, culture, identity and marginalization. This is the decade that had also witnessed the steady move of autonomous women's movement groups towards setting up NGOs. Apart from the need to build a strong alternative feminist space, resource centres, advocacy centres, development work and service delivery the other major factor that contributed to the establishment of NGOs was the participation in UN Conferences. The participation in the NGO Forum at the UN Conferences is linked to accreditation as NGOs. Several NGOs sought accreditation and also special status in the UN Commissions as NGO representatives.



Several UN Conferences¹⁰ took place in the last decade of the previous millennium, where women from India (referred to as part of Global South) had participated and significantly impacted the discourses hitherto dominated by the Global North. Extensive mobilization on the key thematic of the UN Conferences took place within the country at the national and regional levels.

Third Decade: Globalization, Sovereignty and Citizenship

The intensification of globalization particularly with reference to overall reduction in employment in the organized sector, a series of changes in legislations dispossessing communities from access to natural resources and growing state repression in various parts of the country marked the engagement of the IAWS in this decade.

Conference Titles:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| 2000 Hyderabad: | Women's Perspectives on Public Policy |
| 2002 Bhubaneswar: | Sustaining Democracy: Challenges in the New Millennium |
| 2005 Goa: | Sovereignty, Citizenship and Gender |
| 2008 Lucknow: | Feminism, Education and the Transformation of Knowledges |



Along with a close focus on new policies that were announced during this decade – National Population Policy 2000 and National Policy for the Empowerment of Women 2001, the conferences had focused extensively on reiterating democracy, democratic institutions at the

²1992: United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil)

1993: World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, Austria)

1994: International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, Egypt)

1995: Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, China); World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, Denmark)



national level while attempting to unpack markets and global financial architecture that dictate State policies.

Fourth Decade: Redistribution to Recognition

There has been a palpable emergence of critical voices pointing to 'diversity', 'difference', 'voice', 'participation', 'identity' and the like, in the country. These have also resonated in the conferences of the IAWS that had brought to the fore the "politics of recognition" in tandem with the "politics of redistribution" to use Nancy Fraser's¹¹ analysis, along the lines of caste, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Discussion on issues of economic inequalities and addressing the same are now laced with discussions on the cultural identities and intersectionalities. In other words "what constituted the category of woman?" Are the terms "women's studies" and "women" expansive or limited terms?

Conference Titles

- 2011 Wardha: Resisting Marginalizations, Challenging Hegemonies:
Re-visioning Gender Politics
- 2014 Guwahati: Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from
the Women's Movement

As a reflection of changing times and the complexity in feminist theorizing and mobilization, it is important to note that there has been a reaching out by IAWS to include the questions of diversity and difference along with the questions of inequalities. The decoupling that occurs with addressing issues of distribution independent of social and cultural identities, is attended to, when they are taken together.

³ Nancy Fraser (2000): Rethinking Recognition. *New Left Review* 3, May- June.



To illustrate through a reading of the concept notes and brochures of the IAWS conferences:

The concept note of the 2011 IAWS Conference in Wardha elaborates - "In the domain of culture and ideology, hegemonic nationalism prevails even as its newer versions are nurtured through the media and other cultural modes. ...The misrepresentation and marginalization of women and their interests coincides with this hegemonic representation of 'Indian culture'...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.....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".

The 2014 IAWS Conference focussed on the Theme of "Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement" and its brochure mentions: "The women's movement has engaged in debates on these issues from its myriad locations..... the movement has actively worked to preserve the pluralist culture and historical legacies of our people against fundamentalist assertions of women's rights and womanhood per se. Commitment to equality and pluralism is both an underlying principle as well as a necessary condition for women's democratic advance in Indian society today".

During this decade, Women's Studies has globally started discussing "intersectionality". Wherein, an attempt is made to bring in the multi-cultural, multi-layered and yet specific ways in which women's lives and realities are shaped within the environment of global and local political climate.

More sharply, the theme of the XV IAWS conference, "Women in a Changing World: Restructured Inequalities, Countercurrents and Sites





of Resistance". This is taking place at a critical juncture of our times experiencing national and global political changes. Growing fundamentalism, the triumph of economic liberalism coupled with rising conservatism and global exclusions are the descriptors of our times. Gendered poverty and gender-based violence compound the effects all these have on women, girls, children and marginal groups. IAWS and feminists have a special responsibility to strengthen Women's Studies which is a political tool and an instrument of change.

Specific Suggestions for the Future

- Build strong collaborations with women's movement groups engaged in sectoral development work, carrying out advocacy work and working with communities. There is much to learn and undo the fragmentation.
- Build a strong digital presence given the enormous content that IAWS has.
- Reimagine the relationship with Women's Studies centres in Universities and colleges to strengthen research methodologies and teaching pedagogies.
- Provide leadership to the Global South through an international conference to be held each decade.

* * *





MY WOMEN'S STUDIES JOURNEY

*Maithreyi Krishnaraj**

My entry into Women's Studies (WS) was in a way fortuitous but the result actually of an unseen hand propelling me towards it. This unseen hand was my self-reflective observation of women's lives within my family and the way it fostered a latent feminism within me. It is the combination of personal experience and study of feminist literature much later and reading about the history of our fore mothers like the women of the nineteenth century struggle for liberation, that pushed me formally into women's studies. However there were precedents which prepared the ground for this. I had occasion to live with my mother's family off and on. In those days children were often left with relatives if parents were away. My mother had a difficult time in her in-law's house. As a child I shuttled between my maternal grand- parents and my paternal grand- parents. I witnessed my mother's suffering. At my maternal grand- mother's house, there were stories of child widows, visible signs of strict enforcement of Brahmin customs in the way my grandaunts lived, and the austerities that



* EC Member, IAWS, 1991-93 and 1998-2000.





widows had to bear. My great grand- mother was always in white and had her head tonsured, ate frugally and could not participate in any ceremonies. My grandmother's young sister was a virgin widow. My maternal grandmother had ten children. So also my paternal grand - mother who had ten children. In those days, family planning was not known. What impresses me was that all the women in my family had a great yearning for education. They could not attend school beyond a few classes but were literate and continued to read books in their spare time. I was given one mantra. "Educate yourself and don't rush into marriage. Pick up a vocation where you can be useful to other women."



Somewhere these seeds that lay within me, at the opportune time given the sun and water of reading, connections to women's movements, sprang into a sapling and later blossomed into a tree, whose branches kept widening as new experience fed into the original seed.

My father was a great scholar well versed in several disciplines- Mathematics, Science, Sanskrit, Tamil, and English Literature. He became a civil servant. My father's father was a teacher of English literature and knew a lot of Shakespeare. My mother's father was a Tamil scholar, though he went into Police service. I am harping on this point because I imbibed this culture of learning. My own name, chosen by my father, was that of a renowned woman philosopher of ancient India. It made me feel very special.

Moving out of this preface, I will quickly run through my formal educational history. I moved from place to place and my schooling was in different places depending on where my father was. Starting school in Chennai, whenever my mother went to her parents place in Coimbatore I went to school there. Later, I went to school in Nagpur, Delhi and Shimla. This exposure to different places and different





people, had an impact on me in so far as I learnt about the diversity of India and I escaped any taint of parochialism. My bachelor's was in Pune, where I picked up Marathi and lived in the hostel as my father was away. I saw nine yard saree wearing Marathi ladies riding bicycles, or swimming and their freedom to do what they wanted to do was astonishing. My first day in the economics class was an unexpected jolt. The male teacher asked the five girls who were in the class what girls were doing in economics –'it is too tough a subject for ladies and they should do home science'. I was horrified. This was my first brush with male bias. As the girls did well in the examinations (I got a merit scholarship) he mellowed and appreciating an essay I wrote he became very friendly. Years after when I went to see him in Pune, he welcomed me warmly and declared that he has named his daughter after me. What an honour! The professors were friendly, we were often invited to their homes where we had coffee and discussions. It was a glorious period of intellectual stimulation for me. This background helped me to develop a critical attitude to what I read. Moving to Delhi to do my MA in economics, we had very distinguished teachers and that was the period when India launched planning. I have felt strongly that women's studies students should have a strong background in social sciences because we must understand the social structures and social ideologies to make sense of women's position in society. Some centres offer BA in WS to students who have no such training and I think it is a bad idea. A systematic study helps one to acquire the wherewithal for academics. One cannot critique Marx or other liberal economists without being familiar with what they said. In the absence of such training, one is likely to jump to conclusions and one's arguments are not based on sound premises but only on received wisdom. It was this conviction that made me write, years later, 'Gender in Economic Theory and Philosophy' (Krishnaraj 2001) in the Economic and Political Weekly. I switched to Education as I found Economics the way it was as taught, too dry. My performance at B.Ed. won for me a





Government sponsorship and a US government scholarship to do Masters in the USA. The purpose of drawing in these details is to underscore the varied exposures I had, which came in handy to do interdisciplinary work. Though I did not do any course in philosophy my personal interest led me to read on my own some books on Philosophy, both Indian and general.

The stint at the State University of New York College at New Paltz and later at Syracuse was where my systematic reading of feminist literature began and I became familiar with important feminist writers. I do not want to give the whole bibliography here to tire the readers. I also attended many conferences of women. This was the thick of the second wave women's movement in the USA. While much of it appealed to me, somehow I could sense India was different culturally because in our case, the family, caste and kin were major forces. The notion of 'autonomy' and breaking away from men which western feminist advocated, seemed a negative approach. Even within the USA, there were many who spoke about women's association as important to give them space. In India where we have a highly sex segregated society, where women always had a separate space to sit in any public functions, women's groups used to have lives of their own in special rituals, in mutual exchange and activities. Affiliation with others is equally important and this is the difference between Indian women's movement and western movement. Thus from the beginning I had this feeling that our feminism had to be different. Solidarity with other women was essential but a society ridden with class and caste differences - as in India - meant that there were dimensions which the western middle class women ignored. An example was how Black women raised questions of colour and race in the USA.

To cut a long story short: after returning from the US and after teaching here and there, when Dr. Neera Desai opened a small Research Unit on Women's Studies in the Women's University in Bombay, I joined as a research assistant.





With my joining the women's university, I imbibed the ethos of the university. My own development as a WS scholar is thus intimately linked to the history of my host institution. I could not have done as much as I did in WS but for the pioneering and promotional spirit of the important figures in that institution, not through any outside influence or lobbying. What was unique about the founding of WS in the university was that it was the first initiative in the country and long before the UGC stepped in to support WS in higher education. Even that happened because the Vice Chancellor of the women's university, Dr. Madhuri Shah became the Chairperson of the UGC. The UGC gives Grants and also gives accreditation to universities in India on the basis of a set of criteria. The university had the right 'horoscope' of favourable factors for the growth of WS. Earlier national leaders who promoted women's education had a perspective which was both class biased, ambiguous and conservative. They saw women's role as primarily family bound and because women as mothers were entrusted the care of children, they needed education in health, hygiene, child development and so on. This view was what impelled Dr. D.K. Karve, the founder of the university. Today, despite dissenting voices that advocate self-development as a necessary goal of education the approach of a woman's essential role as that of her family-role was to die hard. Later, Sir Vithaldas Thakersey in 1916, gave a handsome donation which enabled the institution to become a full-fledged institution. In the early nineteen thirties the university shifted to Bombay offering courses in nursing, home science, arts, and humanities and after 1952 became a part of the Maharashtra State university system and expanded to cover all faculties. It henceforward became known as Srimathi Nathibai Damodar Thakersey University after the donor's mother's name (S.N.D.T. for short) Between 1916 and 1951 the university was basically interested in a liberal education for women and played the role of social reform by bringing women out of their orthodox homes. The perceived role of education for women had no doubt widened but without challenging the idea that this was the only role a woman



should play. In the deliberations the university held on its golden jubilee, a momentous decision was made. Apart from teaching subjects taught in any normal Women's University, it was decided that a woman's university must also investigate issues concerning women.



To wind up this history, after the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which revealed the dismal state of women's condition in India, Dr.Vina Mazumdar, the then, member secretary of the Committee, with ICSSR help launched a programme of Women's Studies in India. This official sanction further gave legitimacy to Women's Studies. Thus was born Women's Studies in India. It came into academics, not as a God given gift or a happenstance but as a result of hard work, ingenuity, imagination and dedication of many actors. The small unit became the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS).

Given my varied exposure, my own understanding of feminism deepened. One can define feminism in its historical context as a discourse that evolved overtime, which at some points joined up with as social movements, or some action joined to theory. 'Feminism' meant to me, a set of ideas and beliefs that were situated in a particular social context, as a reaction to a particular set of circumstances, in a particular world or particular part of the world. What is common to feminism is its woman centredness and valuation of women. Different tendencies developed- socialist, radical, Marxist and liberal. The discourse way of looking at it enables us to think about how different tendencies interrelated and how they changed in historical periods. Actually the distinction between viewing it as a discourse and as a social movement is superficial as it differentiates the intellectual component from people who are doing the action. Theory is a reflection of practical struggles. Today we seem to have issue based feminism whereas earlier we had a 'sisterhood' approach which made us strong, cohesive and identified.





Questions of methodology, perspective and frameworks were to come in course of time as WS developed. To this, I was happy to have been a contributor. Some of the issues I tried to explore were: feminism, methodology and theorisation in Women's Studies. In 1986, Alice Thorner and I approached the editor of Economic and Political Weekly to begin a Review of Women's Studies supplement in the journal. From then on, twice a year the Review of Women's Studies in the Weekly began to appear. I owe this support to Krishnaraj who was then the editor and to Padma Prakash who was part of the Weekly. While earlier I wrote unsigned articles, it was much later that my name began to appear in the Weekly.

There were many field projects with grants from different agencies. I undertook a study of cane bamboo workers in the Konkan (a region which lies in the Western Coastal area of the State) along with my colleague Dr. Divya Pande. We complemented each other in several ways and our relationship was congenial. In fact there was an absence of competitiveness in those days in our colleagues in RCWS as well as other WS centres. We were not seeking academic accolades, but exploring women's issues in order to understand them better and to mount proper action. We learnt a lot about caste based occupations and about sexual division of labour and how patriarchy worked even among the poor in our field projects. The women did intricate labour of weaving objects necessary for agricultural processes like winnowing baskets and drying mats for rice and so on used in local agriculture while the men specialised in making baskets for mangoes of commercial value and also undertook all marketing. Thus cash was in the hands of men. This story was repeated when I was part of a sericulture study. Women reeled cocoons at home dipping their hands in very hot water but they were sold by men in auctions. We persuaded the Silk Board to provide space for women in the auction centre. When we did a collaborative project on Women's Work and Family Strategies with many other centres, it was once again obvious how opportunities for





economic improvement were always seized by the men who migrated while women continued to hold the family's subsistence farming or did traditional crafts with old technology.

My work on Women in Agriculture, co-authored with Amita Shah, was upgraded with more data and co-authored with Aruna Kanchi and was brought out by National Book Trust in 2008. Even today, women are the mainstay of family farms. In another study on the impact of male migration on reclaimed land in Maharashtra, once again the lesson was driven home to us that women bore a heavy burden without any support in the form of improved technology, markets and inputs. In many houses I saw women carrying even the plough on their shoulders for lack of help in hiring bullocks in the absence of male members. My deep concern with Agriculture in India, on which I wrote some articles to emphasize the criticality of agriculture to India's development earned me the sobriquet of 'Agricultural Fundamentalist' by the Delhi policy makers. When the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation asked me to edit some papers, I added some new ones on 'Gender and Food Security'. It was published by Stree, Kolkata. My own intuitive feeling buttressed by reading convinced me of the need to revive this sector with State support for improving soil, water, technology and markets. Bina Agarwal had in her award winning book (1994) "A Field of Her Own" stressed land rights for women. Her insight that land rights to women were critical to empower women was reinforced in my mind decades later when I edited for U.N. Women a set of conference papers on "Gender and Productive Resources'- a multi country study. When policy makers talk of economic empowerment of women they think only in terms of income generating projects. This volume emphasized how important holding assets were for women. Income is not predictable; assets give a measure of social security. Indian agriculture is cultivated by small and marginal land holders who form the majority. Even though many find agriculture unviable for lack of support and take up non- farm employment to get wages, land is held as security, just as gold ornaments serve as security for women in India.



Motherhood is so venerated in India that I wanted to explore this area. When I worked on The International Labour (ILO) and Government of India Ministry of Labour sponsored study of Maternity Benefit Schemes in India. I realised how few receive the statutory benefits. The majority of births still take place in rural areas at home with the midwife('dai").Some attempts to upgrade the skills of dais have been undertaken but we have a long way to go as maternal deaths continue to be high. Part of the problem is lack of medical outfits in rural areas close enough for access for the people and lack adequate staff, who would be present at the primary centres. India is one country that spends little on health, as compared to even Bangladesh or Sri Lanka. One of the things that has helped me is my regular reading of political economy both in the daily newspapers and in journals.



Our Research Study on Women Scientists demonstrated that even among the middle class, highly educated women, rising to top positions was difficult. This outcome was blamed on women having to manage two roles- professional and family/childcare. Our study showed that the reasons for women's career stagnation had much to do with institutional blockages such as men cornering opportunities through old boys' networks. Seminar notices or important conferences would not be passed on to women. Often women were given less work that was innovative or challenging tasks. I kept asking why is it that the work place is designed only for - called 'male bread winner' when women were equal partners in the economy. Why is a woman's reproductive role treated as a private task when it is very much a social task. She produces the future worker; she nurtures the future worker. Without this base how would the economy function? From these questions a new interest began in examining unpaid work of women and undercounting of women's work. Working with UN organisations and our own Department of Women and Child we examined through a workshop, our census, our national sample survey



(NSS), our national industrial classification to show the omissions of women's participation in the economy. From these exercises, as well as my direct participation in the 1991 census we were able to highlight the need for improvement on data on women. These efforts have borne fruit in our data system especially in National Sample Survey (NSS). These attempts were also helped by UN. Organisations like the ILO and UN System of National Accounts in rectifying our data system. We now have figures of hours of work in market work and non-market work of men and women. However much needs to be done still.



My own progress in theorising came with all these experiences. Is Women's Studies a new paradigm or just a new perspective? Originally I began with the notion it was a perspective. (Krishnaraj 1986). Later I began to see it as a new paradigm (Krishnaraj, 1988). I defined paradigm as follows: "A paradigm is a fundamental image of the subject matter. It serves to define what should be studied, what questions should be asked, how they should be asked and what rules are to be followed in interpreting the answers. It subsumes, defines, inter-relates the problem situations and rules evolved which are used as models for solving other puzzle situations".

Somewhere along the line, international influences introduced the term 'gender' to stand for women. Gender as a concept was a great innovation in making a distinction between biological sex and social identity. Different traits were attached to each gender- man and woman. Thus what began as a descriptive term developed into an *analytical concept*. Though actually gender has more than one entity composed within it, it became the practice to say 'Gender and Development, 'Gender Budgeting' and 'Gender Studies' to imply we are talking about women. Perhaps it is because it is less threatening to men. I felt this substitution was not necessarily a great improvement unless we simultaneously talk of the other side. While a great deal has been written about femininity, not much work existed on masculinity and so





I tried to say something about masculinity. I do not wish to tire the reader by quoting myself all the time so suffice it to say that the common notion about femininity and masculinity as a biological given is untrue. Sexual identities are made up of three kinds of directional tendencies: i) sexual orientation ii) style of behaviour iii) core identity. In most of us all three point in the same direction. This core identity is located in the brain, not between the legs. Most genetic females feel female, while genetic males feel male. Given exposure to high levels of male hormones during the foetal stage makes females behave tomboyish but they feel female. The message is our core identity is resistant to biology and is open to social manipulation. Seeking answers in Biology is doomed to fail. Granted that gender identity is fixed early, we have a range of behaviour traits that vary across cultures. Masculine and feminine are variously conceived as either polar attributes ii) complementary iii) as fragmented which need fusion for a whole personality. Modern science veers towards the third view- the importance of the emotional and rational to be in balance. The notion of 'Ardha Nareeswara' a Hindu icon, takes this view. Shiva (the male principle) and Shakti (the female principle) must conjoin to create life (or universe).

The emphasis on *difference* between male and female human beings obscures a whole of range of behaviours that are common to both. They are a continuum rather than polar opposites- gentleness to aggressiveness. In every women's life, gender stereo types have a powerful influence. Manhood as dominance is one of the root causes of male violence against women. In our own tradition we have had poets, artists and saints venerated for their gentle demeanour. Modern societies with less physical work being needed and service occupations being more widespread, muscular strength as a pre requisite has given way to importance of interpersonal skills. Yet there is a revival of the 'BODY' due to media influence and the advertisement industry in this era of market economy.





Many of our studies demonstrated how ubiquitous sexual division of labour was. It is not an innocuous exercise of merely saying women do this while men do this but is loaded with a value system. Women's work is under rated in terms of skill and in terms of its value to the household and the economy. They are underpaid, in low skill occupations by and large. But the question is who defines skill? Why should transplanting be considered low skill and paid less than ploughing where the man merely drives bullocks?

I joined the Research Unit in Women's Studies (SNDT) in 1975. It was just a small unit housed in the department of sociology with Dr. Neera Desai as honorary director. With the immense support from the vice chancellors of the day- I thought of them as a benign matriarchy. We quickly expanded and moved to larger space in a new campus. The first women's conference was held here where six hundred women from various organisations- Socialist Party, Communist party of India Marxist (CPI-M), Communist Party of India (CPI), All India Women's Conference, Young Women's Christian Association, Working Women's Forum and other non party women's groups attended. Unlike the later birth of WS centres, right in the beginning we had this link with political agencies. It was at this conference that the decision to launch an Indian Association of Women's Studies was taken. My own experience was thus to understand Women's Studies as a political as well as an academic venture. The very first thing we did was to invite social science departments of all Universities to send us their under graduate syllabi and we noted the absence of women, the lack of women's dominant position in the economy , ignorance about the Sociology of women, the biases in Psychology that was following old outmoded content and methodology, the omission of women's participation in many movements in political science and history, national and regional- were an eye opener on how much work needed to be done. Thus we began Women's Studies within academia. Politically, Women's Studies was closely linked to the women's movement in many ways. The



questions that were brought up by the movement such as dowry, violence, economic condition, lower power within the household-family inspired many researches on the causes for the emergence of these maladies and fructified in legislation to protect women. That laws were not effective against social customs is another story. Many studies were undertaken to gauge the effectiveness of policy and their gender bias and women's groups offered policy prescriptions. I was part of the group to appraise the national XII Five Year plan.

My most creative period was when I organised workshops with Prof. Neera Desai's encouragement on what I called Feminist Concepts: Gender, Concept of Status, Sexual Division of labour, Production and Reproduction, Domestic labour and Patriarchy. Gail Omvedt did a piece on patriarchy, Gita Sen presented an essay on Production and Reproduction, Chhaya Datar did on Domestic labour debates, Vidyut Bhagwat wrote on Sexual Division of labour and I on the concept of Status. I edited these deliberations and these were cyclostyled (as Computers and Xeroxing were not available then) and as working papers these were widely distributed. Kamla Bhasin used them a lot in her training programmes. Women's Studies scholars use these terms without the knowledge that I was the first person who was responsible for coining them as Feminist Concepts. In those days I never worried about claiming authorship. The pursuit of WS was itself an emotional and intellectual adventure. Now I realise by not putting my stamp on my writing through a published form I lost recognition of this contribution. It was during this period that I began to learn more about the concept of 'patriarchy'. The basic components of patriarchy are: control of female sexuality, female reproductive ability and female labour. Gerda Lerner's 'Creation of Patriarchy' made me understand the historical angle. From then to realise that patriarchy is not uniform and exhibits different characteristics in different cultural contexts. So, Indian feminists talked of 'patriarchies' in the plural. I saw patriarchy not as an uncontested structure but contested often and as permeable.



Age and being the head of a household gives a woman some degree of power. It is not an undiluted male dominance. However what is important to accept is that unless women are also in the public domain, they cannot have any say about their own welfare as well as that of society. Collective struggles are the means to assert their rights. Participation in decision making bodies and elective organs are avenues of such opportunity.

There are departments today organising Feminist Methodology courses. There is a popular confusion between method and methodology. Methods relate to techniques of data collection while methodology relates to the framework used. Somehow many WS scholars seem to think that what matters is employing known techniques. The more critical issue is how do we frame the problem? What is our analytical mode? Earlier there were sharp distinctions between liberal feminism and Marxist/socialist feminism. In my visiting scholar stint at Syracuse University where I was teaching Women and Development, I got the opportunity to read more about socialism and capitalism and books on anthropology. Many books I found stimulating became part of my personal library but at all times I was aware of the difference in our case of the influence of caste, class, kinship and family organisation (Palriwala and Risseeuw, 1996).

It was my interest in Socialism that spurred me on to read through these texts What I was aware of was: that India was not a complete capitalist country and there were large remnants of pre-capitalist styles of production with subsistence agriculture, household production of crafts and capitalist organisations out-sourcing production to so called 'informal sector'. The public sector was also more prominent. Hence many of the analyses were not relevant to India but it is when we read contrasting stories that we understand our own culture by noticing where the differences lay. The feminist socialist argument that in the relations of reproduction, not so much in production that patriarchal



power is more evident was very helpful to link these theories to our own condition. Our family planning programmes - targeting women to control population growth - illustrated these truths tellingly. Secondly caste and class were big determinants. Patriarchy and masculinity are closely associated.

Today there are many Women's Studies Centres and not all of even quality. The link with the women's movement has also become more tenuous. Women's Studies as another intellectual enterprise prized for its intellectuality rather than its significance for women's liberation is counter-productive. Unless the link with the movement is nourished, we are no different than others in the academia.

* * *



ARCHIVING THE IAWS JOURNEY:
FROM SIX STEEL CUPBOARDS TO ORAL NARRATIVES –
ORGANISING, DIGITISING, DOCUMENTING

Sumi Krishna *

'The IAWS Archives will preserve, conserve and make accessible records of its own past history including probing into absences and silences and retrieving lost, scattered and dispersed material; further, it will put in place methods and processes to document and subsequently archive its ongoing activities and developments. Finally, it will also create and archive new material on themes at the interface of the history of the women's studies movement and the women's movement in India.'





– Objectives of the IAWS Archives

A Personal Prelude

In 1999, just back from a visit to north eastern India, I dropped in at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi. Like most women's organisations, CWDS was an open house frequented for its



* President, IAWS, 2005-08.



well-stocked library, stimulating conversations and refreshing lemon tea! Over a shared lunch, the talk turned to the next conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies in Hyderabad in January 2000. My work as an independent action-researcher in the area of gender, science and natural resource-based livelihoods seemed somewhat tangential to the prevailing women's studies agenda. Nevertheless, Narayan Banerjee (who looked after CWDS' field project in Bankura, Bengal) and I decided to jointly coordinate a sub theme on gender and community forest rights, inviting both academic papers and activist presentations. That drew tremendous response and after that I became increasingly more involved with IAWS. In October 2005, as a member of the recently elected Executive Committee (EC), I was persuaded to accept the responsibility of President, with the support of many senior members in the team and Mary John as General Secretary. Neither Mary nor I had served on the EC before and we did not know what we were in for. That very evening I found out!

After the formal handing over in Delhi, out-going General Secretary Veena Poonacha asked me casually, 'So where should I send the six steel cupboards and other stuff?' It was astounding to learn that the material history of IAWS (books, papers, vouchers etc.) were stored in these cupboards, a large yellow bag and sundry cardboard boxes, which were meticulously moved at considerable expense by train or truck, in recent years from Hyderabad to Deonar, Mumbai, and then across the city to Juhu, Mumbai! This did not seem feasible anymore. Where could we accommodate all this stuff, how expensive would it be to move? After a sleepless night, the next morning I requested Vina, then Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS, SNDT Mumbai), to hold everything till we figured out what to do.

Back in Bengaluru, just as I entered our front door and put my suitcase down, I realised that my husband was unwell; this was a shock because he had been in good health after major heart surgery a decade ago.



We rushed to the hospital where he was admitted to the cardiac emergency. As I sat outside the CCU, Vina's question kept popping up in my mind and it was in that unlikely setting that the plan for the IAWS Archives began to take shape.

The First Phase

An institutional archives is a collective reference, providing continuity with the past and reflecting the complex ways in which an organisation is shaped over the years. Amazingly, despite the problems of a roving secretariat, year-after-year successive ECs had maintained and passed on files and other materials. The need for an IAWS archives had been talked about earlier. In 2002, Vidyut Bhagwat and Sharmila Rege had edited the collection, *Twenty years of the IAWS*, which included Kalpana Kannabiran's collation of the presidents' addresses to nine conferences from 1981 (Madhuri Shah) to 2000 (Vina Mazumdar). With the 25th anniversary coming up, it seemed to me that this was the ideal moment to systematically start archiving the IAWS journey. Clearly, the very first task was to sort through and make an inventory of the material in the steel cupboards, keeping what was of archival interest and distributing or discarding the rest. The archives would have to be physically located in a women's organisation or an academic institution where it would be safe and accessible. I was personally excited about this and thought it would be a wonderful project for our members in the run-up to the Silver Jubilee Conference.

Under the terms of our major grant, the previous EC had agreed to have some permanent presence in Delhi. This was mainly for practical and financial reasons – the bank accounts, the auditor and so on were located in the national capital. But at the last General Body meeting in Goa in 2005, many IAWS members (including myself) had argued that the diverse and plural national character of IAWS would change with a permanent secretariat; the apprehension was that Delhi-based

members tend to take control of everything (*'Dilliwale sab kabza kar lete hain'*).

Our plan, therefore, was for the *roving secretariat* to continue, moving with each new secretary and for a *financial secretariat* to be located in Delhi. This would be in keeping both with the concerns of the general body and the terms of the grant. The financial secretariat could hold the financial documents (required to be preserved by law) that were scattered at various locations including the back of Chhaya Datar's garage in Mumbai! The IAWS archives could then be located in the western region, where IAWS has a substantial membership. Through the years, CWDS had often provided an umbrella to IAWS and readily agreed to house the financial secretariat; Director Narayan Banerjee carved out a tiny space for us in their already cramped offices. The next step was to decide on a location for the IAWS archives in the western region.

In 2006, I called a consultative meeting at Aalochana, Pune, attended by invited IAWS life and institutional members from the universities of Amravati, Aurangabad, Mumbai, Pune and SNDT, women's groups such as the Maharashtra Stree Abhiyas Vyaspeeth, besides EC members. The consensus was that the most feasible location would be at RCWS in SNDT University for Women, Mumbai. SNDT was the first university in the country to start a women's studies centre. It was also where IAWS had been launched a quarter century earlier. (And, of course, those six cumbersome steel cupboards were currently housed there!) The university gave its consent and space within RCWS was demarcated. So, on March 14, 2007, the IAWS Archives at RCWS, SNDT Mumbai, was inaugurated by Vina Mazumdar in the presence of Neera Desai, Maithreyi Krishnaraj and other doyens of the women's studies movement.





Archiving women's lives

The story of the IAWS Archives is a part of a larger vision of retrieving, documenting and archiving women's lives. Realizing that feminist perspectives have transformed the conventional understanding of archives, even as documentation technologies have undergone fundamental changes, one of our early tasks was to bring scholars, practitioners and technical experts together to discuss this. In January 2007, an IAWS Western Regional Workshop, 'Archiving Women's Lives: Perspectives and Techniques', was organized in collaboration with the Department of Sociology, University of Mumbai. Academics from different disciplines joined artists, film makers, and professionals with expertise in archiving, documentation, digital and film technology. The workshop focused on how to address the gender biases in historical accounts, recover and privilege alternative sources, and make use of the new technologies. An important part of the workshop was the CWDS visual documentary exhibition, 'Re-presenting Indian Women 1875-1947' (curated by Malavika Karlekar with Leela Kasturi and Indrani Majumdar) which was brought from Delhi to Mumbai. The archival photographs of women – in the family, women learning, at work and in the freedom struggle – drew the attention of many young students. For us, these formal and informal interactions underlined the importance of using varied means of documentation to recover different stories, of networking and reaching out to different groups.

Kamala Ganesh, our Joint Secretary, who had coordinated the archiving workshop in Mumbai, volunteered (despite having recently recovered from cancer treatment) to oversee the arduous process of sorting through the stuff in the steel cupboards, the large yellow bag and cardboard boxes. I undertook the responsibility of collecting the published materials, books, speeches, newsletters etc. and having these digitised. As both of us discovered, the experience was fascinating but much more difficult and time consuming than we had imagined. CWDS







too was taken aback to find how much space the financial documents required – the cardboard boxes that arrived from Mumbai were all over their lobby for a while till room could be found in the basement.

The physical archives

In the first phase before the Silver Jubilee conference, Kamala assisted by Unnati Tripathi sorted through the materials to prepare a detailed inventory. The aim was to reduce the sheer volume by identifying what needed to be kept and what could be discarded. The EC decided to hold not more than five copies of each published document and distribute the rest to women's studies centres. The unpublished 'grey literature' comprised mainly of routine correspondence, abstracts of conference papers, rejected paper proposals, drafts of publications and so on; much of this was discarded. A selection of letters was retained because of their interesting content or to provide an insight into the changing times – from handwritten postcards to typed notes, from cyclostyled sheets to computer printouts. Kamala prepared a detailed inventory of the documents that were retained or discarded. The voluminous material was successfully reduced to two steel cupboards!

Writing about this exercise for the Silver Jubilee publication *Anchoring Women's Studies*, Kamala Ganesh (2008) noted certain key features: The material reflected the organisation's feminist principles, its 'austere purpose with a human touch', and a concern for accountability. As the membership had changed and grown in 25 years (from 271 at Trivandrum in 1984 to over 1500), the logistics of organising a conference had become overwhelming and made up the bulk of the grey literature. She writes:





'The rich material provides glimpses of the organisational, personal and interpersonal dimensions of the IAWS that played a role in the way the academic agenda and activities developed. To some extent, one can track the course of the women's studies movement in India in its formative phase, since many members were also leading figures in the field. Popular themes and approaches for research, the quality of papers, and the nature of participation in the conferences over the years can be analysed, as also the issues taken up for resolutions and advocacy, and the internal debates that went into them. ... Furthermore. In contrast to the individual member, who reacts to the organisation through her personal experience of it, the cumulative picture that comes through is one of office bearers taking considerable pains to run the organisation as well as to lead it.' (pp. 29-30).

She also draws attention to 'an easy and unselfconscious transition between personal and professional matters and issues'. For instance, 'The EC correspondence is scattered with references to shifting house, children's and other family illnesses, and conjunctivitis and laryngitis of EC members! Past President Nirmala Banerjee's letter to a pregnant General Secretary Kalpana Kannabiran on the eve of the Hyderabad conference asking her to take care and mentioning her own impending cataract operation highlights not only the generational sweep in the composition of the office bearers but also the very pressing personal happenings in the midst of serious conferencing, the impossibility for women of having a neat separation and perhaps even its undesirability.' (p.32)

The digital archives



In 2007, I was a nearly 60-year-old digital novice; my digital experience till then was confined to e-mails, and setting up and moderating e-groups, including one for members of the IAWS Executive Committee. My first digital project was creating a CD of the IAWS Southern Regional



Workshop (Feb.2007), 'The Struggle to Transform Disciplines'. The CD put together with the technical help of the Centre for Education and Documentation (CED), Bengaluru, included presented papers, PPTs, photographs, a photo-montage and video clip, reports from other regional workshops and information on IAWS. This was later distributed to all the participants.

This exercise provided the confidence to go ahead with digitizing all the IAWS publications, again with technical support from CED, Bengaluru. The process of identification, collection, collation and digitizing took many months. In the early years before commercial publishers discovered gender/ women's studies, the Association itself had published significant works, most of which were only available as single copies; there were a quarter century of newsletters, besides office bearer's reports to the previous eleven national conferences, the IAWS constitution, and selected photographs. These materials were scattered across the country with individual members and former office bearers, or in libraries. Kalpana Kannabiran (Hyderabad), Chhaya Datar and Veena Poonacha (Mumbai) shared materials generously; others hesitated to send precious original documents to Bengaluru but sent photocopies instead. My obsession with getting the full set of newsletters led to some teasing from my colleagues, because no meeting began without my mentioning IAWS Newsletter No. 6 presumed to have been issued from Baroda – it continues to remain elusive!

Because of cost, time and other constraints we decided not to digitize membership lists (privacy concerns), conference abstracts (too many) and conference papers (incomplete sets). Initially, the grey literature (correspondence, balance sheets) was not digitized but after 2010 some part of this was done at RCWS. In all we scanned about 110 documents, including 20 publications and over 40 newsletters, covering the period from 1983 to 2007. I had to learn all about the various file



and image formats before choosing the image pdf format, which maintains the characteristics of the original document. The IAWS Silver Jubilee Archives CD was released at the XIIth National Conference, Lucknow, on Feb 7, 2008. Designed as a self-sustaining venture, it was priced at Rs100 and we soon ran out of copies. Of course, if we were to undertake this project today we would opt for pen drives instead of CDs.



The intention was to eventually have the digital material available on the IAWS website. So the CD too had a web format with hyperlinks that connect different files. A small start was also made to set up an open access IAWS Web Archives drawing upon the material published in the Archives CD. Enhancing and supplementing this is a continuing task that requires archival and design expertise and funding.

The IAWS Archives project was among the key factors that helped us negotiate a five-year grant from the Ford Foundation in 2008 to cover IAWS activities including the on-going work on the archives. The Archives has been visited by scholars and students researching the growth of women's studies in India.

The Second Phase

It took a couple of years before the working arrangement between IAWS and RCWS, SNDT University could be legally formalised. In December 2010, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) was signed between IAWS and RCWS, SNDT University. In the meanwhile, RCWS had received a substantial donation under the late Avabai Wadia's will to set up the Avabai Wadia Archives (AWA) to document the lives of women. The Memorandum signed by the then IAWS General Secretary Samita Sen and Veena Poonacha, who then headed RCWS, states:



'The IAWS Archives is being established under this agreement between the two collaborating institutions, IAWS and RCWS. Under the terms



of the agreement the RCWS will provide and maintain the space, and minimum maintenance of the collection. It will also provide expertise in archiving through the RCWS Archives (AWA) and Documentation Centre. The IAWS Archives and the AWA archives will have distinct identities and will make no financial commitment to each other. The IAWS collection cannot be merged with the RCWS archives and documentation collection or with the University Library or with any other body of the University without the permission of the IAWS Executive Committee. The RCWS holds the IAWS Archives Collection in trust and will ensure routine maintenance. RCWS will also facilitate the development of the archives without any financial commitment. The IAWS will be responsible for transferring material, including correspondence, materials, and conference related papers to the RCWS on a regular basis. It will also be responsible for the overall functioning of the IAWS Archives and will bear the financial costs of its activities.'

An IAWS Archives Committee set up by the EC had been functioning since 2006. Under the terms of the MoA, this was reconstituted in 2010 as a Core Management Committee (CMC). It included four IAWS life members; two representatives of the EC, one of whom would serve as the convenor of the committee; and the Director of RCWS as an ex-officio member. The CMC had a term of five years (unlike the three year term of the IAWS EC).

In collaboration with AWA two workshops were held at RCWS, in 2011 and 2013, on the challenges of feminist archiving. Archiving work in Mumbai progressed, as Unnati Tripathi and RCWS (guided by Kamala and Veena) undertook the classification, cataloguing and digitising of some of the grey literature, such as minutes of meetings, conference proceedings, and other materials that had been acquired. With the guidance of Indu Agnihotri, CWDS also digitized the fragile documents from the Indian women's movement stored in its own office files and library collection. The effort here was to digitize documents emanating



from the joint women's organisations during the 1980s and 1990s. These focus on violence, women's economic rights and role vis-à-vis development policies and planning as well as interventions aimed at engaging in institutional processes and critique of policy framework.



Video documentation

With the strong base established in the first phase of archiving, IAWS ventured into video documentation of workshops and conferences, under the leadership of Uma Chakravarty who headed the CMC. A regional workshop on 'Cultural Production of the Women's Movement in India' was held in collaboration with Indraprastha College for Women, Delhi, which itself had many years earlier established its own archives on higher education for women. A selection of audio-visual recordings from the workshop covers 30 years of cultural production relating to the women's movement.

Subsequently, the proceedings of the IAWS National Conferences at Wardha (2011), and Guwahati (2014) were videographed (by Pranhita Sen and Puloma Pal, respectively). These form a unique record of alternative forms of recording women's lives. The Wardha conference, for instance, included sessions such as the Chhatisgarh Tribal Artists' Workshop on Gond painting, a mono-act on the struggle of Irom Sharmila in Manipur, and a pre-conference workshop that captured the voices of university students from across India on women's studies scholarship and activism.

Oral narratives

Feminist critiques had long emphasized the need to go beyond conventional archival sources to recover the voices of the marginalised, through retrieving informal documents like posters and pamphlets and by recording women's oral narratives and stories of resistance to





patriarchy. Feminist publishing and audio-visual documentation in India had drawn attention to the range of 'sources' that needed to be explored. In keeping with the three-fold objectives of the IAWS Archives (epigraph above), during 2011-12 the CMC initiated projects to 'create and archive new material on themes at the interface of the history of women's studies and the women's movement in India'.

The first of these projects was to interview women activists of the 1970s and early 1980s, a time when many 'new social movements' had emerged and questions about the direction of the nation-state had been raised. Ponni Arasu (guided by Uma and Mary) recorded interviews with pioneering women and collected historic photographs, pamphlets and other documents from them. Among those interviewed were the following: Southern region - Geetha Ramakrishnan, Vasanth Kannabiran, Mythili Sivaraman, Nalini Nayak, Fatima Burnad, Saraswathi Rajendran; Northern region - Manimala, Nandita Haksar, Shah Jehan Apa, Vina Mazumdar, Nandana Reddy, Vasanthi Raman. Western Region - Urmila Pawar, Shiraz Bulsara, Sujata Gothoskar, Kumud Pawde, and Gail Omvedt (who also donated 400 photographs of three decades of her work in Maharashtra).

A project envisaged by J Devika as 'a snowballing preliminary archives' was on 'Feminism before and after the Fourth National Conference of the Indian Women's Movements'. The conference, held at Kozhikode (Calicut) in December 1990 was critical in understanding the history and perceptions of feminism in Kerala at that time. Recorded interviews and discussions with key organisers and participants (such as K. Ajitha, Sara Joseph and others) were complimented by collecting relevant materials in Malayalam and English – conference reports, newspaper and journal articles and so on.

In 2014, despite a difficult funding situation, we went ahead with two significant oral narrative projects. One of these is Ilina Sen's project to





interview key participants of the Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan, held in Patna in 1988. The Patna Conference had brought to the fore the voices of women in people's struggles and mass organizations in a hitherto unprecedented manner. Indeed, this inspiring example preceded the Calicut conference and other conferences organized by the autonomous women's movement. It is also unique because later conferences have not had this kind of representation.

The other is Anita Ghai's project on the interface (or lack thereof) between the women's movement and the disabled women's struggle through interviews with representatives of both. Although 'women's bodies' are intrinsic to feminist perspectives, women with disability have been excluded from both the women's movement and women's studies. Anita suggests that beyond acknowledging exclusion, there is need to articulate and understand the perceptions of feminist activists that led to this. Are there any common threads in the narratives of women who interrogated patriarchy but did not 'see' disabled women? Could the articulation and analysis of these narratives lead to a surer path towards a socially just women's movement?

Moving Forward

We may no longer be carting steel cupboards, bags and boxes across the country but the digital era makes archiving both easier and more difficult. Immediately after our EC took over in 2005 we had set up an e-group to communicate among EC members. This has continued to serve the invaluable purpose of linking EC members in far flung cities and is a digital record of internal correspondence and discussion (including, no doubt, some angry exchanges!). This vast amount of 'grey literature' already in the digital space needs to be organised and perhaps selectively made accessible to future researchers. This has not happened partly because of lack of funding and partly because



the nitty-gritty of archiving is laborious, backroom work, requiring considerable patience and persistence to yield small nuggets.

Using newer documentary technologies and recovering oral histories is invigorating but this too requires focus and organisation. The priorities for future oral narrative projects of the IAWS Archives, as outlined in September 2014, are: a) History of the women's movement; b) Role of women in struggles and other movements/ Women's linkages with other movements and struggles; c) Women's struggles with larger movements; d) Women's involvement with the health movement; and e) Women's Studies.

The process of archiving the IAWS journey has involved retrieving that which has been scattered or lost and 'probing into absences and silences', devising methods to document and subsequently archive women's changing lives, and creating new materials at the juncture of women's studies and the women's movement. It has meant selecting and sifting through all kinds of oral and written records that are often interwoven in complex ways. Personal and collective narratives are open to varied interpretations, reflecting the politics of the past and the present. The Archives show that as a professional association, IAWS has consistently striven to institutionalise the critical concerns of the women's movement, straddling the space between women's democratic resistance and academic structures. This endeavour is fraught with obstacles and challenges. Archiving the IAWS journey serves as a touchstone and a guide to the ways in which two generations of women have faced and overcome these challenges.

Note:

IAWS Archives Committee 2006: Sumi Krishna (chair), Kamala Ganesh, Veena Poonacha, S. Anandhi, Meena Gopal. Core Management Committee of the IAWS Archives 2010: Life members - Uma Chakravarty

(chair), Sumi Krishna, Kamala Ganesh, J Devika (to 2014)/ Kumkum Roy (from 2014);

IAWS EC representatives – Ilina Sen, Meena Gopal (convenor)/Shaila Desouza (convenor); Veena Poonacha (RCWS Director, ex-officio).

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PIONEERING WOMEN'S STUDIES INTO
UNIVERSITIES:
THE ROLE OF THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN'S
STUDIES



*Veena Poonacha**

Introduction

I write this essay as someone who has had a ringside view of the growth and development of Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) for over three decades. I write with the hope that those who have only recently ventured into the grand adventure of women's studies scholarship may become aware of the history of IAWS and its contribution to the growth of women's studies in the country. This knowledge is important, so that we do not forget its founding vision, or overlook the collective struggle that created a space within institutions of higher education for women's studies scholarship and led to the establishment of women's studies centres.



* General Secretary, IAWS, 2003-05.





Currently there are approximately 200 women's studies centres/cells in the country, under the grant-in-aid programme of the University Grants Commission (UGC), New Delhi. Many of these centres fight a lonely battle for survival within institutional structures that do not appreciate the radical import of the discipline and its potential to overturn accepted tomes of knowledge. Apart from the administrative and financial problems that they face, their work is made difficult by rigid university structures. Consequently, these centres find it difficult to fulfil UGC's mandate of initiating teaching, research and extension activities, under the terms of its grant-in-aid support.

The framework given to these centres/cells is different from that of other university departments. They are expected to work as agents of social change through research, teaching and community outreach programmes. This vision of higher education institutions grows out of an understanding that the three-fold activities of research, teaching-learning programmes and community outreach activities, are not mutually exclusive. They are intricately interwoven to enrich each other, generate experiential knowledge, democratize knowledge systems and promote women's struggles for equality.

To appreciate this model of higher education, there is a need to look into how and why women's studies entered the university system. It is a story that is inextricably linked to the pioneering work of the IAWS. The IAWS lobbied to shape education policies and programmes, played an important role in ensuring UGC grant-in-aid support to women's studies centres.

The Growth of Women's Studies

I begin by describing some of the factors that led to the growth of women's studies in India. Women's studies has its origins within the feminist politics of the early 1970s. The theoretical challenges that it represents to mainstream disciplines, can be traced to the various



consciousness-raising sessions organized within autonomous women's groups as well as to the questions raised women academics within universities. Women scholars and activists recognized the negative impact of the prevailing development policies on women's lives. The Government of India therefore set up the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) to look into the socio-economic and political processes that were negatively impacting on women. Drawing upon the Census, the NSS data, interviews with more than 10,000 women, the Committee painted in its report, entitled the *Towards Equality Report* (1975), a dismal picture of women's lives. The report, presented at the first international U.N. Conference on women in Mexico (1975) provided a suitable environment for the emergence of autonomous women's groups seeking to promote gender politics.

Based on the recommendations of the Committee, the Government of India drew up a *Plan of Action* to stem the deteriorating status of women. The plan emphasized the need for research and documentation to uncover the social structures/processes that hampered gender justice in the country. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) pioneered women's studies research to bridge the existing knowledge gaps on women's lives and to develop intervention strategies. The research findings generated through the ICSSR programme substantiated many of the conclusions drawn by the CSWI. The CSWI had specifically called for 'greater involvement of educational institution in removing the invisibility of the real life experiences of the majority of India's women within the curriculum, teaching and research activities of educational institutions.'¹ The report stated:

¹ Some of the early experiments that grew out of these recommendations included: 1) the Research Unit for Women's Studies subsequently named Research Centre for Women's Studies by Neera Desai in SNDT Women's University, Mumbai; 2) the Centre for Women's Development Studies, by Vina Mazumdar; and 3) the Indian Institute for Social Science Trust (ISST), New Delhi by Devaki Jain.

‘The deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes are built in the minds of men and women through a socialization process which continues to be extremely powerful. If education is to promote equality for women, it must make deliberate planned and sustained effort, so that the new values of equality can replace traditional value system.’²

Birth of the Association

The First National Conference, organized at SNDT Women’s University from April 20-24, 1981, was to follow up on the recommendations made in the *Towards Equality Report*.³ As Madhuri Shah one of the main convenors of the conference stated in her inaugural address:

‘When we initiated the move for this Conference, five months ago, we thought we were about to begin a long struggle to persuade the educational system to take a new look at women’s situation and its role in bringing about healthy and positive changes in society, so that women do not continue to suffer from injustice, discrimination and indignity. We were prepared for indifference, reluctance and resistance to the idea of developing Women’s Studies as a new and unfamiliar venture within the educational process. The response however was beyond expectations.’⁴

It was at this historic conference, that the participants first mooted the idea for an organization that would sustain and lend voice to the

2 Cited in Dr. Madhuri Shah’s inaugural address at the First National Conference in 1981 at SNDT Women’s Studies. (RCWS Newsletter 2014, Vol. 35, No.1).

3 The conference was convened under the leadership of Dr. Madhuri Shah, (the first woman Chairperson of the UGC) and Prof. J. P. Naik (former Member Secretary of the ICSSR and of the India Education Commission).

4 Madhuri Shah’s inaugural address at the First National Conference held in SNDT Women’s University, 1981 (cited in RCWS Newsletter 2014, vol. 35, No.1).



concerns of activists and scholars. The participants included a large number of teachers, students, vice chancellors of different universities as well as well as activists and political leaders. Describing the heady excitement of the conference, Indu Agnihotri, recalls participation of stalwarts like Pulrenu Guha, Ahalya Rangnekar, Vimala Randive, Pramila Dandavate and Gail Omvedt.⁵



Formation of IAWS

Since its formal inauguration in 1982, the IAWS has been the space for academics, policy-makers and activists to meet, share, analyze perspectives, present inter-linkages, and initiate action as academics and activists. The IAWS has the distinction of being the only professional association in the country that draws its members from such diverse fields and provides a forum to the grassroots activists as well as internationally recognized scholars to come together in the same platform.

Over the years, the IAWS has retained its national character and has developed an effective system of networking with institutions and regional women's studies associations in different parts of the country. This representative character of the IAWS is maintained by ensuring that the EC members are from different parts of the country. These members take special pains to reach out to grassroots women's organizations and women's studies centers in their respective regions. The IAWS also brings out a newsletter to facilitate effective communication with its members.

Providing impetus to political activism as well as critical theoretical enquiry, the IAWS organizes national conferences in collaboration

⁵ Agnihotri, Indu. 'How I landed up at the first NCWS in Bombay in 1981' In *Anchoring Women's Studies in India: Twenty Five Years of the Indian Association of Women's Studies*. 2008 Pp. 19-27.





universities in different parts of the country. In the interim period between two national conferences, the IAWS organizes a series of seminars and regional workshops with different institutions. A review of the conference themes indicates that the focus has been on a range of socio-economic and political concerns that undermine women's citizenship rights/entitlements. The conferences, in effect, provide the space to discuss ongoing trends that displace people, deny them livelihood and erode their entitlements to natural resources. It has been a space to question regressive ideologies that seek to exclude communities/people on the basis of their religion, ethnicity and sexual orientation; and a space to discuss epistemological and pedagogic concerns in women's studies. The synergy created through the organization of bi-annual/triannual national conferences as well as the various regional seminars and workshops has contributed significantly to the growth of women's studies teaching and research and pedagogy in the country.

Women's Studies Enters Universities

Perhaps a lesser known contribution of the IAWS to the growth of women's studies is its efforts to ensure the establishment of women's studies centres within universities. The IAWS was the forum through which women lobbied for the inclusion of the gender component in education policies. This demand was made at a collaborative workshop on the proposed education policy organized by IAWS, UGC and University of Delhi in April 1985. The recommendations made at the workshop for women's studies research, teaching and extension programmes within universities was subsequently incorporated into the National Policy on Education by the Parliament in May 1986.



The policy provided a clear mandate to the national education system to 'play a positivist interventionist role in the empowerment of women through research, curriculum development and direct involvement in



women's development activities.' It also stated that women's studies would be promoted within existing institutions and disciplines. The subsequent modifications of the educational policy in 1992 passed by Parliament further elaborated on the role of women's studies programmes as agents of social change within institutions of higher education. Following which, the UGC, since the Seventh Plan, provided grant-in-aid to a few universities for the establishment of women's studies centres. Pioneering institutions like CWDS, New Delhi, and Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, undertook teacher training programmes and curriculum development activities to facilitate the introduction of women's studies.

It was expected that women's studies centres within higher education institutions would strengthen women's movements and struggles by building a data-base on women's lived situation through documentation research and publications. The centres were also expected to conduct teaching-learning and community outreach programmes to create awareness and sensitivity to gender concerns. Envisaged as the academic arm of women's movements and struggles, the centres were expected to provide women space to conceptualize, document and preserve their knowledge for posterity. It was, in short, an attempt to infiltrate feminist ideas into the university system.

The importance of this process was that it aimed at creating a back-up for women's political assertion. Women had learnt bitter lessons about the politics of knowledge generation: their knowledge and the history of their resistance to patriarchy tended to be trivialized by men, unless they made a conscious effort to preserve it. Without knowing their history, future generations of women would have to start from scratch to seek out their liberation. These centres were not envisioned as a pure research institution. It was expected to go beyond theoretical discourses to reach out to the community and become an agent of social change. This was a revolutionary measure: for it meant breaking





the academic isolation of the university system and making it sensitive to the needs of the community.

Women's studies centres have been established through UGC grants since 1985.⁶ Through the three decade history of women's studies within universities, the IAWS has cooperated with the UGC to shape women's studies. It was a relationship that can be traced to the time when Dr. Madhuri Shah, who was the President of IAWS, was inducted as the ex-officio member of the UGC standing committee on women's studies. Subsequently, the UGC followed the precedent of inducting her successors as ex officio members of the standing committee. The rapid expansion of women's studies programmes occurred under Dr. Armaity Desai's initiative when she was the UGC Chairperson. During this period, the IAWS was part of the UGC consultations to frame the guidelines for women's studies programmes.⁷ The IAWS also cooperated with various centres in conducting organizing seminars as well as the refresher and orientations courses in women's studies that the UGC had initiated under its Ninth Plan programme.⁸ The IAWS lobbied for the inclusion of women's studies as an area in which candidates could appear for the NET examination. Further it suggested that the qualifying

6 The Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University is an exception here, since it was established in 1974, a year before the International Year of Women. The mandate given to the centre since its inception was broad-based. It included research, teaching, training publication, documentation, extension and networking with other academic institutions as well as women's groups. It was the model for the development of women's studies centres in the country.

7 Under the Ninth Plan Guidelines, the centres were classified under three phases and given grants according to the phase they were in. The centres classified as phase III were expected to provide support to other centres within each region. It was an attempt to create network among women's studies centres and across universities.

8 The UGC guidelines expected the faculty development programmes in women's studies would be organized by III UGC centres and well-established women's studies centres outside the university system.





candidates should be recruited not just in women's studies teaching programmes, but also in any social science departments in which the candidate had a post graduate degree. The IAWS has also been the forum in which the various women's studies centres lobbied for redressal of their grievances about their service conditions by the UGC.

The UGC framework for action provided by the UGC guidelines since the Ninth Plan required the centres undertake: 1) research (both theoretical and action oriented); 2) teaching (curriculum design, post-graduate programmes and short-term courses); 3) training and gender sensitization (within the university as well as the larger community); 4) publication (of teaching-learning material, training modules and research reports,); 5) documentation (creating a data-base on women); and 6) extension/ community-action research. The last was the most difficult activity for most women's studies centres to implement. The faculty members were generally comfortable with teaching and research, but were not aware of how to engage in extension/community outreach activities. The importance of extension and community outreach programmes, however, cannot be underestimated. It is the means by which the academic hierarchies between universities and grass-roots communities can be bridged, leading to the democratization of university knowledge systems and enrichment of learning experiences for university students.

Confrontation with UGC

Sadly this close cooperation between the IAWS and the UGC received a setback during the tenure of Dr. Hari Gautam as UGC chairperson and subsequently under Dr. Arun Nigwaker. The commission refused to recognize the IAWS Presidents as ex-officio members of the UGC standing committee on women's studies. The IAWS protested against such arbitrary action to undermine the long-standing precedents established to promote women's studies. The rise of right wing





ideologies in the UGC, during the period, saw insidious attempts to undermine the radical potential of women's studies programmes. Under the Tenth Plan programme attempt was made to restrict the scope of women's studies centres by renaming them as 'Women and Family Studies Centres.' Dissenting members of the women's studies standing committee (who were also IAWS members) present at the meeting appraised the IAWS EC of these developments. The IAWS immediately initiated a widely discussion on this issue. Supported by national and international scholars, IAWS successfully forced the UGC to withdraw such a move.

Further lobbying by founding members of IAWS forced the government to reconstitute the women's studies standing committee under Dr. Vina Mazumdar's leadership. This committee comprising women's studies scholars (also members of the IAWS) framed the policy guidelines for the UGC Eleventh Plan programme after regional consultations in different parts of the country. The revision of guidelines was necessitated because of the ways by which the Tenth Plan guidelines had tampered with the founding vision of the women's studies programmes within universities.⁹

Changing Directions for Women's Studies

The Eleventh Plan period sought to expand and consolidate women's studies programmes within universities: for it sought to establish women's studies centres in each university of the country. One of the pitfalls of introducing women's studies through official decrees was that many centres were opened in areas that did not have a history of women's movement, transformatory vision and politics. This meant



⁹ For instance, the Tenth Plan Guidelines expected women's studies centres to monitor the functioning of NGOs in their regions. This surveillance role that women's studies centres were expected to play could not under any circumstance be accepted.



that very often the faculty appointed in the centres had no idea about women's studies. The only criteria for the appointment of faculty members in women's studies centres was that they were women willing to shoulder additional responsibilities. Indubitably, these women accept the additional charge out of a commitment for women, but they are often unable to appreciate the political content of the discipline; or even if they did, they were not able to draw upon the rich experience of feminist activism to gain insights and creatively enrich their teaching/research programmes. Women's studies research and teaching programmes increasingly became a study of women without reflecting the feminist underpinnings of the discipline. This is not to imply that all the existing women's studies centres similarly failed but rather to suggest that without a suitable knowledge and appreciation of the history of struggles, the newly initiated centres/cells fail to transmit feminist ideas to the new generations of women.

The Eleventh Plan document had laid considerable stress on teaching-learning programmes to be conducted through these centres. This is not to suggest that women's studies teaching-learning programmes began only during the Eleventh Plan. Many universities had initiated such courses earlier.¹⁰ The earliest attempt to initiate women's studies teaching was made at the SNDT Women's University in 1991 with the introduction of a compulsory foundation course in women's studies for its undergraduate students. The RCWs also introduced a post-graduate diploma programme in 1997. At around the same time, Pune University as well as southern universities like Mother Theresa

¹⁰ The earliest attempt to initiate women's studies teaching was made at the SNDT Women's University in 1991 with the introduction of a compulsory foundation course in women's studies for its undergraduate students. The RCWs also introduced a post-graduate diploma programme in 1997. At around the same time, Pune University as well as southern universities like Mother Theresa University, Avinashlingam University and Padmavathi University had begun their post graduate and doctoral programmes in women's studies.





University, Avinashlingam University and Padmavathi University had begun their post graduate and doctoral programmes in women's studies. The twofold reasons for the growth of women's studies teaching programmes were: 1) the growing demand from the student community for such courses; and 2) the need to gain concurrence for women's studies faculty positions from state governments. Such a concurrence for the faculty positions by state governments requires that faculty appointments comply with the requisite teaching workload.¹¹

While many universities have offered exciting new courses on women's studies, drawing upon the current advances in women's studies theorizing. It cannot be denied that the teaching-learning programmes offered in some of the universities are dismal. Without adequate guidelines or availability of course materials these courses did not fulfil the objectives of introducing women's studies in universities. To overcome these constraints, the UGC during the Twelfth Plan period set up a Curriculum Development Committee to design model post graduate and undergraduate curriculum in women's studies. Many members of the Curriculum Development Committee were members of the IAWS and also its EC members. These members sought to ensure that the theoretical advances made within women's studies scholarship was reflected in the curriculum.

Need for Intervention

The initiative to form a model curriculum addresses only one aspect of teaching-learning programmes. Women's studies scholarship has grown exponentially. The theoretical advances made by scholars across disciplinary boundaries and by activist-scholars are not easily available to students from far-flung parts of the country. There is a need to

¹¹ Faculty workload is often measured in terms of teaching hours. The faculty member's contribution to research and extension are not taken into account





develop suitable teaching-learning materials in different languages to meet this demand. A point of concern is the rigid structures imposed on women's studies teaching programmes within universities.

In many universities, there is not much scope for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary areas of study. Women's studies is seen as a discipline under the faculty of social science. This restricts the admission of students from other disciplines and courses. For instance, students with post-graduate qualification from disciplines outside the faculty of social sciences may not be allowed to enroll in a Ph.D programme in women's studies. No doubt, the introduction of choice-based credit system under the semester system is an attempt to allow students to take elective courses across departments and faculties. Yet the question that bothers me is, to what extent can a modular teaching-learning programme, inculcate the critical consciousness required to do women's studies? Does the programme, in effect, undermine the radical potential of women's studies?

This point becomes clearer when examining the evaluation pattern adopted under this model of education. The emphasis is on standardization and objective evaluation in ways that would eliminate teacher bias. This sounds good in principle. But the question is, how does one go beyond standardized testing, to see the extent to which students can engage critically with theories? This concern becomes clearer when examining the model question paper designed for NET examination. The model prescribed seems to test the information level of the student rather than her ability to critically sustain a theoretical position.

Pitfalls of Institutionalization

The institutionalization of women's studies has created its own compulsions of meeting certain standards set by universities, of API scores. In trying to meet these standards, the large political aims of



women's studies scholarship may well be forgotten. This has led to the neglect of extension activities by women's studies centres. In the process, women's studies becomes another discipline – a venue for career growth, rather than a potentially politically charged area. Women's studies centres are also uncertain about their existence beyond the Twelfth Plan period which concludes in March 2017 and this uncertainty has affected their functioning. These centres need support from the IAWS to ensure the continuity of UGC grant-in-aid through the next plan period.

Challenges Ahead

Alongside these concerns, a point that needs to be addressed by the IAWS is the pernicious ways by which retrogressive, right-winged ideologies have entered university systems. These ideologies seek to intimidate, silence and infiltrate women's studies centers. The question is how do we resist and challenge these ideologies that are based on non-secular values and understandings about gender concerns? The resolution of this question is not as easy as it appears, neither strategically nor theoretically. The strategic difficulty of spearheading a homogenous feminist position is because acceptance of difference is fundamental to the discipline. Theoretically, feminist commitment to a secular and progressive ideology aimed at establishing women's equality is weakened by its recognition of a relativist position of truth. If no truth is non-negotiable, how can we claim the falsity of non-secular ideologies? How do we confront the interpolation of identity politics within universities? How do we accommodate diversity of ideas without compromising on core values that marked the foundations of women's studies?

* * *



THEMES



GROUNDING RESEARCH: NEGOTIATING CHANGE



Devaki Jain *

The 1950's and 1960's were heady times, especially for the former colonies. There were struggles for freedom in the countries of the global South for affirmation of political rights. ***Emancipation and liberation*** were the words of the moment. Many of the women who emerged from their freedom movements became prominent leaders of social and economic struggles and also established national women's organisations¹. This phenomenon - women's emergence as leaders - as part of the outcome of the freedom struggles, was a characteristic of many nations in the South continents in the post-colonial era.



* President, IAWS, 1991-93.

¹ Like the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) founded by Aruna Asaf Ali, All India Women's Conference (AIWC) founded by Kamladevi Chattopadhyay, Anasuya Sarabhai founded the Textile Labour Association, India's oldest and largest union of textile workers in 1920. Durgabai Deshmukh established the Central Social Welfare Board in 1953. Sarojini Naidu went on to preside over the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947. Kamladevi Chattopadhyay struggled for the township of Faridabad in the outskirts of Delhi. Sucheta Kripalani became the first woman to be elected as the Chief Minister of a state (Uttar Pradesh) in 1963.



In India the decades -1950's and 60's were also years of great turbulence, both positive and negative. Post-independence, the sense of renewal, "*freedom to be*" was a strong current. Reformist and revolutionary ideological breezes blew across the country, and within identities. For example Marxism and socialism were strong currents. Simultaneously there was the presence of the ideas and institutions that came from the Gandhian fold — an open space. The turmoil, pain of partition and refugees were tangible, reconstruction was the idiom of the times. Women leaders and all India women's formations, coming from varied political roots were a major presence in the field.

While the announcement by the UN , of a world conference to be held in Mexico in 1975 June, in many ways transformed the space of thought and activism related to women and their aspirations, for most of those from the global South, UN conferences formed a very small part of their work and participation in the larger spaces. In fact, while it gave us, in India, a base and the space to make ourselves transnational, it was fed and sustained by national and sub-national issues. Thus, when the first UN conference on women to be held in Mexico was announced in 1974, many of the women in the former colonies were already engaged in one or other movement for liberation. (*See Devaki Jain, Women development and the UN Indiana University Press, 2005*).

It was this call of reporting on Status that led to the setting up of the famous Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). Towards Equality²: the Report of the CSWI set the bench mark for investigation into the condition of women in India, as well as a stimulus to government to examine and take forward the proposals emerging from

² Towards Equality - <http://feministlawarchives.pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/towards-equality-1974-part-1.pdf>? <http://feministlawarchives.pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/towards-equality-1974-part-2.pdf>?

the findings. While many of the findings and recommendations of the report were contested from the point of view of varied political ideologies, it was still a most progressive and fact driven analysis and was acclaimed the world over for its dimensions.³

What however is interesting to note, as an Indian achievement and the progressiveness of the “old” are the recommendations of a committee that was set up by the Congress Party in 1938! Its proposals/ recommendations are almost as “radical” as the ones made by the CSWI report !!

In 1938, a National Planning Committee (NPC) was set up to chart the course of future planning in India, a Sub-Committee on Women (SCW) called Women's Role in Planned Economy (WRPE), was established in 1939 to examine and make recommendations on women's role in the planned economy.⁴

The SCW insisted that the traditional vision of the man in front carving out new paths, and the woman trailing behind with the child in her arms,

3 Many a time it was not the institution but the players who made the difference. Mr.JP Naik as Chairman of Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), led the stream that enabled research, later the setting up of a committee in the ICSSR on women studies. The encouragement by the ICSSR, of research related to women brought many of us into the field of women studies. Dr. Madhuri Shah, as Chair of University Grants Commission (UGC)² ensured that women studies became a part of the University curriculum. A path breaking move leading to the current streams not only of research and report but scholars and students.

4 The Sub-Committee to discuss Women's Role in a Planned Economy was formed on 16th June 1939 to “deal with the place of woman in the planned economy..” ranging from family life, employment, education and social customs that prevent women's participation in the economy. Ref. to K.T. Shah's Introduction, (pg. 27) of “Woman's Role in Planned Economy”. Report of the Sub-Committee, National Planning Committee series. Bombay: Vora & Co. Publishers, 1947. The chairperson of the Committee was Rani Lakshmibai Rajwade, and the committee included prominent women of that time: Sarla Devi, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, Begum Zarina Currimbhoy, Sarojini Naidu, Durgabai Joshi and Dr (Smt) Muthulakshmi Reddy.

must be changed to “man and woman, comrades of the road, going forward **together**, the child joyously shared by both.”⁵

In each section, there were many recommendations; some of the key ones are in notes at the end of this paper. The most striking recommendation is the need to recognise women’s labour, both on the land and in the home. Other major suggestion indicates the role of the state in: provision of equal opportunities, ensuring equal wage for equal work, and protection from dangers in employment (for instance, the threat of violence).

The WRPE was obviously against the tradition of making the family a unit of economic activities because it recognised that this made women the subsidiary or secondary earners. They felt that it also acted as a justification for the relatively lower earnings of women.

Perhaps the most radical and innovative recommendation of the WRPE [resonating the current campaign for/wages for unpaid work] concerned women’s unpaid labour both in the family’s economic activities and in the household. The WRPE recommended that the economic value of the work must be recognised and, in lieu of payment, “she should have the right to claim all facilities given by the state to other workers” (e.g. medical help, crèches, training etc.). As compensation for work at home- mainly housework- the women should get absolute control over a part of the family income, and also an inalienable right to a share in the husband’s property. And the husband should pay on her behalf, the contribution necessary for a social insurance scheme for workers that the state may introduce. There was also a mention that men should learn and practice household skills.

⁵ Ibid. Introduction, p.33., emphasis added.

Unfortunately, most of these issues and recommendations by the Committee were not incorporated into the first plan, and the women's role was considered only as a 'social' and 'welfare' issue. Nor was this oversight corrected in the later plans.



While retrospectively on our histories, it seems important not to lose sight of the many other champions, agencies, spaces where, what can be called the women's question was being discussed as well as negotiated. Women MPs like Renu Chakravarty of the CPI, Lakshmi Menon of the Congress, often came together to negotiate space. Earlier stalwarts such as Aruna Asaf Ali, Ava Bai Wadia, Kamala Devi Chattopadhyay, Durgabai Deshmukh were all not only at "work" but had their own "clubs" - networks and activities - which were enabling women, negotiating with governments, as well as offering platforms for researchers and the women's movement.

It is easy to negate the value of earlier generations as conservative compared to the present, but as we go deeper into political history, we recognize the valour of the "old" and the battles they fought.

My entry into this domain

In the 1960's, I was a lecturer in Economics at Miranda House. But marriage and children forced me to give up the job. But I continued to dabble in writing and was persuaded to write an essay on women in an issue of the SEMINAR being brought out by Romesh and Raj Thapar in 1974. This prompted an editor in the Publications Division of Government of India to invite me to prepare a book, basically on the status of women in India also for the World Conference of Women 1975 in Mexico.



As the Governments were required to present a report on the status of women in their countries - India took two initiatives - one, setting up of the Committee on the Status of Women which was to do a well-



researched Report on the Status of Women in India. The other was an initiative by the Publications Division of the Government of India who invited me to write a book on the status of women in India, also to be released in 1975 and taken to Mexico. My edited volume was a volume of essays by academics, who had some expertise on themes related to the status of women but not experts on women or gender⁶. Thus, as a person who had been at the university, I recruited friends from the various departments of the University, such as: Ashish Bose from the Institute of Economic Growth, Andre Beteille from the Sociology Department, Romila Thapar from the History Department etc. to write essays. I also invited some political women, as well as stalwarts of that era. For example, Ester Boserup for employment and the writer Qurratalain Hyder for a consideration of Muslim women.

It would not be surprising to any of us now to hear that none of these scholars/ persons had really thought about women as a focus. It was a learning experience for them as it was for me. Any way doing that book or pulling it together, reading the essays and trying to write an Introduction plunged me into what can be called gendered inequality, injustice, the extraordinary neglect of women. Apart from the issues that came up from Ashish Bose's essay in the book on starting a demographic profile became a high profile topic, and which haunted as well as influenced research and policy for several decades and continues to do so, - the other glaring fact was the number given for would be called women's work participation drawn from the Census 1971 as 11.8% for women and 52.5 for men. This drove me to a desire to do a study which would look at women's roles in the economy in greater detail.

⁶ Jain, D. (1975), *Indian Women*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.



My interest in uncovering the truth about women's economic roles emerged out of both the visual and the academic. Visual in the sense that one could not miss the picture - either as one drove across India whether by bus or by car across different geographical areas, or on our city roads - of women, backs bent, working.

Women were in the fields back bending,- for picking tea leaves or back bending for sowing or digging or pulling out weeds or picking out berries gathered on the floor of the forest. They were there in what was obviously work that was adding to the economic product. But when we looked at the national statistics on women's participation it was is abysmal as compared to men's participation- it was 52.5 percent of Males as opposed to only 11.8 percent of females⁷ in 1971.

I decided to do a field study to see if we could correct this grave error.

Post-1975 a whole new era of engagement with the women's question emerged from within government and outside; stimulated not only by the knowledge that these documents provided but also the follow up that was designated by the First UN World Conference on Women held in Mexico from June 19 to July 2nd in 1975. Governments were mandated to have bureaus to provide support to women studies and were commissioned to understand better the position and the neglect of women in different domains. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) which had housed the office of the CSWI, became a hub with Vina as Director, Programme of Women's Studies (from 1975-80) energizing research pertaining to women

I designed a proposal which was to observe and record women's activities and then group them together according to whether they were "productive" or "household". This study was funded by ICSSR

⁷ Ibid. Pg 169

which led to the founding/the birth of the ISST -whose first office was a bedroom in our home in Jor Bagh. I was able to recruit support staff.

ISST then undertook this study of rural households in 1976. In designing the study, the ISST had the privilege of advice from several scholars, notably late Professor Ashok Rudra (who initiated and supervised a first module in a village Muluk in 1977); as well as the late Professor V.M. Dandekar, who was at that time the chairperson of NSSO, and several others.

The hypothesis on the basis of which this study was undertaken was that female work participation in India was under-enumerated because of the nature of female work and wage (i) the primary objective of the study was to test this hypothesis (ii) a second objective was to try to identify the various determinants of female labour supply (iii) a third was to re-group productive and non-productive activities and define gainful activity on the basis of the evidence. However as the study went along many additional issues as well as information was thrown up which both widened and reduced the scope of the investigation.

The mode of investigation was observation and not recall. We employed the usual methodology of taking two types of areas – one which is wet land cultivation and the other one which is dry land. I chose West Bengal and Rajasthan.⁸

⁸ In West Bengal, I chose an area near Shantiniketan and in Rajasthan near Bharatpur. NSSO advised us to choose three villages as a 15 % sample of a taluka. The NSSO field officers helped us then to make the selection of households, which we did according to land classes as the proxy for economic class. Having done that, over one year, my colleagues lived in these villages, two in a cluster of three and did what we call recording of time use with the observation method. They would visit households on rotation basis. (Jain, D. (2007) 'Integrating Unpaid Work in Macro economics: Some Indian Experiences', International Seminar on Mainstreaming Time Use Survey in the National Statistical System in India, Goa).

The study underlined that the characteristics of the female labour force were markedly different from those of male labour force, requiring far greater investigation and documentation and requiring a far most sensitive response by the system. For example female labour was concentrated in certain occupations which were by and large, the least skilled, worst paid, most time consuming ones. It further revealed that within certain processes of production there was segmentation of tasks between men and women, and often the tasks performed by women were not identified. In other words, the base line invisibility made the displacement from employment an invisible unquantified loss to women.⁹

By this time i.e. 1979 / 85 women studies centers had also increased their pace and generated many reports and studies. The idea of a conference on women studies emerged and the First¹⁰. National Conference on Women's Studies¹¹ held in India, in 1981 defined women's studies as a critical perspective and recommended the integration of the 'woman's question' in all disciplines¹².



Energy, passion, knowledge-sharing, networking all took place in that one space and the fall out for many of us, who were economists was setting up our own sub network of women economists within the larger association. Similar bonding took place in other themes too, such that the arena was enriched with collective knowledge and advocacy.

9 Jain,D. (1996) 'Valuing Work : Time As Measure', Economic and Political Weekly.

10 Krishnaraj, M. (2002) 'Looking Back' in Bhagwat, V. and Rege, S. (Eds.) *Our Story: Twenty ears of the IAWS*, Pune, Indian Association of Women's Studies, pp.14- 15.

11 Pande, R. Women Studies: An Institutional Experience, *Women Link*, 19(2) Also see- <http://www.isidelhi.org.in/wl/article/2013-02.pdf>

12 IAWS- <http://www.iaws.org>





For example at this conference many of us had an opportunity to meet others from our own disciplines, and I was able to initiate a network, drawing in the economists who came to the conference, called it EIWIG (Economists Interested in Women's Issues Group) as - in those days the term feminist was not yet in use, and secondly it was my intent that many of the economists, if not all the economists, need to look at gender.

This group was encouraged by the Ministry of Labour as well as other ministries and held four conferences at which the focal points were special issues such as industry, agriculture, poverty and invisibility in statistics. These conferences took note of data on women's particular locations and issues arising from them and also challenged the statistical system and the way that data was collected. It was the first round in gendering economics. ISST brought out a volume out of these conferences called *Tyranny of the household*¹³, and the now famous professor Amartya Sen was part of the first meeting of EIWIG, which was focused on poverty and women, and contributed an essay 'Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias'¹⁴ to this volume that emerged out of these meetings.

This differentiating between men and women, amongst the poor, now known as gender differentiation, became the strum of all the research, and advocacy of ISST. This uncovering of women within the poverty sets as a "class" by themselves was of crucial importance to the journey, as it challenged political ideology apart from economic programmes.

13 Jain, D. and Banerjee, N. (Eds.) (1985) *Tyranny of Household: Investigative Essays on Women's Work*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi



14 Sen, A. And Sengupta, S. (1985) Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias in Jain, D. And Banerjee, N. (Eds.) *Tyranny of the Household: Investigative Essays on Women's Work*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, pp. 3- 24



Government in India had massive anti-poverty programs. We decided to find out how women were doing in these programs. This was a continuum to our finding that within the household there was such cruel inequality based on gender. Since the targeted poverty eradication programmes in India considered the household as the last unit of the boundary for giving relief, we wanted to break through those household walls and see what was happening inside. The findings were chastening. The woman in the household was perceived as not having any economic activity; neither poor women nor poor men were receiving the benefits. The delivery mechanisms were remote and inappropriate, and women were not recognized as economic agents. Often in poor households, while men may be wage labours, the woman could be providing an income through selling cow dung cakes, rolling bidis etc or some home based productions. However, she was not addressed at all in the outreach of credit support.

This finding led us to propose breaking open the household, to look into the various inequalities it contained. Research was coming up from other places, on sequential feeding, how in a household men and male children were fed first, so women and girls often were deprived, if the household was a poverty household. It was a hunt and we were constantly invited to investigate injustices in the domain of women's work both by the government as well as self driven.



When one of the girls who had been brought in a gang from Kerala to the beaches of Gujarat to peel the prawns that had to be harvested and readied for the market died in the "camps", the Ministry of Labor invited us to investigate this death to see what it was all about? The girls were usually housed in small dingy rooms in Veraval on the coast of Gujarat, often separated from the Contractors living space only by a cloth curtain.



This led us to look at the whole business of bringing women labour as gangs by contractors and the supply seemed to be coming from one set of villages in Kerala. The study called 'prawn peelers of Kerala' showed the vulnerability of the girls, the misconduct of the contractors as well as the low wages paid to these women. As a result, both the state governments took interest. We arranged for a conference in Kerala which included the fishery department and the women's department to see why it was that these girls could be so easily mobilized and taken all the way and no wage fixation or protection or accommodation had been arranged on the beaches. This led to a similar echo conference in Ahmedabad. A policy was framed where hostels would be built on that coast where the women who were brought, could be housed and other legislation, including income earning opportunities were put in place in Kerala to protect the women.

Similarly, ISST undertook a study of sericulture in Karnataka where the World Bank argued that women had no role to play in this industry. They were funding an upgradation of the silk cocoons. We did a field study and found that in fact cocoon rearing inside the small shacks was all done by women. They harvested the mulberry leaves and often had to feed the cocoons every three hours all night. Once we pointed out that this was unpaid family work, and affecting women's health- issues which got no recognition at all, the state government began to look into the matter of health and better facilities for cocoon rearing.



This uncovering of women's contribution to "the final product", but neither recognized nor rewarded became another important objective of the ISST. We studied production processes, such as weaving of carpets in Jammu and Kashmir, preparing of silver filigree products in Orissa, and so on. In each case the recognition was not only for the sake of recognition but also to enable the understanding of "displacement", the silent removal of wage earning spaces.



Our time use study had revealed that the majority of women in rural Rajasthan earned their income, in cash or kind through weeding the fields. There was a strong move to introduce harvesters to improve productivity in farming. Our findings and voice , i.e. shouting with the data, among other information , -induced a member of the Planning commission at that time, Professor Sukhumoy Chakravarty to also support the banning of harvesters in agriculture in these regions.

Chasing women's spaces in the work field became a passionate journey. In the Jama Masjid area we found women were working on zari embroidered into various decorative items. Just a little behind the shops and theatres of Asaf Ali Road in the gullies women in hovels were preparing lifafas i.e. small paper bags made out of old newspaper. They would buy old newspapers and in their homes with some homemade gum they would make these bags in assorted sizes – some 6x4, some 10x6. These in turn were sold to the street vendors for putting their small or big amounts of whatever they were selling – especially foodstuffs or rather dried items. It was a circular economy. We found that whether it was the zardozi workers or the lifafa makers, despite spending hours in their homes working with their hands while also doing the cooking and child care, their earnings were abysmal. They were obviously being exploited by the brokers who commissioned them and then took their goods to be sold to the shops. Our effort then was to bring them into some form of unions – to identify their problems and to address them.

In the tea plantations in the hilly regions of Karnataka women workers in the tea plantation who were basically picking leaves carefully and putting them in their bags on the shoulders lamented as follows: Men would like to use us. They invite us to sleep with them. Those who agree they weigh their bags correctly. Those who don't, they deliberately weigh their bags to show less than what there is. Payment is usually made on the weight of the leaves that they collect in a bag.





We heard a similar story when we went to organize the women who were working in bidi rolling. A local shopkeeper holds a stock of tobacco. Local women from poor households come to them and he gives them raw material free. Payment is made when they bring bundles of thousand rolled bidis. Once again the shopkeeper propositions them asking them to give him sexual favours. Those who do not agree, he counts in such a way that he rejects falsely 200% just to weigh less. This form of sexual exploitation of workers in these industries drove us further and further into not only studying by visits, women workers, but also to enable voice, organise and intervene

Along this road we also found that women workers had combined into associations, into cooperative societies as well as street struggles, to fight for their rights as well as enhance their earning power. We undertook case studies of such endeavours, and published a book of some of them.¹⁵

Looking for catchments where women were present in large numbers led us to do the first study of women on the sites of the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme, or MEGS as it was called. The MEGS is the mother of NREGA. The ILO funded it as part of their emergency schemes studies. We published a report in 2 volumes¹⁶. We found many holes in the scheme. Firstly women participated in large numbers giving a lie to the notion that women do not come out for wage work. There were many built in inequalities in wage giving as well as share of work. We then actively pursued UNICEF to provide crèche and food

15 Jain, D. (1980), *Women's Quest for Power: Five Indian Case Studies*, Vikas Publication Housing Pvt. Ltd.

16 *The Impact of Women Workers: Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme: A Study (Vol. 1 and 2) (1979)*, Sponsored by Employment and Development Department, International Labour Organization, Geneva. Prepared by Institute of Social Studies, New Delhi.



facilities for women in the sites. Chayya Datar was the lead field investigator and later published a book on this endeavour

Learning from the field through data collection surveys and through discussions with local groups, and then doing advocacy for course correction in policy program as well as ground level organizing, became the methodology of ISST. There was no scholarly research, reference to books. It was field and then carrying the field 'upwards' to public fora and simultaneously taking steps to bring redressal to groups and people we met. In the first phase research whether it was through data collection or through listening to voice was made into reports, books, memoranda and taken to policy fora whether in Government or UN.

Going to the ground, to look at the women who are engaging in activities but without remuneration became the thrust of our work – ground and then survey, write, prepare reports, carry it to Government departments, state authorities, UN institutions and argue for better understanding of programmes. In those years, say 69-70 or 75-95 in ISST perhaps we never read theoretical work of books on these issues. Our entire work was visiting the fields, doing some short and dirty surveys, picking up the analyses and carrying it to places where it can make a difference to the people that we studied or surveyed. I do not remember reading a single book on gender studies. Each uncovering pointed to not only the flaws in measurement, data gathering but also to the flaws in programme design due to the invisibilization of women.

There were many - not conflicts but differences - amongst all of us in the movement. The study of women or the understanding of women and its articulation was not limited only to institutes of research like CWDS or ISST. It went beyond to the numerous, in fact innumerable women centers activist voices that were spread across India. There was also the radical edge of the women studies and women centers



who perceived and called those centers like ISST and even CWDS who were engaging with transforming Government programmes and policies as being **reformist**, and the autonomous women's groups called **revolutionary** . In other words working with Government was seen as co-option. Further while working with the State had been a positive idea in the 50s and 60 s as post-independence spirit, by the 70s and 80s, this mood and environment had changed.

Women's Studies, Gender studies has now spread in India both through the University as well as due to the interest by funding agencies in uncovering the reality. Theoretical works, which engage with political economy as well as other domains lead the research. In this context it could be asked whether the earlier era, which was driven to uncover the reality and then argue for change, had not had greater impact than these studies and reports?

* * *



REVISITING STATE POLICIES ON WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT



*Kumud Sharma**

The XV IAWS Conference opens on the theme of Inequality. There is a long history of theorization of inequalities and discursive positioning of gender, and its intersection with class, caste, ethnicity and religion. After pursuing the economic growth models for decades it was realized that problems of inequality, poverty, declining income and livelihood options for a substantial number of people cannot be addressed by growth alone.



Engaging state on policy and legislative reform was a key agenda for women. There are many challenges involved in policy advocacy on women's issues, due to existing structures and institutionalized gender inequalities. There may not always be the desired impact or outcome. Rural development programmes and policies have witnessed several changes over the years in terms of approaches, strategies and programmes. In the last four decades, a resurgent women's movement



* President, IAWS, 2003-05.



and its engagement with state policies and institutions, has located women's concerns within larger debates. Sustained advocacy has led to policy shifts, legislative amendments, and new institutional mechanisms. This paper addresses a few issues relating to women and rural development.

Since the 1970s, interrogating development policies have brought out long standing concerns, problematizing social and gender relations by using a gender lens to understanding of the dynamics of social and economic change. Central to this analysis was a critique of the key social institutions (family, household, community, caste, division of labour and so on) which structure women's roles and define their entitlements. Towards Equality: the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (GOI, 1974) concluded that 'no matter what the growth models, the development process increases differentiation by class, caste and gender'. It recommended the adoption of a 'well defined policy' for women. It was after the UN Conference in Beijing that a National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) was adopted. Official documents, however, claim that the approaches to women's development have shifted from welfare to equity, to anti-poverty and efficiency and women's agency and finally, to women's empowerment.



Do we have a coherent policy for rural women's development, or is it mostly an academic debate? Gender issues in rural development policies are wide and complex. These are considered as instruments of development and change and a tool for redressing inequalities and gender imbalances. The Transformative potential of development policies often gets translated into a limited framework of service delivery, target group approach or cash transfers to the poor and marginalized groups.



In the 1990s, in the wake of economic liberalization, there was a renewed debate on addressing the needs of the deprived sections. Arguments for increased social sector spending were advanced to soften the impact of new economic policies, and provide social protection and safety nets to the poor.

Rural women constitute a large majority of food producers for decades agricultural policies and research had a blinkered view of women farmers. The 'women and development' debate brought to focus the economic imperative of addressing women's concern in agriculture. Empirical studies on women in peasant households have confirmed Ester Boserup's (1970) conclusions that the marginalization of women in agriculture has further reinforced the biases in policies. A large part of India's agriculture sector depends on climatic and weather conditions. The loss of biodiversity, specifically food crops affects food security and sustainability of the agricultural sector. Increasing pressure on a fragile resource base has contributed to failure in meeting subsistence needs among marginal farmers and poor rural households. Women bear an unequal burden in meeting the subsistence needs.

NSSO's estimates (68th Round 2011-12) show that 80% of women in rural areas depend on agriculture for their livelihood. They constitute about 1/3rd of cultivators and 47% of the agricultural labour force. Time use surveys reflect heterogeneity in women's contribution to agriculture. However, rural women's work burden exceeds that of men as it includes a much higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities. They are overrepresented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work. Recognition of the diversity of women's role in agriculture and rural livelihood is important for meaningful policy planning. Though there are no accurate estimates of women's contribution to agriculture and food production, nonetheless women are important food producers (60-80%) in developing countries and





play a crucial role in the food production cycle. It is estimated that in India about 14.9% of households are headed by females.

A National Committee appointed by the Ministry of Agriculture (1979-80) reiterated that, 'development efforts have not taken much cognizance of the roles of women and there is a need to improve her productivity and skills in farming operations and strengthen her role in local decision making bodies'. Examining the increasing undervaluation of women's role in agriculture and their 'economic invisibility' to planners, the Committee emphasized that 'the articulation of the relationship between land, labour and capital in the rural social structure and the impact of their incorporation into the larger market system is central to understanding of the various dimensions of rural women's lives.' For the first time the Report discussed at length the need for ensuring ownership of land and house sites to women when they are distributed under land reforms or as part of a public distribution programme.

Critical resources such as land are unevenly distributed by gender as women seldom enjoy ownership rights. Even when they own land in their own right, they may not actually have a voice in decision-making with regard to sale, mortgages and purchase of land. Agriculture has seen a decline in female work force across all states. The reasons cited are education and income effect and insufficient non-farm jobs.

The traditional denial of women as farmers and key producers excludes them from equality in ownership. Though women are a crucial resource they face constraints that reduce their productivity. Occupational segregation and their concentration in low skilled low tech agricultural operations, limits opportunities to generate new capabilities.

Legislative changes have been made in India to facilitate women's right to inheritance and land ownership (e.g. Amendment to the Hindu





Succession Act, 2005), but in practice little has changed. It is difficult to say as to how many women are able to exercise their legal right to a share of the undivided land of the family. How many women have exercised their right to partition? Data about women's ownership of land and various forms of tenurial rights are not adequately recorded. The interface between gender and the land issue is contextually specific and cannot be addressed by a uniform policy.

Agrarian systems in India are highly diverse. So are patterns of inheritance. These include personal and customary laws governing inheritance. Gender and property relations are rooted in patriarchal systems. Some of the key constraints to access to land and other resources for the poor and socially excluded are – land lease market, fragmentation of holdings, failure to translate women's legal entitlement into practice, encroachment of commons and transaction costs of land transfers. Real and long lasting improvements in women's social and economic well-being are directly linked to their control and access to resources. With the deceleration of female rural employment and livelihood options, intensification of unpaid and casual labour, the land question has acquired a new urgency.

Eighty six percent of arable land is privately owned. Very few women have social and economic assets to enter land markets. The agrarian transformations, that include greater commercialization and integration of agricultural products into global food chains, bring with them both challenges and opportunities with a distinct impact on gender dimension. Farmers who are producing for supermarkets and global food chains are educated and well resourced, while the small and marginal farmers get marginalized due to low capabilities and inputs and poor access to resources and markets.

There are a number of issues on which there is little agreement – universal vs. targeted approach, equity and redistributive justice, risk





and vulnerability factors which involve systemic denial of entitlements and rights to resource.

Most governments in their rural development policies have adopted poverty alleviation strategies. These policies filter through social and economic institutions like families, communities, market arrangements, health and educational systems. Rural development policies have one dominant theme of poverty alleviation. Over the years, there have been several changes in terms of approaches, strategies and programmes (Integrated Rural Development Programmes, Area Plans, tribal sub plans, wage employment programmes, food for work, employment assurance schemes like MGNREGS, social security like maternity benefits for women and land reforms). A belated recognition of women's resource right in government land distribution programmes (joint land titles) has suffered due to non-implementation. The West Bengal government issued a circular in 1992 for joint pattas, fourteen years after the land reforms programme began and could not be implemented with retrospective effect. The majority of land distributed by state governments was wasteland and ceiling surplus land. Mostly women were the main beneficiaries as they were deemed to be the heads of the households.

Gender Inequality, Risk and Vulnerability in the Rural Economy

Risk and vulnerabilities affect poverty dynamics. Small and marginal farmer households are vulnerable to both economic and social shocks which include indebtedness, production losses, lack of access to inputs, information and markets. Women are held back disproportionately by disadvantages rooted in inequality. Gender specific vulnerabilities are often multiple and interlinked.

Risks and vulnerabilities are key features of rural poverty and households manage risks through diversification of both farm and non-



farm activities. A large proportion of the chronic poor, especially women are dependent on casual labour and face the risk of entitlement failure.



The Chronic Poverty Report (2008, Overview p. xii) identified 5 poverty traps including:-

- Insecurity (of environment, conflict and violence);
- Limited citizenship (lack of political voice);
- Spatial disadvantages (exclusion from markets, resources)
- Social discrimination (traps people in exploitative relationships of power and patronage).

The report argues that a sharper policy focus is needed on the inequalities that confront the marginalized sections and massive investments are needed in assets to sustain poverty escapes.

Gender specific vulnerabilities are often multiple and interlinked. Viewing women as a target group results in a narrow conceptualization of gendered vulnerabilities and promoting their participation in sectors with low growth and remuneration.

State interventions through labour, food and credit markets have proved inadequate. Most of the interventions aim to reduce the misery and deprivations and exclusionary outcomes of various macro policy initiatives. Today the universal right to food security, livelihood and education is recognized. MGNREGA (expression of right to work) guarantees rural households access to assured employment and a nominal annual income in exchange for manual work. Is it only a palliative or will it increase the effective demand for wage goods of the working poor, a substantial number of whom are women? Has it resulted in decline in distress migration? Has it given a dignified space to poor women? While the intent is good, the scheme is plagued with many irregularities and leakages.





The National Rural Livelihood Mission (2010) emphasizes that investing in self-managed institutions of the poor yields good returns in poverty reduction.

Nevertheless, with regard to the right to food, there is no agreement on the commitment to extent and coverage. Limited and uncertain entitlements negate the potential of these legally guaranteed but limited measures to address social exclusion. Is it possible to ensure food, income and livelihood and educational rights without moving away from growth philosophy?

Credit as a via Media for Self-Employment

Sizeable literature today exists about the impact of micro credit on women. In rural development programmes, credit is seen as a via media for self-employment and as an alternative livelihood initiative. Self-help Groups (SHG) of women are widely acknowledged as effective anti-poverty interventions as in the absence of effective social security programme, credit and SHGs are seen as an insurance against risks for the vulnerable households. Assumptions about women's access to credit and their empowerment are not new as many grassroots organisations in India have identified credit as a major constraint for self-employed women and women in the informal sector. High repayment rates among women led to the belief that women are good creditor.

Micro credit was also seen as a key strategy for poverty reduction in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Many NGOs have demonstrated the potential for self help in promoting self-employment and entrepreneurship among women. Some argue that in many cases, income increases are small as the groups invest in existing activities which are low profit and insecure. Women's contribution to family income does not necessarily mean that it poses a challenge to gender inequalities.



Has micro-finance emerged as a cost effective mechanism for providing financial services to the poor and meeting the needs of the rural poor women? A clear strategy in micro-finance needs to look beyond improving women's access to credit and organizing self-help groups and look at promoting rural enterprises and linking them to potential markets as part of the planning process.



Women's Collective Voices and Interest Representation

In the 1980s, organisations of poor and marginalized sections were strongly advocated in order to:-

- enhance their access to resources and enlarging their livelihood options;
- demand broader policy and institutional changes through collective action and emphasizing distributional concerns (Land titles, house sites, credit, common resources);
- improve capabilities and bargaining power.

Those involved with grassroots interventions realized that 'development activism' at the local level has to deal with not only basic survival issues of the poor women which often get subverted by macro policies; but also local power structures which contain women's mobilization efforts. The issue at the local level are both ideological and strategic. The liberal democratic system believes that inequalities can be dealt with by legislation or affirmative action, which in itself does not bring about redistributive justice or changes in power structures.

New democratic spaces for women's engagement in local planning were created by the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through 72nd and 73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1992). With the introduction of political reservation for women in PRIs it was expected that this would bring about a qualitative difference in grassroots politics. The entry of



women in large number in these institutions envisaged a significant change in the process of decentralized governance and power and development planning at the local level.

The connections between women's representations, voice and agency are not simple. According to field reports, women face multiple challenges. They are looking for support networks in their struggle and encounters with complex state structures and rural power elites. They also need adequate support mechanisms and access to information, education and resources to be effective. Other institutions of governance and local planning also need to be responsive to their concerns.

Women who have been active in local organisations/movements (literacy campaigns, anti liquor campaigns, Mahila Samakhya Groups, SHGs etc.) and have been exposed to mobilization and sensitization process, have both the will and political energy to take on the challenges and withstand counter pressures.

The Draft National Policy for Women (2016), coming after 15 years of the 1st National Policy, envisages 're-scripting of women's empowerment as a socially inclusive, right based approach while reinforcing rights and entitlement provided under the Constitution of India'. Taking note of the 'feminization of agriculture', the Draft Report talks about recognizing women as farmers and providing support to them in their livelihood, visibility and identity.

The relationship between planned interventions and macro economic policies are always weak. Macro economic policies through state interventions and markets, distribute key economic resources. Gender responsive policies have to take into account distributional concerns and exclusionary outcomes and not limit these to the single dimension of poverty. There is a need to have a hard look at forces of transformation which restructure inequalities.



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EVOLUTION OF A DEBATE ON SEX RATIOS

*Mary E John**

I am very grateful to the IAWS for inviting me to write something on the evolution of the debate on sex ratios, in the context of the emergence in contemporary India of the women's movement and of women's studies. What is so remarkable is the symbiotic relationship between women's studies and the problem of the adverse sex ratio. It is true that the discovery of "missing" girls and their statistical significance goes back to the colonial period (practices of female infanticide in northern India and the imbalanced numbers in the first censuses from 1881). In the post-independence period, a demographer like Pravin Visaria noted the long term trend in declining sex ratios in the population from census data up till 1961. However, it was only with the publication of the *Towards Equality* Report by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) that the issue of adverse sex ratios came into full focus as a major problem for thinking about gender inequality in India. It is important to emphasize this because in the eyes of the public the issue of "missing women" is frequently associated with the



* General Secretary, IAWS, 2005-08.





article written by Amartya Sen in the New York Review of Books in 1990, and undue credit is given to him – by no means did he discover this problem, though he had important things to say about it, in relation to overall development in countries like India and China. In the short space of this essay I will try and focus on some of the main issues, which I have dwelt on at greater length elsewhere (John 2015, see bibliography for references in this essay).

The Pivotal Role of Towards Equality

Chapter Two of *Towards Equality* on demographic trends showed that all India census statistics in 1901 put the figure at 961 women for every 1000 men, which fell to 946 in 1951, 941 in 1961 and 930 in 1971. When the fledgling research field of women's studies was established within the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) in the mid 1970s, this shocking and surprising data on the declining sex ratio acted as a springboard for the new research they hoped to undertake, ranging from migration to women's labour.

Inspired in no small measure by the work of the CSWI, another demographer Asok Mitra's monograph in 1978 is particularly noteworthy for the scope of the questions he posed to the "inexplicable" data. While it was relatively easy to put down the very early Census figures to undercounting and the regions of colonial Punjab and parts of Rajputana had already been noted for their practices of female infanticide, it was the twentieth century trends that were so difficult to comprehend. Mitra called upon the social science community to probe everything, from the effects of recurrent famines and epidemics, migration patterns, food availability and consumption trends, mortality differentials across the entire life cycle, from infancy to maternal deaths and aging, disparities in medical treatment, and, finally, to the effects of labour and employment among women both rural and urban. Till the 1980s, much of the focus on disparate sex ratios, whether in the





historical, anthropological or demographic literature, looked for their explanations within kinship patterns and in rural contexts.

Therefore, while it is important to note that Asok Mitra did wish to include in his long list of research the role of urban employment such as blue and white collar jobs, the effective focus coming out of the social sciences during the 1970s and 80s was on sex ratio disparities in rural, and more specifically, agricultural households. Barbara Miller's analysis rested on finding cultural correlates within rural societies. Moreover, the kind of focus on women's work brought out contradictory assumptions. Women's work in the home, her unpaid 'productive' labour and her potential to work for wages were deeply significant yet contradictory issues.

The Women's Movement's Engagements with Sex Selection

In the late 1970s and 80s, women's organizations shocked the public with evidence of violence against women among the urban middle classes, of which the most horrendous involved unmasking the 'accidental' death of young brides in the homes of their in-laws. It is in the wake of these campaigns against violence, which opened up family, household and the state to feminist scrutiny, that an outcry ensued over the first reports of amniocentesis testing for sex determination in cities like Delhi, Bombay and Amritsar, when amniocentesis testing for foetal abnormalities was 'hijacked' for purposes of sex selection.

With the first protest meeting in 1982 in Delhi, called by a coalition of national women's organizations demanding a complete ban, and the establishment of the Forum against Sex Determination and Sex Pre-selection (FASDSP) in Bombay in 1985, a new level of political intervention was necessitated, focusing on a modern technology that made sex selection before birth a possibility. The creation of the FASDSP in 1985 turned the issue into a national campaign, which used all the





skills of organizing – from street theatre and demonstrations to public interest litigation. Initially, the problem did not find the kind of public resonance that the campaigns against dowry and rape had achieved. Just as the campaign against sex selection began to gain ground, came startling reports of female infanticide in Tamil Nadu, considered to be a ‘good’ state in terms of sex ratios and women’s overall status. In specific rural districts, especially Madurai, Salem and Dharmapuri, the numbers were high enough to show up in taluk (block) level sex ratios. (George et al 1992) In an essay reflecting on female infanticide in Tamil Nadu written a decade later, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan sensitively probes the different frameworks that have been deployed for approaching this practice – as a crime, the product of a backward region, a manifestation of gender discrimination and through the lens of demographically oriented sex ratio imbalances.

Such specific cases of female infanticide apart, it was sex selection via medical technologies (namely the detection of foetal sex followed by an abortion) that came to be perceived as the main danger. As a consequence of campaign pressure, the first central legislation took the form of the Pre-natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition of Sex Selection) (PNDT) Act of 1994, subsequently revised as the PC (Pre-conception)-PNDT (Regulation and Prevention of Misuse) Act of 2003. However, legislation by no means had the result that was anticipated – the practice continued and has been spreading even though it is a crime (carrying a punishment of imprisonment of up to three years and a fine).

Sex Selection and the Law



Precisely because of the central place that the law has occupied in the opposition to sex selection, it is particularly important to emphasize that the legal focus has been on the technologies involved in sex determination testing, not on the subsequent act of having an abortion



(which in any event would not obtain in the rare cases of pre-selection). This point is often missed, given the language of the campaigns against female foeticide or sex selective abortions (SSA), including all the media focus on sensational cases involving the discovery of aborted fetuses. There was much debate on the existing abortion law (the Medical Termination of Pregnancies Act of 1971) which had been passed as part of population control and family planning, with little or no concern for women's rights, much less control over her body.

Nivedita Menon challenged the campaign against sex selection, by arguing that the very effort to obtain justice from the law is doomed to failure. It is simply philosophically incoherent to argue in favour of abortion "in terms of the right of women to control their bodies and at the same time, demanding that women be restricted by law from choosing specifically to abort female fetuses". In our context Menon asks how the law can be "selective", that is to say, distinguish between a general right to abortion, on the one hand, and the specific abrogation of that right in the case of sex selection.

Menon's critique points to a problem in the language and focus of the campaigns. To date, 'female foeticide' is a popular slogan, in spite of or perhaps because of its connotations of murder, even genocide; others prefer the more politically correct terminology of sex selective abortions, and even more recently of gender biased sex selection. However, I would like to point out that abortions and the MTP Act have not been the most significant sites where the law encountered its limitations. The problem was not of how to narrow down the meaning of abortion to sex selective abortions, but rather of getting the law to work at the prior stage of sex determination, especially when the terrain of its applicability became technologically more widespread and advanced. In their subsequent examination of the legislative history and context of the PC-PNDT Act, Indira Jaising, C. Sathyamala and





Asmita Basu begin by pointing out the first problem with the 1994 legislation – next to nothing was done in terms of its implementation.

A Public Interest Litigation led by Sabu George, CEHAT and MASUM seeking directions was therefore filed in the Supreme Court in 1998. At this point in time, technological innovations available in India included highly expensive and complex possibilities of pre-selection through certain sperm sorting techniques in combination with Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) to “choose” the sex of a child at the time of conception through in vitro fertilization. In flagrant violation of the PNDT Act even “home kits” for knowing the sex of a baby have frequently been advertised over the internet from countries like the US and Canada. But as Jaising, Sathyamala and Basu state with great emphasis, it is with the ubiquity of ultrasound (including portable versions), prescribed for all pregnancies, that the limits of the law have become most obvious. The law encountered its biggest stumbling block in the fact that what had started out as a particular medical technique to detect foetal abnormalities via specialized genetic centres was now part of the generalized “normal” practice of ante-natal medical care.

One of the biggest obstacles of the PNDT Act has been the overall immunity of the medical fraternity and sorority, which may be why it took so many years to even put monitoring bodies in place. According to Brinda Karat and Sabu George, the strong nexus connecting medical personnel, politicians and bureaucrats has made a mockery of the law. As they point out, “since 1994 when the PCPNDT law was enacted there have been only 93 convictions. Of the 1,036 ongoing cases, only a small per cent, possibly 10 per cent, relate to charges of communication of the sex of the foetus”.



Therefore, something of an impasse has been encountered in the legal campaign, which groups are trying to break. It is not enough to say,



as Karat and George among other leading activists do, that there is nothing wrong with the law (which must certainly be included in any comprehensive policy now under consideration), when its implementation has either been non-existent or so flawed. More than the incoherence of a selective approach to abortion, it is a situation of all round collusion backed by power without a complainant that robs the law of meaning. Moreover, as the disability movement has pointed out, the law has selectiveness built into it. Even though there was some initial discussion among women's organizations about the advisability of demanding an overall ban on any amniocentesis testing including for possible foetal abnormalities, the basic form taken by the law was to make a distinction between 'legitimate' grounds and their 'misuse'. In other words, while checking for certain genetic abnormalities in a foetus are medically and socially acceptable grounds for aborting such a foetus, should there be a positive diagnosis, sex determination testing is a crime. Feminists like Anita Ghai have asked why there should be such an automatic assumption against bringing a potentially disabled child into the world, and what this tells us about the absence of any effective rights for the disabled, and of society's responsibilities towards children with disabilities. Politicizing the 'social' bias against girls cannot be advanced without also politicizing the 'naturalized' bias against disability.

Population Policies, Government Schemes, and the Girl Child

Apart from the law, how else has the state machinery responded to the 'missing girl child'? Schemes are the other means that have been adopted so far. However, these very schemes that have been promoted recently reveal the ongoing centrality of population control in the compulsions towards combating the adverse child sex ratio. A particularly clear example would be the conditional cash transfer schemes for the girl child being variously promoted by a number of state governments.





Behind most of these schemes is an aspect of population policy that enjoys widespread consent, namely the two-child norm. Though the National Population Policy (2000) contains no such provisions, recent Supreme Court rulings as well as population policies promulgated by several states seek to penalize and disbar those who have more than two children from accessing various government programmes. First and foremost, such a policy constitutes a violation of human rights. As Mohan Rao has argued, the “imposition of the two-child norm, and the disincentives proposed (including disbarment to stand for elections right from the level of local government), would mean that the majority of the deprived populations would bear the brunt of the state’s withdrawal of ameliorative measures, pitifully inadequate as they are.” But, what is less well recognized, in the context of the present focus on adverse CSRs, is that a “vigorous pursuit of the two-child norm is an invitation to female sex selective abortion”.

A recent desk study by T.V. Sekher provides a detailed overview of many of the current schemes being promoted in several states, which are essentially conditional cash transfer schemes over the life a girl from birth to eighteen years. But the rules and requirements laid down, the conditionalities and eligibility criteria for the various schemes on offer today, as discussed by Sekher, have now multiplied. Moreover, as many have noted, the scrambling of population control with protecting the girl child can have particularly adverse outcomes. Poverty has also been turned into an eligibility criterion. Many have critiqued such schemes for effectively providing a lump sum as dowry to a family—indeed, in north-west India, these schemes are locally called ‘dahej’ (dowry) schemes. It is to be hoped therefore that these schemes will be subjected to a much needed review.

Insights and Debates in Demography



The first discovery of new and disturbing trends among child sex ratios (CSRs) was an accidental product of the state’s desire to measure



literacy rates and schooling, which led to separate Census statistics for the pre-school 0-6 age group population. Even though Census 1991 recorded an all time low sex ratio of 927 overall, its most worrying statistic turned out to be declining CSRs in several states, even below 900 in Punjab and Haryana. A decade later Census 2001 riveted the country and the world beyond with news that India's overall CSR had dropped below that of the general population: While the child sex ratio fell from 943 in 1991 to 927 in 2001, that of the overall sex ratio rose from 927 to 933 in the same period (a clear sign that life expectancy among surviving women was increasing significantly).

Satish Agnihotri sounded a note of caution in his study of differential mortality rates among children, by region and social group in India, with sex selection as yet only of marginal concern. He is responsible for coining the notion of a "prosperity effect", defined in terms of the relative effects of increases in income on the survival of boys and girls, with startling evidence that such prosperity worsened the gender gap of survival. Of particular importance is his analysis of the sharp decline in child sex ratios among the Scheduled Castes in north India, where the rate of decline even exceeds that of the general population. While the equivalent child sex ratios among Scheduled Tribes is high on average, this is often a consequence of high rates of child mortality for both sexes, with the exception of the state of Rajasthan whose tribal populations also showed excess female mortality.

Monica Das Gupta and P.N. Mari Bhat computed that between 1981 and 1991, approximately 4.2 million girls in the age group 0-4 had died, in excess of official death rates, and also arrived at an estimate of 1.2 million girls missing due to sex selective abortions, just under 1% of all female live births. Missing women - among different age groups, social locations and across time periods – turned into a major and contentious subject of analysis, with considerable dispute over trends and their causes.



A particularly noteworthy exploration was undertaken by Mari Bhat who argued against what he deemed to be excessively 'feminist' assumptions of gender bias. Revisiting the data from 1911 onwards, he highlighted problems with age reporting among children in particular (which would render CSR comparisons across time less reliable); he also pointed to ways in which relative improvements in the life expectancy of boys and adult men from very low prior levels over the course of the twentieth century could misleadingly "worsen" the sex ratio. Re-estimating Asok Mitra's 'conundrum' over India's declining sex ratio, Mari Bhat postulated that while in the first half of the twentieth century about 5 million adult women were 'missing', by 1991 the figure was 21 million (of which only 14% were below 15 years). Between 1951 and 1981 the sex ratio among children became marginally masculine and then worsened post 1981, for the first time in urban India. The latter could be put down largely to sex selection, but the former might be as much due to a rise in male births with better maternal nutrition and deliveries, as a consequence of a greater bias against girls.

The provisional results of Census 2011 have added new twists to the saga. India's overall CSR has dropped further to 918. While north-west India and the rest of the country continue to stand apart, the reasons have changed. It would appear that there has been a peaking (or plateauing) of the practice of sex selection in states like Gujarat, Haryana, Delhi and Himachal Pradesh, with actual small improvements from very low levels in Punjab and Chandigarh. Whatever the extent and nature of positive change in north-west India, CSRs are falling in large parts of western, central and eastern India – Maharashtra, Goa, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and even Andhra Pradesh has joined the ranks from among the southern states. In other words, the state wise figures demonstrate a widening of the circle, well beyond the so-called prosperity belt of north-west India, to the poorer states.





Dowry

When it comes to providing causal explanations for the practice of sex selection today, two broad claims emerge. As we have repeatedly seen, medical technologies have been granted fullest agency in the hands of the aggressive radiologist who takes his mobile machine into the hinterland of rural India to vend his wares, unmindful of the criminality of such actions. Such unscrupulous practitioners in turn are being ably supported by multinational capital, and several activists have pointed to the role that companies like General Electric are playing in pushing the market for ultrasound machines further and further into India's rural heartland. On the demand side, what appears with equal frequency is, quite simply, 'dowry'. "Like a black shadow in the wake of dowry demands, is the spread of sex selection." Much has been written on the modern institution of dowry. It is the idea that dowry is a modern phenomenon linked with capitalist modes of development and the devaluation of women and their labour, that makes it possible to see dowry as a primary 'cause' for the practice of sex selection as well. After all, in the initial years in the 1980s, when sex determination testing was openly being advertised in several cities, doctors put out the slogan "Rs. 500 now or Rs. 50,000 later".

The role that dowry might be playing in a changed modern context has been the subject of various analyses, of which that offered by the sociologist M.N. Srinivas is the most wellknown. Nirmala Banerjee and Devaki Jain have argued for a reversal in the usual way in which a causal relationship has been posited between women's work and status: "Women are held in low regard [in regions like the Punjab] and because of this, both the survival chances of the girl child as well as the work done by women throughout their lives are considered relatively unimportant." This led them to shift the focus of analysis to questions of 'culture' and kinship, and the role of women in certain upper castes as status agents, especially via marriage practices like hypergamy.







They then posit what they call a new 'widespread and growing male resistance to marriage' due to a shrinking of traditional occupations and the rise of uncertain access to regular incomes with modern development. Women are at a severe disadvantage in terms of their own limited earning power, and hence become even more dependent on 'good marriages' achieved with correspondingly heavy dowries, which in turn make them a burden.

Dowry has thus been something of a linchpin in many arguments, offered up in numerous ways in order to find connections between women's status in Indian society and economic developments over time. The increased, indeed 'monstrous' practice of dowry, translates quite simply into growing daughter aversion and therefore to fewer girls being born. In a recent discussion, Patricia Jeffrey has warned against any 'complacency' on the part of demographers who, in the light of a changing marriage squeeze now operating against men (given fertility declines and too few girls being born) predict that dowry will now come down and daughters increase in value.

Debates and Disagreements

As would be obvious by now there is no shortage of differences among both activists and scholars on the question of sex ratios, their explanation and consequences. Indeed, over the years such disagreements have, if anything, been deepening. Has there been too great or too little a focus on the PC-PNDT Act? Many advocates believe that the main effort must continue to be the criminalization of venal medical practitioners, while others warn of how the very advocacy against sex selection has often turned into an unintended but problematic campaign against abortions per se. Disputes abound when it comes to interpretation. Could there be reduced son preference even though the numbers are more skewed today than ever before in India's history? Is the problem one of "mindsets", which are out of





synch with modern values of equality, or, does modernity itself, have a lot to do with what is going on? Some read the latest figures as proof of heightened practices of “female genocide”, while others see signs of a turn-around.

A Question of Violence?

In a recent essay, Kumkum Sangari has claimed that even though the heightened prevalence of sex selection cannot be understood outside of a combination of many factors, it is the special role of domestic violence that needs to be foregrounded - as a ‘continuum’ of violence undergone by the pregnant woman, the discriminated daughter and the future daughter-in-law, which forms a ‘connective tissue’ between the familial and public domains. While the issue of violence must be examined with care, I am less convinced that violence is the major causative factor for the kinds of daughter aversion that families are displaying when, aided by medical practitioners, they ‘choose’ not to bring a detected female foetus to term. Moreover, there is little correlation between reportage on domestic violence and adverse child sex ratios – the state of Kerala leads the way according to the National Crime Records Bureau but still has the best CSRs.

Where Sangari offers the specific lens of violence to describe and explain what is happening, and others, as we have seen, have given ‘dowry’ a pre-eminent place, one also encounters the opposite problem in much of the literature, where terms are used generically and loosely, with little explanatory value. Thus, “tradition”, “culture”, “mindsets”, “son preference”, and more generally “gender discrimination and bias”, continue to be the most frequently cited.

Lest I be misunderstood, the point I am making is not that there has to be an entirely new way of understanding our present and its ‘missing girls’. One factor that has frequently figured in discussions of the family today concerns changes in fertility. Interestingly, even a scholar



like Mari Bhat has changed his own position on the consequences of fertility decline. Together with Monica Dasgupta, he posited a 'parity effect' and an 'intensification effect' in analyzing the consequences of fertility decline for gender bias. In the first case, reducing the number of children also reduces gender bias given that female mortality is most pronounced lower down the birth order. In the second case, the total number of children desired falls more rapidly than the total number of sons, thus leading to heightened discrimination against girls. The essay argued that in India, especially in the north, the intensification effect outweighed parity. Revising his opinion subsequently, however, he claimed a more complex relationship between fertility decline, son preference and sex selection. In the past, families wanted large families with plenty of sons, while today's family wants one son and a daughter, or perhaps two sons and a daughter. In other words, reduced son preference could go hand in hand with skewed child ratios. And just to add further voices, Ravinder Kaur has cautioned against simple assumptions about past preferences where sons are concerned, arguing that in the case of peasant castes like the Jats, for instance, a matching of resources with family size included regulating both 'bachelor sons' and 'dispensable daughters', and it is this dynamic that is entering a new phase today. Moreover, as Kaur has been exploring in her more recent work – it is necessary to look as much at consequences as at causes in the gender imbalance.

There is no doubt that contemporary India is witnessing a highly gendered version of fertility decline – in north-west India, according to the findings of a co-authored study, this veers from one to three children. Note therefore an unprecedented shift in son preference as well – extra sons are no longer wanted either. But I do not think this can be mechanically read as reduced son preference. Rather, even the stated preference of one son and one daughter needs to be interpreted with care – in my view families are actually 'planning' to have *at least one son and at most one daughter*. It would surely be



worth exploring whether this family building strategy has now moved beyond north-west India into the swathe of the country that has seen a downward spiral over the last decade.

Notice further that child sex ratios have fallen most precipitously during a period of unprecedented economic growth. It has emanated from northern and northwestern India, regions which may be characterized as being in the wake of the Green Revolution and whose levels of prosperity therefore require more careful calibration. A huge disenchantment with agriculture has set in, supplemented by highly volatile forms of development, a parallel revolution in aspirational levels, especially among the non-poor classes, where child sex ratios are the most skewed. Families are planning to have or not have a daughter or a son who will have to be brought up into adulthood, 'settled', and whose future relationship will be shaped by the inter-generational transfer of resources under such conditions. Positive changes are also palpable – such as increases in educational attainments, often with proportionately more girls in higher education, and rises in the ages of marriage. And yet, as our study tried to show, "these unintended consequences of contemporary social processes, when combined with parental fears of the unattached sexuality of adult daughters in a context of a highly competitive and differentiated marriage market, are compounding the sense of burden represented by the birth of a daughter. She now requires many more years at home with higher investments in nutrition, health and education... Sons, on the other hand, embody a range of ritual and economic roles. If the current climate of economic volatility and masculine anomie makes them often fall short of expectations, nonetheless at least one is essential for the future of the family. It is this conjuncture that is producing the falling child sex ratio."





More than anything else it is the interlocking effects of two markets — the compulsory institution of marriage and the increasingly depressed labour market — that are critical for the present and future life chances of daughters and sons. What needs to be understood and contested are the contradictions of value and cost embodied by women — most visible in the difference (rather than the continuum) represented by daughters and prospective daughters-in-law in hypergamous marriage markets, where sons marry 'down' while girls marry 'up'. Expectations that marriage in India's contemporary globalizing economy might be loosening are not bright when the proportion of women with any kind of paid work are as low as 15% according to NSS data trends for 2009-10.

Finally, and more positively, the very processes that are making daughters appear to be an unbearable cost are also harbingers of change and resistance. It is not the 'girl child' that is the source of so much anxiety and rationalization among families but the adult woman, and the sooner that the ubiquitous girl child image receives a make-over, whether in the corridors of policy or the popular media, the better. Even the horrendous violence visible in recent years in states like Haryana against those who wish to marry against community and caste norms speak of reactions to new assertions for space on the part of young people, who are seeking and making changes that will ultimately be irreversible.

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PATRIARCHY AND CAPITALISM- A FRAUGHT MARRIAGE?



*Nirmala Banerjee **

Introduction

In various developed and developing countries of the world, the period of late 1960s and 1970s saw the upsurge of diverse social and political movements with new actors forming unexpected alliances in support of their ideas. India was no exception; here too new actors - young students, peasants, displaced factory workers – were coming forward to protest on all fronts against corruption and repression by vested interests and political powers. In these exciting times, the beginnings of an Indian feminist movement- a movement largely staffed by women as women against their age-old repression in all spheres, perhaps did not get the public attention it deserved; but it was probably the most momentous in its far-reaching effects.



* President, IAWS, 1996-98.





Social movements seeking justice for women were of course not new in India; there was a history of over hundred years for reform movements in the country which had aimed at improving women's social and even economic positions. Therefore, at the time of independence Indian women and the social reformers were justified in feeling complacent that their efforts had been successful since the new constitution of independent India gave women equal rights as citizens fully at par with men; India also saw the passing of new family laws that aimed to remove much of women's disadvantages in personal lives. Women were to have free access to all education facilities in the country and were supposed to enjoy full freedom for participating in economic activities.

However, two decades after independence and passing of the Indian constitution, Indian women had realised the many gaps between their professed status and the ground realities of their lives. Family traditions still severely limited their personal choices regarding education, marriage and careers; domestic violence was a common problem facing women of all classes and social groups. In the economy, women worked under the twin constraints of family taboos and limits on their mobility on the one hand and active discrimination by employers and fellow workers on the other. And everywhere, the severe bind on their sexuality and the imperative to contain it within lawful marriage relations still continued to guide their entire life patterns. Added to all this there was the growing menace of dowry demands backed by extreme violence, even murders. All in all, at the end of the 1960s, Indian women had many grievances in their private and public lives.

Workers take up the challenge



It was perhaps to be expected that the first group to come together for action as women against their gender-based disadvantages was that of poor worker women fighting for their livelihoods. In early 1970s



the organisation SEWA was formed in Ahmedabad by women working in several unorganised trades; the 'chindhi' workers, who were its initiators, were facing discrimination in many forms from the mills supplying them their inputs. But the long-established Textile Labour Association (TLA) a union of the Congress party, refused to make them members on grounds that they were self-employed and without any identifiable employer/employee relationship. The desperate workers were then inspired to form their own trade union under the leadership of Smt. Ela Bhatt. Although self-employed workers are usually in competition with each other and therefore not willing to pool their interests, SEWA members appreciated the fact that they were fighting not just for workers' rights but for the rights of women workers. As a feminist organisation, members of SEWA as well as of several similar women workers' organisations that have come up in various cities are consciously fighting on two fronts: as unskilled workers unprotected by any labour contracts and facing a hostile and competitive market on the one hand and as women out in a male-dominated economy and society. State policies to support women's economic efforts now mainly comprise forming self-help groups; they are based on the common idea that whatever their particular occupations, the main support system of women workers in the unorganised sector can only rest on links formed with other similar vulnerable groups of women workers.

Women's work as an academic subject

It was also in the middle of the 1970s that the report, Towards Equality of the CSWI triggered off academic interest in its finding that, every decade since 1911 of the 20th century had seen a fall in the rates of women's workforce participation in India. In other words, women were being increasingly marginalised as productive agents in the Indian economy in the process of capitalist development. Following this discussion, during the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars took up



studies of women's experience of economic development in several developing countries including India. The International Labour Organisation was one of their chief sponsors.



Explaining women's experience of economic development

Marxist explanation of women's marginalisation through economic development had rested mainly on Engels' theory of "the historical defeat of the female sex" that was supposed to have happened through men's control of the growing surplus generated by development. This argument assumed that:

- a) It was the generation of surplus in an economy that create the asymmetry of powers between men and women.
- b) That tasks of production and reproduction are distinct from each other.
- c) And that, all societies are built with monogamous nuclear families where control of productive resources rests with the men.

Feminists rejected all these assumptions on the basis of the large store of historical and anthropological records available with them. They made three crucial points:

- i) The sexual division of labour is not nature-given; rather, it is the reflexion of the power relations that men have been able to impose on women whereby they can make women responsible for any task they consider unpleasant and devalue it in social and economic terms. That is why the line dividing the two sets of tasks between men and women shifts widely from one economy to another, but does so always at the discretion of men.
- ii) That, far from being clearly separable, tasks of reproduction and production are usually closely intermixed. Also there is no evidence that production was at any time solely a male prerogative. In most





societies women have always played important roles in production for basic subsistence.

- iii) Most societies comprise several kinds of institutions- extended families, kinship groups, caste alignments, religious institutions- that determine their patterns of man/woman relations including that of sharing of work and control of productive resources between them in that society.

Indian feminists found it particularly hard to fit the totality of Indian women's experience into the Marxist framework. Even though data at the all-India level exhibited a negative relation between women's role in the economy and the country's economic development, there were infinite variations in the situations women in different regions, cultures and communities. What is more, field studies in various parts of India showed that, those differences were not so much in the quantum of work that women did in different regions or communities but in its contents, and more importantly, in the acknowledgement it received from their households and communities. Determinants of women's situations obviously depended as much or far more on the patriarchal norms that they were subjected to than the imperatives of economic development.

The globalisation debate



The force of patriarchal controls on Indian women was demonstrated most vividly when in the 1990s, India accepted policies of economic liberalisation. Global experience of previous two decades had shown that, in many late developing economies that had accepted policies of economic liberalisation, the new globalised economic order had actually reversed the earlier pattern of a negative relation between economic development and women's employment. At that juncture of open capital movements, in several large industries serving world markets, computerised production techniques had made it possible to



disintegrate different operations in the over-all production processes and locate those operations that used large numbers of unskilled or semi-skilled workers in newly developing countries where labour was relatively cheap. The overall control and coordination of the entire production could be done by centralised computerised management. What is more, because many developing countries were inviting these multinational companies to locate their production operations on their soil using their labour, the parent companies had the power to closely monitor the working conditions that they offered to the workers including the option that their factories in one country could be shut at any time allowing the companies to move their operation to other locations where they had found still cheaper labour.

In order to find labour that would accept such high-handed working conditions, multinational companies had opted for women workers of developing countries because it was known that patriarchal traditions of those countries had converted their women into the more flexible and docile of all workers. As a result, women in those countries had soon come to form the bulk of the countries' industrial labour. A new theoretical construct, feminisation of workforce, had come to replace the earlier women and development theories; this new theory argued that in the globalising world economy, the faster the growth of women's share in a country's manufacturing employment, the faster the pace of its overall economic development. In other words, the extent of feminisation of a country's manufacturing workforce was to be considered a reliable indicator of the pace of its overall economic development.

After the Indian state adopted similar policies of open invitation to multinational capital investment in the country, it was expected that, since Indian women were known to be exceptionally docile and malleable as workers, foot-loose multinational capital in the world would begin to move its investments in such labour intensive operations to





India. This would give a boost to women's employment especially in Indian manufacturing industry and thereby reverse the established negative relation between economic development and women's employment.

Surprisingly, these trends failed to appear in India; in fact, in the two decades since India accepted liberalisation policies, women's overall employment and manufacturing employment for the country as a whole have both been stagnant or falling. To a large extent this can be viewed as a triumph of patriarchy over capitalist forces. It was the specific character of Indian women's socialisation that probably made them unsuitable for the purposes of capital that was looking especially for flexible labour. In most developing countries of South east and East Asia as well as Mexico and Latin America, women join the labour force immediately after they finish their education and before they get married, so that the female workforce of those countries comprises mostly the unmarried young females who do not bear the burden of household duties. For Indian young girls on the other hand, immediately after puberty, marriage and child-bearing is the ordained career path and families generally discourage their joining the workforce as unmarried young girls. Though this picture has been changing quite fast in India's urban areas in the last twenty-odd years, international capital, in its quest for flexible labour does not as yet have enough incentive to select India as its chosen destination. It seems that, for Indian women, patriarchy still has the powers to decide the socialisation patterns applicable to them and capital's demand for female labour has not been able to make an impact on those patterns.

A Theoretical Vacuum?



Marxist analysis of the impact of economic development on women's employment does provide a logical framework for analysing the relation between those two variables, economic development and women's



employment; it does so not only in the early stages of development during the first half of 20th century when capital was looking for long term engagement in production operations and preferred male labour as a steady option, but also in later stages of development in the last quarter of 20th century when globalised multinational capital demanded and got large numbers of low-skilled docile women as workers to staff their labour-intensive manufacturing operations on temporary basis.

But for feminists, the problem remains: unlike the assumptions made by neo-classical economic theory, women are not just a part, perhaps the part at the lower end, of the continuum of an economy's workforce. In fact, there has to be a distinctly separate category of 'women workers' in the labour market whose labour supply function is given a distinct shape by social constraints and values that are not applicable to male workers. Indian women's studies provide numerous examples from different parts of India at various points of time when women's labour market behaviour could only be accounted for by the extra-economic values and compulsions imposed on them by their households, communities and to some extent, by the state. A framework that does not account for these instances of extra-economic controls on women's labour market behaviour cannot be considered as anything but arbitrary and male chauvinistic.



Therefore by the 1990s decade, researchers looking for tools to analyse the role of women's work in the economy, had all but discarded the Marxist framework. This was true more or less everywhere among feminists but especially so in the Indian context. As mentioned before, towards the end of the century, the earlier thesis regarding women and development had been replaced by a new hypothesis of feminisation of the workforce of developing countries. But while experience of many late developing countries round the world had corroborated that hypothesis, India had remained a marked exception to it. The feminisation theory in any case has remained moribund in



the years since for several reasons; chiefly this is because multinational capital was by then already in the process of changing its production processes towards greater skill content and therefore had begun to follow a different kind of international distribution of their capital investment. It is not clear what share of those jobs that are now being located in developing countries is of a kind that can be described as “women’s work”. It is also worth noting that, even as liberalised economy Indian manufacturing capital is dominated by domestic investors and they have been following a distinctly different pattern of production organisations with much of the work being farmed out to smaller producers with their own workshops. As a result labour relations and production processes in India’s manufacturing industry still follow the traditions set by Indian investors and there are few indications that India’s manufacturing labour is likely to become feminised in the near future.

Care Work

A relatively new term that is now frequently being used to loosely cover much of women’s work is of ‘care work’. Originating in the United States, it is broadly meant to cover tasks that are done in service of others, to help other people to meet their needs. It can be paid or unpaid and usually is meant also to cover women’s household duties. In India too, in the absence of any generally acceptable theorisation, a few feminists have been using the term to describe most jobs that have traditionally been identified as women’s work, especially the unpaid work that they do for their own households. However, others have strongly objected to this for two broad reasons: one, that care-work is a loosely descriptive term, with no given criteria for setting its boundaries. On the one hand, in developing economies, unpaid work done by women round the household often includes not just their household tasks of caring for the family but also many productive tasks such as processing grain, making clothes, growing vegetables





etc. These tasks significantly increase real incomes of the households. On the other hand, with the care work conceptualisation, women's paid work in service professions like nursing or medicine would also get categorised as care work. In that case, it no longer can refer to women's work alone. Secondly, in identifying women's work with care work there is the danger that it entirely gets identified with nurturing and women get regarded as natural nurturers. We are then in danger of being back to the age –old belief in a nature –given sexually determined division of labour that feminists have vehemently discarded. The category care work thus does not in any way help us to understand why it is women who do the bulk of care work and why that work when done by women gets devalued.

Patriarchy and Capitalism- in Tandem?

So, at the end of the 20th century, it seemed that it is patriarchy that has retained its control over Indian women's labour and capitalist plans for its use in economic development have been foiled.

However, events in the Indian economy during the last two decades have created some unprecedented challenges before the Indian patriarchy. These briefly are: i) women's traditional employment in agriculture and household industry has shrunk significantly. ii) There has been practically no incremental growth even for males in formal sector employment of the kind that provided workers with a family living. All new jobs are in the informal sector. iii) Field studies show that households without at least one formal sector worker must send out more than one worker/take up multiple occupations to ensure their sustenance. This second worker almost always has to be the woman in the family.

These gainful activities of women for the sustenance of the households have been partially counted in the slight increase in urban female employment that was noted in the 64th Employment and Unemployment





survey done by the NSSO in 2012. But most probably, bulk of it has gone unmeasured since they may be working as unpaid and unnamed help in the activities of the vast army of self-employed male workers. Or the economically productive work that women are now doing is once again being subsumed in the load of their household tasks and therefore, as in the past, it remains unacknowledged in the economy.

Many recent studies of female occupations –domestic service, beauty work, retailing or informal factory work, have brought out the desperate and determined efforts that are being made by women to find a toe-hold in the economy. There is a marked increase in even married women migrating singly for work that has become an accepted livelihood strategy for a high percentage of households in many parts of India. An additional factor that may be helping these efforts is the definite increase in years of school education for young girls that has taken in place in most parts of India in recent years. Many observers of the situation on the ground have noted that everywhere, especially in urban India, more and more young women are looking for gainful work even if it is meant for collecting a dowry for their own marriages.

At the other end of the spectrum are daughters of urban educated families who have quickly joined the band-wagon of high-salaried jobs for the well -educated young that are very much a part of to-day's market economy. Moreover there seems to be considerable social acceptance for the changed norms of marriage and sexual practices followed by these women working in the new globalised economy. All in all, patriarchal controls on women's labour seem to be getting compromised in many ways in the new economic order created by recent economic development in the Indian economy.

To make sense of these disparate trends, one perhaps needs to consider an alternative hypothesis; instead of posing capitalism and patriarchy as two warring forces bent on claiming permanent and supreme



sovereignty over women's labour for all times, one can view the situation as one of a variety of possible adjustments and compromises made between the two institutions from time to time to accommodate each other's requirements. After all, to have survived and maintained their relevance to social and economic realities over very long periods and in diverse environments, both patriarchy and capitalism must necessarily have infinite capacity for adjustments and compromises.

So we can posit a system where both capitalism and patriarchy operate making conflicting claims on women's labour but allow compromises to accommodate the other to varying extent. Capitalism has the powerful profit motive working for it that seduces even the most traditional supporters of traditional mores. On the other hand, the most powerful tool that the Indian patriarchy has always used to maintain its control over women's labour is of its control over women's sexuality; this is reflected in the strong emphasis that Indian society places on women's uncompromising chastity and the compulsion for women to strictly contain their sexuality within lawful marriage. This has always provided Indian men and patriarchal institutions with the handy tool of sexual violence for terrorising women through abuse and rape in both public and private spaces. Public or domestic approbation of their sexual behaviour or loss of chastity is the ultimate nightmare of each Indian woman whatever her age and social background. So on the one hand, women are being driven to look for some job opportunities and gainful activities both because of their families' economic necessities and also because of their growing realisation of the vast potential for economic gains that the new economic order is offering; on the other hand, faced by a growing overt threat of sexual violence and social censure in public and private spaces, they are being driven to seek the protection of family and marriage, however abusive these may prove to be. With these manipulations, household authorities are managing both to profit from



women's participation in the new economic order but also to ensure that these newly empowered women do not assert their independence and defy their traditional authority. Rather, much to the gratification of these authorities, women have continued to acknowledge the household's claim over their incomes, labour, bodies and sexuality.

Conclusion

This brief note presents a tentative hypothesis suggesting that in any economy, there is a continuous potential for confrontation between market forces and patriarchal traditions for maintaining control over women's labour. Capitalism, with its powerful tool of profit motivation, can usually win any such battle in the short run; for example currently, it has acquired full control over the labour of the top layer of highly educated and trained women workers in India. But patriarchy does not meekly surrender its domain; it can, as it is doing at present in India, fight back against those transgressing women with virulent sexual violence in public spaces. After all, gender-based violence has always been its main mechanism for controlling women's labour in the private sphere.

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Unionising Domestic Workers: Women and Working-class Politics

*Samita Sen**

The question of women's work was central to women's studies as it took shape in India in the 1970s and 80s. The framework, however, was 'development' and while definitions and measurement were addressed at length, questions of class, identity and politics were less in focus. There was little resonance of the debates regarding gender and class— the intersections of women's and workers' movements— that rendered the marriage between Marxism and Feminism so deeply unhappy elsewhere. The distance between these two movements may have been in part a result of the self-conscious position adopted by the women's movement as 'autonomous', defined primarily in terms of independence from political parties, while the dominant strain of 'central' trade unions developed and functioned as affiliates of the major political parties in the electoral fray. There was some attempt to bridge the gap, notably by SEWA, which worked at the interface of women's and workers' movements, but there was comparatively less attention given to the mobilization of





* General Secretary, IAWS, 2008-11.



women as workers. In the past few years, the combined onslaught of liberalization, privatization and globalization have resulted in a renewed attack on workers and the conditions and possibilities of their collective politics. In an economy dominated by informality, scholars are beginning to argue, conventional modes of unionized politics are giving way to other forms of democratic mobilization. Yet, there are contrary trends. New constituencies of women workers are in search of forms of associational politics, posing new challenges both to established women's movements as well as conventional trade-union-based workers' movements. A significant question before the women's studies movement today is to grapple with the changing dynamics of women, work and politics.

It is in the past twenty years that domestic workers have emerged as a significant category of urban workers and as subjects of both women's and workers' politics. They have posed challenging questions of class and gender (and caste), which the mainstream in both these movements have found difficult to answer. While there has been considerable associational activity in different parts of the country, there are also major impediments in the way. In some parts of the country, state governments have resisted unionization. They argue that a home cannot be designated a commercial establishment. Therefore, those who may happen to work in a home, even if they do so for wages, cannot demand the rights of workers. Domestic workers cannot form trade unions. If they wish to collectivise, they must register as societies. This is the position adopted by some state governments, such as in Delhi and West Bengal. The problem is that most of the associations of domestic workers, few and small no doubt, are demanding the status of trade unions. In some other parts of the country, the definition of 'establishment' or 'trade' has not hindered domestic workers registering their own trade unions. For domestic workers, the question combines the perceived power of trade unions





with a more fundamental one of recognition as workers. For too long, their wage relationship has been subsumed under personalized service. The way out of this deadening domesticity, they believe, must take the route of collective politics for which the trade union is the historically validated vehicle.

Yet, history speaks in many voices. The problem is not only with the government but also with the lukewarm response of trade unions. Their position is articulated at two levels. There is, first, a range of practical and logistic difficulties, including that of accessing domestic workers within middle class homes. Some of the leaders also continue to adhere to tired shibboleths, such as domestic workers not being 'productive workers', not engaged in production, and therefore not proper subjects of unionisation.

Many initiatives have been taken in the last few years. There are several unions in the country, such as the Gharelu Kamgar Union (Kanpur), Rajasthan Mahila Kamgar Union, Pune Zila Ghar Kamgar Sangathana, Karnataka Domestic Workers' Rights Union and Stree Jagruti Samiti, the Andhra Pradesh State Domestic Workers Union, from which Renuka Sayola stood for Lok Sabha elections in 2014. In Kerala, the Self-Employed Women's Association also acts as a certifying agency, and there have been unions in other states such as Jharkhand. Under the leadership of the TUCC, there is also an effort towards a National Platform, named National Progressive Domestic Workers' Federation.



The case of West Bengal is illustrative, since it has been a late starter in the field. Under the banner of AIUTUC (affiliated to the Socialist Unity Centre of India) the Sara Bangla Griha Paricharika Samity was formed about a decade ago but it was in the last three years or so that other organizations have made headway. There has been the Paschim Banga Agragami Domestic Workers' Union (TUCC), and the Sara Bangla



Sangrami Paricharika Union (AICCTU). Only one union, however, the Balurghat Agragami Paricharika Union (TUCC) was registered in 2010. The officers of the Labour Department, when questioned about this, say this was a 'mistake', which they have not repeated since. All the other unions have been refused registration. The same is the case with what one might call the 'non-political' unions, organized by NGOs rather than trade unions affiliated to political parties, such as Durbar Disha Mahila Grihasramik Samanyaya Committee and Paschim Banga Grihaparicharika Samiti (Sramik Sahayata Kendra). Another organization was started by an NGO called Parichiti, but they have not yet started a union.



In the long three and a half decades of rule by the Left Front in West Bengal, there was great advancement in unionization in general. Many new categories of workers, such as agricultural workers and cooperative workers, were organised and granted registration as trade unions. In this period, the state became associated with militant unionism, which is often cited as a cause of its gradual de-industrialisation. In the whole of the country, however, from the 1990s, the shrinking of the formal sector led to a diminution of the traditional constituency of trade unions. While unions have had some success in cushioning workers in the public sector, the central trade unions have been losing ground with increasing retrenchment and mechanisation. This was clearly manifest in the late 1990s in a series of crises in the private sector. In West Bengal, these developments pitted a 'reformist' faction of the majority party in government against the CITU, affiliated to the same party (Roy 1991).

Faced with a new set of challenges, central trade unions have been forced to rethink their strategies. There has been a slow re-orientation of policies of exclusion from the late 1990s and they are addressing hitherto ignored issues, such as women workers and workers in the informal sector. The state too has responded with policy interventions,



for instance, promoting self-employment through self-help groups and micro-credit schemes, aimed primarily at women. These have reconfigured questions of informality and women's employment in complex ways. In some informal sectors, such as within the transport industry and in vending-related trades, there has been a strong push for unionization. Thus, for instance, auto-rickshaw operators in Kolkata and Mumbai, who operate within a para-legal framework, have near-complete unionization and indeed some of the strongest unions, capable of paralyzing their respective cities. Informal trades with a predominance of women workers have not seen such depth and intensity of unionization. The CITU now claims a large proportion of women members on the strength of organizing scheme workers, specifically *anganwadi* workers. Surprisingly, in West Bengal, where the CITU has had a dominating presence, no such initiative has been taken and women remain a marginal presence in unions.



In the organization of scheme workers, the lead was taken by AIDWA and later the unions moved under CITU's banner. Several domestic workers' unions were also first organized by the AIDWA and are now in the process of transferring to the CITU, such as in Pune. Clearly, central trade unions have perceived the importance of organizing domestic workers, perhaps because of the sheer numbers involved. The effort at a National Platform for Domestic Workers reflects these changes in policy. The extreme informality characterizing domestic work is reflected also in the absence of reliable data on the size of the workforce. Estimates vary considerably; though, even in the lowest estimation, they constitute a large body of workers. According to the NSSO (2009-10), there are **2.52 million** workers engaged in this occupation; the ILO provides an estimate of **4.2 million**; some NGO sources estimate **7million**. **NPDW quotes a much larger figure of 50 million. According to the NSSO data, 75 per cent domestic workers are urban.** A large majority of the workers are



women. One recent estimate suggests that 23 per cent of women workers in West Bengal are domestic workers (Chakraborty 2016).



The gender question with respect to trade unions in India remains a troubling one. These came to fore of public debate during the Munnar events in 2015. Pembila Orumai (Unity of Women) emerged as an all-women trade union of women plantation workers, which placed their demands in defiance of established trade unions—left, right, communist and congress. When state-level leaders tried to establish contact, they were asked to stay away. This is not the first such effort. Penkoottam (Crowd of Women) led by Viji is a union of unorganized sector workers established in 2009 with over 6000 workers. This too is a women's union. These women workers have openly condemned established trade unions as male preserves and as complicit with employers. Mainstream trade unions in Kerala, once so powerful and playing such a seminal role in the state's politics, do not seem to be able to devise strategies to deal with these challenges.

These are puzzling trends. The women in traditionally unionized sectors are challenging male hegemony of central trade unions, while those left out of these processes, such as women domestic workers, are reaching out to these same unions to facilitate their struggles for recognition and better working conditions. These contradictions follow from a troubled legacy of women workers' relationship with the century-long process of unionization. In India, modern factory industry, from the beginning, preferred men as workers; it began to be 'formalised' by state regulation soon after its inception; from the Factories Act of 1881, women were subjected to special restrictions. Until the 1920s, however, there were large numbers of women workers in modern manufacturing. In the textile industries, which were large employers of labour, their share varied from 15 to 25 per cent. In the mines too, they had a similar presence. In the plantations, they were nearly fifty percent and only in the tea plantations they retained this share despite



successive rounds of restructuring. In the other sectors, factories and mines, women's employment declined over time, most drastically from the 1920s and 30s, with rationalization and the beginnings of an organized working class. The process of organization, thus, went hand in hand with masculinisation, a connection not often made in the literature on the making of the working class. The factories, mills and mines, which undertook the first large-scale retrenchment of women in the 1930s, were also the nucleus of the 'organized' sector— organized not only because they were subjected to record and registration, but also because, by the 1960s, their labour grew to be almost fully unionized under federated trade union affiliated to all the major political parties with considerable bargaining strength vis-a-vis employers and the state. Even as wages and working condition improved, employers offered various arguments as to why women were to be gradually eliminated: they could not be employed on night shifts; and they had to be paid maternity benefit and provided crèche facility. Trade unions, faced with spiralling male unemployment, were more than willing to encourage these arguments. Direct retrenchment had become difficult, so early retirement and 'natural wastage' were used to replace many women by a few men (Sen 2008). Women workers found it difficult to resist the combined onslaught of the family, the unions and the employers (Sen 1999).

Thus, it was male workers who were successfully 'organised' and brought within the purview of trade unions. Indeed, (male) unions became crucial intermediaries in providing access to jobs in the organized sector. It has been argued that trade unions became appendages to political parties because their ability to control and dispense jobs came to be seen as a valuable resource in patronage politics (Ramaswamy 1988). The dynamics of this relationship required unionized men to maintain a stranglehold over prized jobs in the organised sector; and they adopted a variety of exclusionary strategies



against women first and foremost, but also based on caste, region and language. Indeed, it could be argued, women's marginalisation was imbricated in the nature and development of organised working class politics.



By the 1970s, women had been reduced to a negligible presence in large factories (De Haan 1994). The organized sector never covered more than ten per cent of the country's workers. These trends heightened from the 1990s, when casualisation made serious inroads. Women workers particularly— at present about 96 per cent of them— remain outside the ambit of the organized sector, in casualised and exploitative labouring arrangements (NCEUS 2007). The permanent workers, including some categories of more privileged casual workers, are best represented by the unions. The security and working conditions of these jobs diverge sharply from the market conditions in the unorganized (or informal) sector and are prized as assets in which trade unions help workers exercise proprietary rights. For instance, unions and management agreed that a retiring worker may 'nominate' a successor. This led to a brisk trade in factory jobs in West Bengal in the 1980s and, to control the spiraling prices, the state encouraged an agreement with unions to reserve job 'nominations' only for male heirs. Such variations of 'closed shop' specifically discriminate against women. Unions, for instance, exercise considerable control over the new forms of casualisation begun in the 1990s and women are excluded from these new employment arrangements (Sen 2008).

Working class politics led by federated unions— 'new' unions rather than the old 'craft' based collectives— have been inimical to women. Women's ability to resist employers decreased with the growth of trade unionism; their 'spontaneous' modes of protest came under attack, not only from determined employers but also from well-meaning union leaders. Unions neither espoused their special grievances nor made any effort to include women within the ambit of union activity. The



increase of women in some industries was accompanied by decline in union activity. In the knitwear industry in Tiruppur, a strong union developed in the 1950s. Led by the CITU, they organized a general strike in 1984, and negotiated better wages and employment conditions. By 2002, however, union membership dwindled to ten percent of the total workforce because women and migrant workers, who were the majority, were excluded (Neetha 2002). Similar stories are told about the bidi industry, where the unions lost the allegiance of workers with informalisation and feminization (Saravanan 2002).



Leela Fernandes has noted the consequences of trade union policies on women workers in the 1990s. The jute workers' public space, she argues, attempts to 'represent the general interests of workers but in fact produces gender hierarchies that conflate the workers' identity with a particular construction of masculinity... and exclude the participation and interests of women workers' (Fernandes 1997: 109). She shows a remarkable continuity in the moral discourse, which serves to stigmatize women's factory employment. A gendered discourse of morality, focusing on alcoholism, prostitution and crime as forms of social disease, contrasts the 'sexual promiscuity' of women workers vis-a-vis middle class norms of family and appropriate feminine roles. This discourse helps to legitimize women's systematic exclusion from the public sphere, including the formal sector of factory work. Women workers, she argues, are fully conscious of 'the gendered nexus' that deprives them of employment, security and institutional support. They are sceptical of the benefits of participating in union activities. This does not mean that women workers in India are 'apathetic' or 'indifferent' or 'passive'; even in the 1980s, there was a collective memory of female militancy; by the 1990s, they actively rejected the unions from a consciousness of their exclusionary gendered practices. Fernandes notes, however, that this ideological resistance did not any longer translate into alternative forms of collective resistance within



the factory (Fernandes 1997). In contrast to the 1950s and 60s, when women workers were involved in militant collective action (sometimes in defiance of union leadership), numerical and political marginality sapped their potential for resistance. The scope for independent collective action has been severely restricted by the combined forces of competition and dependence, by the complex web of family structure, gendered practices in employment and exclusionary practices of trade unions.

Let us take the case of cashew industry in Kerala as told by Anna Lindberg. Among the 2,00,000 registered workers, 95 per cent have been women from 1960. These workers were organized in 1939 and were quite militant up to the 1970s. Nevertheless, and despite Kerala's history of radical trade unionism, gendered practices like discriminatory wages continue. Moreover, women have no representation in the union leadership only men can be radical trade union leaders. Lindberg speaks of the obverse of the organization-masculinisation dyad, of an 'effeminisation' that defanged the radical potential of women's militancy (Lindberg 2001). The trade union movement, argues Uma Devi, has been relegated to the domain of masculinity in the state of Kerala (Uma Devi 2002).



The politics of central trade unions influence gender adjustments in the labour market. The masculinisation of the formal sector has meant the relegation of women into the informal sector. This hierarchy of employment is, moreover, an ongoing process: When employment is tighter, men tend to take over the jobs women previously undertook, pushing the latter lower down the scale to even less desirable jobs. In the plastics industry, trade unions in large and medium scale units signed an agreement with the management negotiating the fixation of tasks and designations. This ensured that women were restricted to jobs in assembling and packing. As a result, they were removed from the machines they were operating. The expansion of women's



employment in pharmaceutical companies (like Glaxo) was reversed when they decided to 'put out' some of their production to smaller scale units. These latter preferred to employ men (Shah et al 1994). These adjustments do not challenge structures of patriarchal authority but rather reinforce men's superior claims to economic resources.



The 1990s was dominated by a debate on feminization, which was linked inextricably with the undercutting of organised labour. The debate drew on developments in the 1970s and 80s, when there was noticeable increase in women's non-agricultural employment in the rural sector and in some export-oriented industries, though they were concentrated in piece-rated work in sweat-shops or in home-based work. Most scholars agree that in India economic liberalization signaled the reduction rather than increase of women workers and that the gains of the 1980s were lost in the 1990s. In India, subcontracting and home working employs largest number of women, though these figures are difficult to verify. From the nineteenth century, women have predominated in employment where contracts cannot be enforced and organization is difficult. The bulk of women workers are clustered at the lower end— homeworking (in manufacturing), street vendors (in petty trading), unpaid workers and unskilled attendants (in the care economy), domestic workers, cleaners and sex workers (in personal, hospitality and entertainment services). Thus, domestic service has registered large numbers of women workers since census was begun. In one estimate, 92 per cent domestic workers are women, girls and children. In one survey of 12 cities, 78 per cent of domestic workers were found to be women (NCEUS 2007:86). These kinds of wage work in the informal sector are characterized by high labour-intensity and low productivity.

In the new economic climate, the ideal working class family based on a sole male breadwinner and aspirations of upward mobility by housewifisation of women is likely to be less realizable. In this context,



both academic and activist attention on domestic work, a major avenue of employment for poor urban women, acquires great significance. The decline in male employment in the organized sector from the 1990s is forcing much larger numbers of women into paid work. They have had to abandon the role of the dependent housewife and seek employment in domestic service. Despite low wages and poor working conditions, its very informality determines preference of women for such employment. For those coming to the city from the countryside, the availability and easy access to domestic work employment now leads the family's migration strategies. It also attracts women (even married mothers) who may be seeking a way of escaping traditional caste and gender structures or in search of alternative opportunities of wage labour. The option of urban migration or wage employment is a lifeline for widows, deserted and/or barren wives, and offers women a way to challenge familial control over their labour and sexuality. Thus, women in waged domestic work are seeking to limit family size, undergoing sterilization which is the most easily and cheaply available in the public health sector.



In the mainstream trade union movement, political imagination remains limited. While, there have been in the last few years calls for strikes on demands for social security in the informal sector, there is no commensurate organizational effort by central trade unions. This is somewhat surprising, since there have been other kinds of associational initiatives. Women workers have sought out local organizations and associations, neighbourhood groups or community self-help groups, which address alcoholism and domestic violence, often even seeking to settle domestic disputes in favour of women. Men have responded negatively to this increasing assertiveness by their women by attempting more control with increasing violence (Gooptu 2007). While the men are suffering from a loss of status as provider and therefore diminution of control and authority, the undermining of masculine familial authority has opened new spaces for women. Despite the



highly exploitative nature of some of the work that women are forced to undertake, the access to the public sphere, the social space of the women's groups have been a positive experience for most urban women participating in such collective exercises.



Thus more of the impetus for creating collectivities among domestic workers (and other women workers in the informal sector) has come from the so-called new social movements or the women's movement. Thus, the central trade union initiative for a national platform comes later and less successfully than the National Domestic Workers' Movement started by concerned activists in 1985. Some of these social initiatives have successfully questioned the division between personal/political and home/workplace. In many developing countries, there have been new and innovative thinking about the processes of creating collectives, securing rights and empowerment. The spectacular success of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is well known. In India, a breakaway faction of the old Ahmedabad Textile Workers Union led the phenomenal development of SEWA. There have been experiments in organizing construction workers in some parts of the country and the first attempt at unionizing domestic workers was in Pune, leading to the formation of the Pune Shahar Molkarin Sanghatana in 1980. International mobilization has led to the ILO convention on Home Work, 1996. There is an urgent need to link these developments, and the new strategies of collective mobilisation, with the larger political canvas of trade unions and the struggle for workers' rights. Ironically, even though central trade unions are facing the dilemma of shrinking constituencies, domestic workers seeking mobilization remain in search of leadership for formation of unions.

There is deep unease about organizing domestic workers in trade union circles. Some trade union leaders admit openly that their status as employers make it difficult for them to organize domestic workers. Thus, the Paschim Banga Ganatantrik Mahila Samiti ([PGMS] West



Bengal chapter of AIDWA) initiated a union of domestic workers in 2011 in three districts of the state called Paschimbanga Grihasahayika Mahila Samiti, which applied for registration in December 2012. There were major differences within the PGMS, however, since the middle class constituency exerted a powerful influence on the ideological articulation of the problem, arguing that while workers received lower wages in middle class homes, they had greater security and dignity. Also that domestic workers' right to job security should be tempered with responsibility to not exit jobs without prior notice. This is not the usual language of left trade unions. PGMS was unable to convince its middle class membership to accept the possibility of a steep rise in costs of domestic service and was striving to find a balance between employers and employees. That it is not CITU but PGMS, not the trade union but the women's organisation, which has the responsibility of collectivising domestic workers, is itself curious (Sen and Sengupta 2016). The politics of class is a complicated one in these efforts because there is a direct conflict of interest between employers and workers.

In West Bengal, with its history of militant unionism, the question of women workers generally, and women domestic workers specifically, seem to have been left out of the Left (Sen and Sengupta 2016). The chief difficulty with domestic work is that potential organizers, whether union leaders, mahila samiti leaders or NGO activists, are invariably employers. The class divergence in women's trajectory to modernity has cast a long shadow over the contours of the domestic service sector. The whole question is shot through with doubts and hesitancy. For the bulk of workers, there is very little expectation of gain from collective politics. They are apprehensive that formalization will undermine their ability to negotiate with individual employers on the basis of personalized relationships. The domestic work issue is a challenge not only for working-class politics but also for feminist activism. While women's organizations have been the most active in organizing domestic workers, they are also faced with intractable



problems. The class division between the mistress and the maid is one of the few examples of direct exploitation of women by women. Class differences are overlaid with inequalities of caste. These cannot be resolved within the framework of a common or shared exploitation within patriarchy. The issue has to be addressed in terms of the multiple axes of gender, class and caste.

There is considerable political fear of a middle-class backlash. The Labour Minister of the Government of West Bengal, when we took a petition to him, asked rhetorically, 'do you want people with flags marching into middle class homes?' There is a very recent circular from Government of India asking states to ensure that labour laws such as minimum wages are applied to domestic workers. Only nine states have so far included domestic work in minimum wage schedules, which have pegged minimum wages by and large below market rates. Many questions dog these governmental initiatives: How will poorer employers manage? How will the aged fare if they cannot afford domestic workers? In other words: What will be the political cost of alienating the middle class? On the other side of the coin are also fears of consequences of improvement of working conditions for workers themselves, such as the difficulty of enforcing laws in middle-class homes and the possibility of a shrinkage in employment. The path forward is difficult to see. Legislation for domestic workers was first mooted in India soon after independence but successive governments have not been able to mobilize political resources to take this forward. Even today 'slavery in middle-class homes' remains a sharp reminder of the links between class and domesticity; waged domestic work remains a social and political conundrum. This is a new chapter in our many battles over the domestic and is proving proverbially rocky.



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
WOMEN, ELECTORAL POLITICS AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNANCE

*Susheela Kaushik**

When I met Dr. Vina Mazumdar, or Vinadi as she was called by all of us affectionately and respectfully, in 1983 in her office along with a friend from Chennai, I did not realise it will lead to such a long association with women's studies, or IAWS or the theme of women in politics. When she gave me a task, more as a student and teacher of political science, to comment on the papers for the section on Women in Politics at the second National Conference at Thiruvananthapuram, which I did with great academic curiosity and excitement, I had entered a new and profound arena of practical or applied gender politics, in which Vinadi became my mentor, guide and teacher. My association with her - and through her with the IAWS - became more and more intense and ever enlarging. Out of the blue I contested the elections, became Jt. Secy. (later Gen. Secretary), of the IAWS and then moved to many other positions in the university and elsewhere. My political science waned in front of women's studies. My field of specialisation



* General Secretary, IAWS, 2008-11.





became gender in politics. My socio-political activities centred around women's studies and women in politics in India and elsewhere. The impact of Vinadi, basically a teacher of Political Science, her thinking and action was clearly to be seen in my academic and social career.

Under this impact I had begun to read the proceedings and debates in the Report on the Status of Women in India (CSWI, 1975) and got particularly interested in the discussions on women's participation in politics and the reservation issue. The field of Panchayats had clearly come up for discussion. Many members had conceded to reservation there, even while they had disagreed with regard to the same at the national level. There were some, of course, who were opposed to reservation as the method of increasing the participation of women in politics. The debates which had started then are still alive with us, even while the nation has gone ahead and provided for reservation for women in panchayats and municipalities, thereby enabling women to enter politics.


The process of women's entry into local politics and the developments preceding it, by way of active and hectic lobbying by the academics and the NGOs for more than a decade made many women politicians get involved in this. The rise of a strong and widespread women's movement in India, backed these efforts. The bill to amend the Constitution and provide reservation for women, was initially defeated in the Upper House by a narrow margin. This made the women's movement even more keen and determined to get the bill passed in a second attempt.

The passing of the 72nd and 73rd Amendments to the Constitution and the immediate holding of elections to Panchayats in various states of India created enormous enthusiasm among women and tremendous curiosity among outsiders. Without losing any time the NGOs, the Women's Studies Centres, the wider university community and even





the concerned departments of the central and state governments quickly prepared themselves to make this a success. Any number of publications, explaining the historical background of panchayati Raj in India, legal and political interpretations of the new Amendments etc. came up. Literature on women's constitutional, political and legal rights, their political involvement, status of women in villages, etc. appeared. Equally prompt were the efforts to disseminate the provisions of the new Acts among the village women, elders and officials by way of awareness camps, political education and training programmes. Much help by way of support and fund came from the governmental and non-governmental and international agencies. The Women's Studies scholars not merely undertook training of rural women, the NGOs and the rural development officials, but also helped to organise women to access and benefit from the changes. Many women's studies centres and women's studies groups which came up in the universities, colleges and elsewhere, focussed on this new political participation of women at the grassroots level as they believed such political empowerment will necessarily and gradually bring about a better status for women as well as the much needed social and political equality for all the weaker sections of the rural society which was struggling to come out of the patriarchal, traditional and feudal set up.

The situation was electric and exciting for many of us who found in this a gateway for achieving the aims of women's studies. Undertaking frequent visits to villages all over India, meeting with rural women of all languages, religions, and castes in various regions ; collecting first hand data about them and their outlooks, listening to their experiences and issues and lending an ear to their 'personal stories' , many of us had a new set of lessons and learnt our new social science. Taking new political information to the rural women, building on their natural or acquired political skills, and preparing them to exercise their constitutional, legal and human rights and training them to take on



their new roles, the women's studies movement got a new fillip. The rural women of India got a new ally in them, ready to hold their hand, giving newer inputs which went beyond the political into other welfare, developmental, financial policies and budgeting, social auditing and monitoring. It was truly heartening to see the fast growth in political consciousness, skills and actual participation of grassroots women at various levels and spheres in the community.



The role and participation of women in local governments in India had given birth to much curiosity among other countries, in the international women's movement and organisations. The success of this unique experiment based on reservation for women and weaker sections, in a large and largely rural country with feudal practices, strong patriarchies, linked with caste and religiosity, cultural traditions, social backwardness, in regions where female literacy and economic levels were abysmally low, was bound to be watched by one and all. Research on women in local governments was encouraged and financed by all of them. All the women's studies centres got a new agenda and mandate to work for the political empowerment of women; many undertook research, data collection, community action and training for and of women. The continuous chain of elections to local governments in the various states created much enthusiasm and activities for the centres and NGOs. The scene in late nineties and the early part of this century, was one of hectic excitement. Many seminars and publications appeared on the scene, monitoring the participation of women, quantitatively and qualitatively. Many of us were identified and invited to speak on this, wherever we participated. Indeed it was a proud moment for me as a women's studies scholar as well as an Indian citizen, to participate whole heartedly in all these activities. No wonder the theme of political participation of women, particularly in the local governments in South and South East Asia, became the central focus of the activities of Women's Studies and Development Centre of Delhi University.



It is now 25 years since the women in Panchayats and municipalities and their “empowered women chairpersons” have been in local governance processes. In many states the proportion of reservation for women has even crossed 50%. Have they overcome the resistance as women from the society or are they still facing and fighting the social and community prejudices?

It is evident that while the structure of local governments have been rectified, made inclusive and equitable, this by itself does not make it less patriarchal or fair. By and large, it has become a mere number game. The resistance to women's leadership, or their manipulation to suit the patriarchal priorities and preferences by way of policies or their implementation by the panchayats, are clear indications of a resistance to a focus on women's issues and needs. The proposal for reservation for women in the state assemblies and Lok Sabha has been long pending. The fact is that even after 25 years of women having been in governance in local governments, the percentage of women in state and central assemblies has barely crossed a double figure, either as members or as contestants in the elections. The successful and able women performers in the local governments are neither getting re nominated, nor picked up for higher levels or involved in future political roles, Their good work and experience go unrecognised, unrewarded and unutilised, leading to frustration and drop out from politics.



Not merely in the realm of politics and political power, but in all positions at the decision making level, be it in private or public sector, in the educational institutions or corporate spheres, the number of women at the management level is still very low. The ‘chilly climate’ haunts; the glass ceiling is intact; and the women struggle to prove their extra qualifications and extraordinary capacities to move up. The structural policies and practices - the socio-economic barriers and the family restriction barriers by way of expectations even from the women



politicians and managers, clearly indicate that the society is still reluctant even if the structures and policies look to change for the better.

The stale arguments and stereotypes persist, that women are not capable and cannot undertake responsible roles, that they are not winnable candidates; are mere proxies for their more powerful and influential male relatives and that they cannot sustain themselves and will be drop-outs. They are told that they cannot raise resources for their own elections as well as for their parties. While a person like Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Presidential candidate raised more resources and possibly spent more than her rival who is a business tycoon, the popular doubts on women's capabilities, continue. The very same patriarchal convictions and practices which deny the women opportunities for being economically independent and socially empowered and which keep her subordinated, are used as factors against her from occupying high positions. Hence, the efforts to make more women visible at the higher positions and levels, and the method of reservation are necessary and need to continue, in the light of the significance of the need for a 'critical mass'.



However, one cannot stop with that. The identification of the various factors that stop her from functioning effectively even after reaching those positions, need to continue. The patriarchal backlash and the resistance, the consequent increase in violence - both physical and mental - the myriad forms of sexual harassment and murders, the number of suicides and threats, should make us ponder as to whether women have really become empowered. The doubts still persist in many (even among women, political leaders, voters and corporate boards and CEOs,) as to whether the women can manage and weather a political storm or a management crisis. The rise to positions at higher levels of power and responsibilities, both in political and administrative-management spheres, however, continue to be difficult for women to achieve.



The recent developments by way of Hillary Clinton's defeat in US Presidential elections once again confirms that the Glass Ceilings are firmly in their place and despite the best efforts by one and all, the resistance to women exercising political power at the top level cannot be broken that easily. Despite the women, ethnic and religious minorities, white collared workers and liberal men joining together and forming a strong rainbow coalition, the nation stood divided on the issue of voting for a woman president. Not merely Clinton's Democratic party, but even the women, obviously, were not convinced that a woman can govern them and become the supreme leader of the world's super power. Her qualifications, experience and democratic commitments did not help to overcome the suspicions, doubts and resistance of patriarchal forces. All the technical and non-technical methods, black mailing through the e-mails etc. were resorted to and became the last and deadly stroke by a male bureaucrat.

These developments make one sit back and contemplate about women's place in Indian politics, even after the great achievement of the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments and women emerging as members and Chairpersons of the local government bodies by their own political rights. Even here we need to remember that the Amendments could be carried out only in the second attempt and that too by being imposed from above and not by a conviction on the part of all or the changed mindset of the local men and institutions. The method of reservation to bring in the women, rather than through the normal method, once again reflected the reluctance and nature of the essentially patriarchal polity.

This makes one to ponder whether the women's movement has done enough for them. It is very evident that the women's movement is also somewhat tired and has become indifferent to the issue of women's role, contribution, participation and representation in politics. Many of the Centres and research and action groups have not sustained their



interest; do not continue to follow the political careers and role and participation in the rural areas and stopped collecting any data and information on the problems they face. The commitment of the governments, both central and states, and the importance that their rural development agencies gave to the role of women in panchayats, has waned and even the abolition of a separate ministry has gone unnoticed. The women's movement and activists have moved away and focus on other issues, like violence as if one aspect of women's empowerment can be separated from the others.

Within and outside political parties and political organisations the attention denoted to the extent and nature of women's participation at various levels has become minimal. The women's wings of political parties and the NGO networks have lost their interest, group formation, lobbying and pushing the agenda of women acquiring power and positions. More and more roles and exposure of women, without political image, power and roles is leading to more and more violence in the public and private lives of women. The stereo types about women, their sexist symbol images and limited capabilities have returned; though more women have become Ministers that too of non-sexist stereotypical portfolios, their image in politics and political influence are not improving.

Political parties and their senior leaders and members do not care anymore about issues like indecent behaviour and patriarchal statements on women. Sexual harassment by party members and even ministers, violence against women, insult to gender equality, gender justice and democratic dealings , receive little reaction, reprimand and repercussions from the party leadership. Parties do not treat them as part of the issue of party discipline.

Women's studies and election studies need to analyse the factors that haunt and handicap the women who want to move forward. They



need to identify and analyse as to why the women who enter the panchayats or municipalities do not move up or even sustain themselves in politics and why, despite 40 years of debates, discussions and struggles, the women's movement in India is not able to make women 'visible' in the electoral politics and governance. The women still remain opaque in the political parties and in their vote banks and priorities.

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FROM SOUTH ASIA



DRIVERS RESTRUCTURING INEQUALITIES IN SOUTH ASIA: BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



*Anoja Wickramasinghe **

Introduction

The social, economic, cultural and ecological diversity of South Asia attribute to the structuring of inequalities and vulnerabilities to various drivers that are emerging across the countries and geographical regions. Many perspectives have been added by the researchers, development practitioners, activists, politicians and academics enriching discussions and understanding. In this respect women's studies played a prominent role in disclosing the unseen, and including the excluded or marginalised segment of the society, particularly those who are not privileged enough to raise their voice. While acknowledging the 35 years of work carried





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out by The Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) it is time to revisit its past detecting the transitional effects made through networking, research, dissemination of knowledge, and creating space for women to engage in policy dialogue. However let us take this as an opportunity to see the challenges that we have to face to resolving inequalities that tend to continue affecting the sustainable development process. The researches carried out on women and by women have been peripheral to others in the academia so inclusion of women's studies into the dominant curricular has been rather slow in Asia. IAWS in this respect has moved through obstacles strengthening national and regional cooperation. Nevertheless, with the changes in the regional economies as well as in the climate and the environment more difficulties have emerged challenging women's studies to move beyond conventional domains. The author of this paper, with her experience and the collegiality established through IAWS over the years takes this opportunity to provide a brief discussion on the challenges ahead to stimulate those who are in the platform to focus on the gaps in development.

Sustainable development has been in the forefront of the global forums for over 4 decades adding new elements to deal with the emerging and unresolved areas. In 2000, eight goals have been introduced under 'Millennium Development Goals' to guide the development process while addressing the issues of poverty, hunger and the environment. In 2015, 17 goals are being introduced to guide sustainable development process. Past experiences suggest that the development pathways have structured inequalities between countries and the regions as well as within countries in the human development and also the environmental sustainability. The achievements are being reflected on various measures reflecting the position occupied by each country and region on human development enabling to capture the draw backs and the gaps to be taken into consideration in formulating development agendas. This paper - referring to the current position



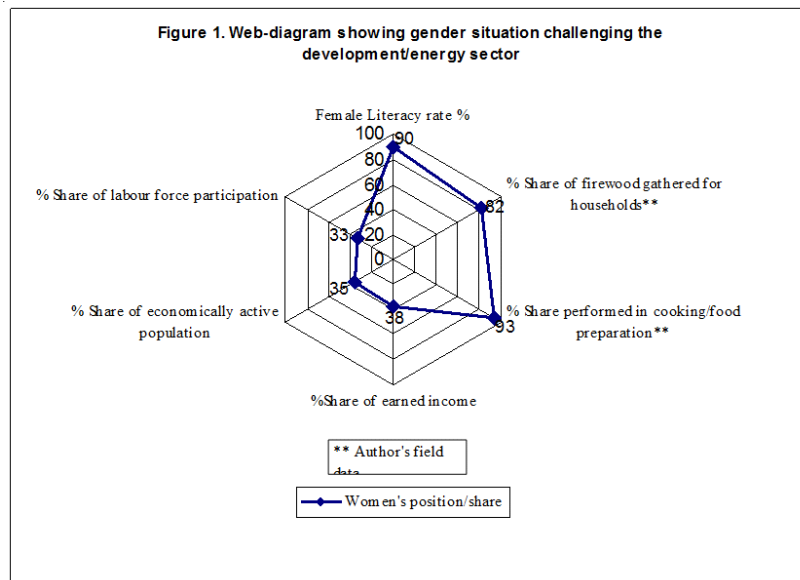
and the available data - briefly discusses how inequalities are being restructured manipulating inequalities in several dimensions. The first is the spatial differentiations that are based on inequalities in the delivery of services and opportunities instating the lagging areas, regions and the communities. The second is the gender inequalities structured through conventional ideology that has not been fully addressed through development.

The analysis presented by the author suggests that the repercussions seriously withhold the development of such lagging areas and the sectors primarily due to vulnerability to risks. Lack of resilience to deal with emerging crisis including climate change, disasters and various natural calamities, poverty and health and disease and many others stagnate the development. Conclusions derived through analysis reveal that women in South Asia have to become the catalysts and play a challenging role to dilute the inequalities preventing their rights to act as equal citizens. The catastrophic impacts of environmental degradation, deforestation and the climate change are severe on women, deteriorating their sources of livelihoods, health, food and nutrition, water, soil and the biodiversity. The majority of people live without safe water for drinking, sanitary facilities, clean energy access for cooking in particular and income are the ones who are not benefited by the development interventions.



Unveiling Gaps and Underserved Areas

The issues in South Asia region are connected with the unjust in sharing the benefits of development and unequal access to services and assets. Women are subjected to and affected by the modern economic development. The resources and the custodianships to the local environments are exploited by the gender excluded protection driven interests and privatisation. The gravity of this situation is heightened for women due to their continuing engagement in managing the local

resources for the wellbeing of the respective households and the communities.





It has been noted that 'extension of the benefits of development to all people, men and women, is fundamental to the fulfilment of the social equity objectives of sustainable development. Unequal treatment of men and women, and their differentiated social and economic roles, has led to increased poverty for women in many countries (UNDP, 2001). Many countries in the region with the UN initiatives on Sustainable Energy for All, opportunities have been expanded providing electricity access to the physically, socially and economically disadvantaged sectors. The development pathways opened up through education, skill development, and health services have recognized the gender specific constrains faced by the development practitioners in rural areas in particular. However the gender based inequalities have not been resolved with a transition in the ideology of women and empowering them to exercise equal opportunities. This situation has



deepened more seriously under the administration and organisations that are defined, designed and implemented under male dominated systems, conveniently adhering women to conventional domain of reproduction.

A series of participatory analysis was carried out in Sri Lanka to define the development gaps that are to be taken into account in setting development targets in designing strategies with a focus on equality (See Fig 1). This provides an attractive base for engaging various agencies for factoring services with a focus on gender equality. Women, in spite of the long hours of work that comes to over 15 hours per day in the reproductive domain are situated low on the spikes related to labour force participation contributing to economically gainful work. Women's greater responsibility over getting solid biomass for cooking and preparing food are non-remunerative and not recognised as economically supportive.

The causes for these imbalances are not driven only by gender ideology, so the potentials for using energy for example factoring inequality mitigating measures can be rationalised. Opportunities for production and economically profitable activities rely heavily on policy commitments, resource allocation and willingness to facilitate gender equality. It is time to re-examine the situation as to what extent of the raising educational and health status and energy access has created upward occupational mobility of women. For instance from 1993 to 2009 the economic structural changes and growth have failed to change the configurations of male and female labour participation rates and the gaps between these two labour categories. During this period it has been in the range of 31 to 37 percent regarding women and 64 to 69 percent for men suggesting that male labour force participation has been consistently twice as high as female participation.



The improvements are seen in their enhanced mobility, safety, literacy, knowledge, health, and leisure with greater implications on human development. Field evidences suggest as a direct outcome of electricity access and appliances there is a willing engagement of men in the unpaid household work in ironing children's cloth, boiling water and helping out children to do additional hours of school work. Rice cookers, grinders, blenders and food processors have enabled men, with the acquisition of appliances and devices to undertake some time consuming and drudgery of work. In turn the same have enabled women to become free of such tasks, save at least two hours of time and energy daily, to lead a less stressful life, enjoy leisure, find time to listen and watch television to be equipped with information and knowledge. Energy based changes contribute to changing gender relations within households and increasing the positions held by women in community organizations are crucial. Substantial changes take place in the domain of women's and men's work with a cross boundary linkages. There is a growing tendency for increase in men undertaking household chores when they are equipped with appliances, changing the stereotyped division of work.

Findings of households surveys carried out with electrified households in Sri Lanka reported that energy based information sources enable them to build their confidence to talk with knowledge on facts. Many women enhanced knowledge on better health practices, food and nutrition, healthy cooking, child psychology, food processing, conservation farming etc. For instance effects of the off-grid micro hydro projects implemented to enhancing electricity access in the Central Province in Sri Lanka are being described by women as the initiatives made to illuminating women's lives which have been isolated in dark over generations.



Restructured Inequalities

The gender based inequalities in almost all the aspects hinder the potentials available for women to reap development benefits. The analysis of secondary data points out that within economically active population women have a low share and as a result the percentage share of income earned by women is rather low. The earned income being an indication of their capacity to make decisions on financial allocation reaffirmed women's dependence on male income and obligations to engage in non-remunerative work. This situation however demands innovative approaches to service delivery for factoring economic options for women primarily through state agencies eradicating barriers to women joining the labour force. Providing livelihood options or solutions for women is a challenge for the stake holders because inputs are managed by the sectors that do not take the responsibility over gender equality. Strengthening of women's productive engagement and transferring the time spent on unpaid work for paid work with income earning options requires an integrated process with the partnership of various sectors working in compartments. These tend to locate the areas requiring capital endowments, financing and technology that are needed for reducing the time pressure arising due to exclusively heavy engagement in unpaid reproductive tasks, lack of opportunities, low mobility etc. This analysis could be furthered to deal with the broader areas like poverty reduction focusing on how economic empowerment of women and the income accrued by women goes to economic growth, human development benefiting their entire families especially children.

Women in rural areas have not equally benefited by the state - driven services that are connected with education, health, transport, water and sanitation, financing, technology, and training and vocational skill development opportunities and the markets. How to translate gaps into opportunities and to make energy as an instrument for factoring



services remain important questions. The development indicators related to gender equality illustrates that the benefits of development have been reaped disproportionately by men and women and the service extension places women on a lower tier in regard to their human capabilities, capacities and endowments. The Gender Inequality Index and the other development indicators situate women in relatively low positions in many countries, indicating the urgency for reducing the gaps (See Table 1).



In 2014 the Gender Equality Index for South Asia was 0.801 and the Gender Inequality Index was 0.536. Data by countries shows that there is a significant gap in Gender Inequality between countries in South Asia with the lowest value of 0.243 being noted in Maldives and the highest in India with 0.563.

Table 1: Indicators of Outcome of Development/ Human Development some selected countries.

| Country | Gender inequality Index/value 2014* | Gender Dev-Index/value 2014 * | Life expectancy 2013* | Mean yrs. Schooling-Female, 2012* | Mean yrs schooling-Male-2012* | Labour force participation rate % Female 2013** | Labour force participation rate % Male 2013** |
|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Bangladesh | 0.503 | 0.917 | 70.7 | 4.6 | 5.6 | 57.4 | 84.1 |
| India | 0.563 | 0.795 | 66.4 | 3.2 | 5.6 | 27 | 79.9 |
| Pakistan | 0.536 | 0.726 | 66.6 | 3.3 | 6.1 | 24.6 | 82.9 |
| Nepal | 0.489 | 0.908 | 68.4 | 2.4 | 4.2 | 79.9 | 87.1 |
| Sri Lanka | 0.37 | 0.948 | 74.3 | 10.7 | 9.4 | 35.1 | 76.3 |
| Bhutan | 0.457 | 0.897 | 68.3 | - | - | 66.7 | 77.2 |
| Maldives | 0.243 | 0.937 | 77.9 | 5.4 | 6.2 | 56.2 | 77.5 |
| South Asia | 0.536 | 0.801 | 67.2 | 3.5 | 5.8 | 29.8 | 80.3 |
| World | 0.449 | 0.924 | 70.8 | 6 | 7.4 | 50.3 | 76.7 |



Source: *UNDP 2014, Human Development Report; **UN Women, 2015.

In our effort at translation of the drivers of vulnerability as taken into consideration in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2014) we can highlight the gravity of the life cycle and structural vulnerabilities women. The productive losses of not having access to clean water, and sanitation and also cleaner cooking fuels are barriers to human



development and economic growth. The split over effects of women not having access to the supplies and the services increase the drudgery of repetitive attendance to water and sanitation. Similarly the reduced demand for child labour - particularly for fetching water and fuelwood – is reported to have positive implications on education enrolment of girls and eventually on their capacity to handle and engage in productive work.



The disproportionate division of energy related tasks particularly the cooking fuel which dominates the household energy system threatens women's health while exhausting economic opportunities. Over 80 percent of the responsibilities for over 80 percent of the energy used by the households are shouldered by women. These circumstances also suggest academics to undertaking gender research vigorously on the power sector, locating best entry points for making the energy sector responsive to economic needs of women, mobilising resources and for stimulating interest in motivating women or women's groups to use energy as a means for empowering women. Some isolated lessons illustrate that it has introduced new partnerships among private sector, financing, NGOs and civil society organisations. The experiences of working through collaborative partnerships are wide. GVEP, RERED, ITDG, ENERGIA, AIWC, Grameen Shakthi, IAWS and many others have proved the success of their interventions that were able to have effective results. Nevertheless the effects of the interventions have been rather low in making transitions. The reasons are the weaker connections between specific interventions and the gender research or researchers and the policy makers, and the researchers' lack of communication or engagement with the policy process. The willingness to consult gender research, researchers, or the civil society organisations in formulating policies is crucial. Quite strongly it has been felt that the gender disaggregated information is either limited, or available only for a few areas or communities where research has been carried out or not been available in the form needed for national or regional level policy



making. Women's specific needs and contributions to economic advancement are to be indicated in the sustainable development agendas with mechanisms encouraging women to engage themselves and share the responsibilities.

Although the causes for these imbalances cannot be justified as the limitations of the service sectors alone, the potentials for using services for factoring inequality mitigating measures can be rationalised. Women inclusive development planning is a way to close the gaps and mitigate the development draw backs that tend to continue in the foreseen future.

This analysis points out that within economically active population women have a low share and as a result the percentage share of income earned by women is also rather low. Empirical data with scientific legitimacy is needed to correlate the relationship between productive engagement and their earned income. This situation however demands innovative approaches to development factoring economic options for women. Development agendas with a check list should respond to the economic and productive needs of women. The economic incentives or remunerations for women are to be introduced using various measures and technologies primarily through state agencies eradicating barriers to women joining the labour force. Providing technology options/ solutions for women is a challenge for the development practitioners as well as for women activists. Strengthening women's productive engagement, transferring of time spent on unpaid work for paid work with income earning options requires an integrated process with the partnership of various sectors working in compartments. These require capital endowments, financing and technology that are needed for reducing the time pressure arising due to exclusively heavy engagement in unpaid reproductive tasks, lack of opportunities, low mobility etc. This analysis could be furthered to deal with the broader areas like poverty reduction focusing on how



economic empowerment of women and the income accrued by women goes to economic growth, human development benefiting their entire families especially children.

Barriers to Women Inclusion and Emerging Issues



An astonishing amount of commitments have been made by and through women's studies, but the emerging situations that need attention are quite complex. The concerns over inclusion of women into the total process force us to concentrate more on the followings.

1. Options in the curricular:

Inclusion of women's studies into curriculum and the faculty based education at higher levels is essential. Often it is expected that the concerns over women and gender based dimensions are covered through women's studies or the social studies and the inclusion of social variables into science disciplines is a matter with less implications. As a result the resources allocated for women's studies have been inadequate and the dependency on external agencies to carrying out research on women and gender studies is to be reduced.

2. Ideological barriers:

In our societies the potential roles of women, their work, capabilities and contribution to the development are being placed in a rather complex domain differentiated by heightening the importance of a family and its wellbeing. The gender inequality in Asia - even in countries like Sri Lanka with relatively high human development - is deep rooted and the unequal distribution of service oriented work between men and women, and the differentiation of work for subsistence form production and income are quite significant. In most households women are expected to take the main responsibility over the household chores including water, cooking fuel, health, sanitation,



taking care of the children and elderly. The injustice is that they are equipped with less production assets, resources and skills. This situation remains unresolved due to two reasons. The first is the unaccounted nature of services and the contribution to sustaining human well being and the second is the ideology on domestic chores that are considered light and less drudgery in performing. Women's studies have highlighted the ground realities to make ideological changes, but equality has not been achieved due to the difficulty of moving through patriarchal barriers.

3. Deepening vulnerabilities and barriers to women's personal safety:

Two important aspects tend to affect the progress made by women. The first is the social quality deterioration which is progressing at an unprecedented scale threatening the lives of girls and women and also male dominated professionalism. The second includes vulnerabilities pertaining to geographical isolation and occupational risks, structural vulnerabilities pertaining to institutions and the discrimination in life cycle vulnerabilities.

4. Climate change and the environmental degradation:

Most of the countries in South Asia have experienced heightened incidents of droughts and floods and also expanded vulnerabilities to water scarcities, deforestation, and land degradation. Depletion and degradation of various resources; water, fuelwood and local food sources in particular have serious livelihood implications and if options are not available women take the drudgery of securing them by undertaking long distance walks searching for work, goods and other materials. Increasing temperature and exposure to sun seriously impact women, reducing their personal health. Climate change and land degradation severely restricts the livelihood security of women in land based economies.



5. Livelihood and economic opportunities:

Domestic work, subsistence related unpaid work and family wellbeing limit the economic opportunities or the labour market of millions of women in South Asia. These have implications for the national and local economies; families and communities, as well as on women and human development. Livelihood and labour market options for women are the two crucial entry points to ensure their share of earned income. Reducing inequality and ensuring gender equality are the two key principles to achieve sustainable development goals which are to be materialised by integrating the relevant actors. It is crucial to provide options for women to enter the labour force and secure paid work enabling to maintain a satisfactory standard of living and become responsible for economic growth.



6. Lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation:

With the expanded periods of droughts the difficulties of getting access to water and sanitation are on the increase. The implications of increased use of contaminated water, distance sources, unsafe and unauthorized resources have multiple development implications for women. For instance the low consumption of water and the use of contaminated water is resulted in increasing health burdens and the costs. Contaminated water acts as a carrier of disease as well as a means exhausting the metabolic energy of women and their productive time to deal with related consequences. Unequal access is facilitated by the unequal distribution of most crucial basic needs like water and cooking fuels.

Conclusions

Inequalities are in all aspects of life and get restructured through persisting inequalities and unequal opportunities. The repercussions of inequality in the labour market are barriers to human environmental





and the economic growth. A social and attitudinal change enabling men and women to act as equal citizens has to be promoted as a development goal. Women's associations seek strategic solutions, especially close coordination and cooperation to create space for women to enter the labour market; resolve the ideological unjust in defining women's needs within a broader development domain expanding opportunities that can avoid exploitation of women's labour.

Decisions on what capacities are required and policy guidelines are to be in place to facilitate and meet the principles of equality and equity. The purpose of providing services expands beyond the lives of women. There is a need to improve the systems equipped with options and opportunities rather than increasing dependency. Sustainable development justice is to be achieved by prioritising the development needs of the marginalised and underserved sectors, but not simply by looking at the numbers with service access.

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Development of Women's Studies in Nepal: Some Memories and Reflections

*Bina Pradhan **

1. Background to the development of Women's Studies in Nepal starting from late 1970s

Although the history of the women's movement in Nepal goes back to the early 1900s when Nepalese women protested and staged demonstrations against absolute autocratic rule, deprivation of rights and gender inequalities (Pradhan, 1979; Hutt, 2011), women's studies as such, in the form of conscious research or teaching, is a new development since the late 1970s. Before that there was virtually no record of serious research on women's issues in any form, or related activities in teaching/training. Gender issues were not a concern in contemporary research and development literature or in the academia, albeit found only in the literary works between 1860 -1960 where personal or societal repressions were ventilated by women in literature and poetry (Rana, 2011).



* Leading Gender Specialist in Nepal

This emerged in the background of the ongoing women's movement in Nepal and the struggle for equal rights, gender equality and social/gender justice. The women in development movement on a global scale (following Boserup's ground breaking work that brought to light the crucial role of women in development), and UN Declaration of International Year of Women (IYW), 1975, followed by the Women's Decade (1975-1985), was the beginning of WID movement in Nepal to place women in the forefront of development concerns and activities to improve their status and participation. There was a realization that the available data base used for planning and programming at the national and international levels, even the instruments used for data collection, were biased and seriously flawed with regard to collection of information with regard to their roles, work and contributions. Further, in 1973, the US Congress passed the Percy Amendment which required that US bilateral assistance programs enhance the integration of women into the national economies of developing countries. It was under this policy that The Status of Women in Nepal study was sponsored to address issues of gender in development and differences in income and economic power between men and women and to undertake research on differential benefits.

The Status of Women study in Nepal marked the beginning of conceptual and theoretical -enquiry into gender and development — women in development — as it was then understood. This perhaps could be seen in the context of a global movement with a few women in Nepal questioning development parameters and women's exclusion, invisibility and subordination within the academia and in the field of research.¹ This was outside of the active women's political/social

¹ The two names that come up as researchers, at the time, were Meena Acharya and Bina Pradhan. Acharya was working in Nepal Rastra Bank, and Pradhan in Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University (TU) as Research Officer.



movement, but in consonance with the concerns of gender equality/ justice and inequality.

I present a brief account of the emergence of the women's studies movement in Nepal in this short paper. This marked a quiet revolution protesting against the repressive regime and denial of the freedom of expression of thoughts/ideas, research on women and gender I draw on my own experiences, and draw connection with the regional movement through our association with pioneering feminists in India during the time. The last section outlines the formal emergence of a women's study programme in the academia under the Tribhuvan University (TU) and its proliferation followed by a focus on emerging gender issues and challenges facing women's studies in Nepal.

2. Status of Women Study in Nepal

The Status of Women in Nepal study marked the beginning of serious research on gender issues documenting/accounting for women's work, roles of women in Nepalese society and economy, and their contributions. Carried out by Center for Economic Development and Administration (CEDA), Tribhuvan University (TU), it was 32 month multidisciplinary research sponsored by USAID, during the Women's Decade in 1978/79, mandated by the Percy Amendment. The overall objective of the project was "to collect and generate information on the status and roles of a range of Nepalese women in order to support planning to facilitate the increased integration of women into the national development processes". As the only women researcher in the University, I was assigned to the project as Senior Research Officer and entrusted the responsibility of forming a research team. Lynn Bennett, the Project Adviser represented USAID and Meena Acharya was seconded to the project in CEDA as Project Economist.

However, in the formulation for implementation of the project, the Research Team went beyond what was mandated and tried to theorize





and conceptualize the status of women in Nepal as a social and cultural construct and the underlying sources of women's subordination and valuation of their work, analyse status and role of women in Nepalese society from a multi- dimensional perspective, including the economic, familial, political, educational, legal, and ideological/religious. A comprehensive interdisciplinary methodology combining qualitative and quantitative techniques of data gathering was developed to critique the economic models of development in the context of the lived experiences of rural women. This connected many of us, as researchers and in the academia, to the regional and international women's studies movements during the time. The project team members shared the basic theoretical assumption that the concept of "women's status" is not a unitary construct but a complex inter-relationship between factors that influence the relative status of women and men in any given society. This study was carried out in two phases, the first devoted to the collection and analysis of the available secondary data on Nepalese women in specific areas that resulted in Volume I with five monographs. There were overtones of the suppressions and marginalization of women's movement by the system of government in particularly, the institutions concerning women (Pradhan, 1979). Phase II comprised of field work in eight communities to collect primary data. This culminated in Volume II with a series of 7 monographs. The publication of two volumes with 12 monographs was a significant contribution to the development of women's/gender studies as well as to the government policy as reflected in the 6th National Development Plan of Nepal(1980-1985). This was the first time that a separate WID section was devoted in the planned document in recognition of women's productive role and their contributions to the economy.

3. Founding of the First Women's Study Centre in Nepal

The Status of Women in Nepal study and dissemination of its findings created a stir in the social sector and the political system by raising



critical issues on the women's organizations, and their marginalization within the political system. It brought to the fore the issue of exclusion of women in the development process. By this time there was a growing discontentment among different groups working on women including those in research and academia, particularly the strict controls on free thinking/ideas and speech and related activities. In the meantime researchers from the study were contacted and invited to the women's studies programmes/conferences in India and in international forums. My association with Vina Muzumdar goes back to those days when I was invited to the first women's studies conference held in SNDT, Mumbai in 1981, where I met women like Madhuri Behen, Neera Desai and other women activists and researchers from the region. Subsequently my association with Vinadi became closer and we shared and discussed issues from our respective countries and the repression that we faced. It was then that we talked about likeminded women from the region coming together in support of each other for promotion of gender issues, independent and critical thinking and women's studies. In order to concretize the idea, we came together in forming independent research centers on women and development in countries where it did not exist. Vinadi, with a group of scholars and activists, had already started CWDS in 1980 in New Delhi. Inspired by the development of women's studies in India and elsewhere, bringing together a group of likeminded Nepali professional women, I started, the Center for Women and Development (CWD) in Nepal in 1983² in the country context of: a) growing dissatisfaction of the oppressive regime of the suppression/ control of academia/media and free thinking; b) development of women's movement against gender inequality and social and economic oppression of women in Nepal; and d)

2 About the same time CENWOR in Sri Lanka, was established in 1984 by Swarna Jayaweera. Tahrunessa Ahmed Abdullah, who was also present at the IAWS conference, was already working in Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development.





development of women's studies in the region particularly South and South East Asia. The establishment of the Centre was, in fact, a direct outcome of my participatory research experiences of my field work living in the villages that gave me an in depth understanding and an appreciation of the deprivations and discrimination facing women despite the crucial contributions they make to the household economy. At that time, there was no space for organizations to be legally recognized and registered as an independent and autonomous entity in Nepal. All organizations that were non government and non profit, required to be registered under the Social Services National Coordination Council (SSNCC) headed by the Queen. In the absence of any other independent legal provision, CWD was registered under the Company Act, where we paid taxes to be an independent forum for critical thinking and free expression of ideas. The Center started with: research studies contesting ideas and development approaches taken by the government for gender equalities and women's empowerment from a welfare perspective; women's resource unit – library – collection of literature on women and gender; and publication of CWD Networker as a tool for advocacy and connecting and networking with different individuals and organizations in the region and internationally. This brought us directly in conflict with the established Panchayat Regime³. CWD started as a research and action oriented institute on women and development, where we carried out research and evaluation of projects and programmes. All the board members of the Center professed to work as NGO for the development and sustainability of the organization. In this sense, it was the first women NGO, that is "non political," carrying out research and action

³ On many occasions our research works and our critical thinking brought us under serious questioning from SSNCC secretariat such as the critical evaluation of the Panchayat System and the leadership that rotated among a few from the "ruling and elitist families".



on women and development to influence policies and programmes changes for gender equality and women's empowerment.



By the time that CWD was established, we were well connected with different women's studies groups and academicians in the region, particularly in India, and had developed a regional network. Vinadi and CWDS were the main link with whom we interacted and exchanged experiences and ideas in a number of regional and international seminars/workshops. It was in the workshops held in New Delhi and Penang that we discussed about our experiences of the impact (negative) of development projects on women, their work and household strategies and how development programmes were insensitive to gender issues resulting in women's marginalization. During this time the project "A comparative Study of Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and South East Asia" was conceptualized and materialized (with CWDS taking a lead) with United Nations University (UNU) funding, coordinated by Hanna Papanek, from Boston University and Vina Mazumdar from CWDS. Three Regional Workshops on the project on Women's Work and Family Strategies in South and South East Asia were held first in Delhi in December 1984; in Penang, April 1986; and the final one in Kathmandu hosted by CWD with support from ICIMOD (International Center for Integrated Mountain Development) in December 1987. The project brought together researchers and academic institutions from 8 countries of South and South East Asia that undertook over 20 field-based studies i.e. representing 20 organizations from the countries and 5 comparative reviews of research on women's work and family; education and employment, family and the kinship system; and socialization and women's labour force participation in agriculture (Mazumdar, 1989; Dube, 1997). Each of the field studies adopted methodologies appropriate to its situation around the theme of the 'women's work and family strategies'. The CWD study examined the impact of development projects on women's work and household strategies,



where we looked at the impact of Cotton Development Project of the government on women's work and household strategies using quantitative and qualitative method for data gathering. The findings were presented at the workshop held in Kathmandu. (See ICIMOD's publication: <http://lib.icimod.org/record/10819/files/5410.pdf>). CWD had a significant influence not only among those working and researching on women's issues but also on the national policies and government (HMG) plans/programmes where we worked in close relation with Women's Development Section under the Ministry of Panchayat and Local Development (MPLD) and lobbied for up scaling of women's section to Division and then to Ministry through our research and evaluation of the programmes/projects undertaken by the Ministry such as the evaluation of Production Credit for Rural Women (PCRW) project.

By this time research on women and development was gaining popularity, and the agenda for integrating women in development from empowerment approach was gathering momentum in Nepal both independently as well as with international support. Nepal was already a part of the international drive for integration of women in the mainstream development, where various individuals, institutions (national and international) and groups undertook research on women either for policies and programs changes or examining roles and issue of women in different sectors (Bhadra, 2001). This was also a time of political turmoil with undercurrents of dissatisfaction and resistance building up against the Panchayat system.⁴ The year 1990, was a historical watershed for Nepal that restored multi-party democracy in the country that brought liberalization of economic and political controls

⁴ The Panchayat System introduced by Late king Mahendra in 1960 banded the political parties and the democratic government elected by the people. The leaders of the banned political parties Nepali Congress, Communist and others opposed the system from the very beginning of its application.





under Panchayat system including opening of legal provision for recognition of NGOs. It provided ample opportunities for the people, including women, to express themselves and their activism. Taking the opportunity, a host of women NGOs came into being and became active in implementing development projects, raising awareness, and advocating constitutional right for gender equity and equality – some of these organizations were in response to the external funding that was made available but few genuinely taking up the opportunity in the promotion of gender equality. Unfortunately when the opportune time came, CWD, that resisted the system and was engaged in activist research and action, contributing to the momentum, went into oblivion⁵. The research activism of CWD was short lived but had a marked influence on feminist research, activism in research as they relate to key socio-political issues, as well as regional research network that explored comparative perspectives on gender issues in development interventions relevant for pressing protests.

At the Governmental level, the Eight Five Year Plan (1992-97) emphasized the “mainstreaming gender” policy which resulted in the establishment of women’s units in the National Planning Commission and various ministries during the plan period. Ministry of Women and Social Welfare was instituted with the mandate of mainstreaming women in development following the Beijing Conference in 1995.

Similarly, the academic arena saw an increasing pursuance in introducing women’s studies within the university – particularly coming from women faculty members from different departments. One such

⁵ From 1989 to 1991 I went on the Humphry Program in Cornell University and subsequently joined Ph.D program, during which time leadership and responsibility of running CWD changed during my absence during the time. Within the period of 5 years, 1983 – 1998, since its inception, the Center was well established and known for its work nationally, regionally and internationally.



strong pursuance came from Padma Kanya (PK) Campus – the oldest and largest all women campus of Nepal under TU. As I recall, Professor Lila K.C., Chairperson, Home Science Department, with her colleagues in the Home Science Department was actively pursuing to introduce WID as a paper in the Home Science Master's Degree programme in TU. They were able to introduce WID paper in 1989 permitted by TU. Subsequently efforts were made to develop capacity of Home Science faculty in incorporating gender issues in the Home Science curricula and in the teaching. PK campus carried out different trainings on gender and development with support from USAID, FAO and other international agencies. However, despite the effort, women's studies as a full-fledged academic program could not be implemented as it is an interdisciplinary field of study in examining gender as a social and cultural construct in determining the social and gender role/relationship. Home Science Department was constrained by its own discipline biases and lacked the experience and academic credential for teaching the course. In 1993/94 I was approached by Prof. K.C to help introduce women's studies in the Home Science Department⁶. It was then that I took it up with the WID Officer Nirmala Sharma, in CCO for supporting a post graduate course on women and development, which was received positively. I wrote up the proposal for funding with three integrated components: first capacity development within the Home Science Department in creating a core group of faculty members with interdisciplinary background for teaching and research, second, implementation of one year post graduate (PG) diploma course on Women and Development to start with and to prepare the department and faculty towards degree



⁶ This was the time when I was just back from Cornell University to do field research for my Ph. D programme and I was engaged with Canadian Cooperation Office (CCO), on a part time basis, as Gender Specialist to provide assistance in the development of gender policies and incorporation of gender in their development assistance programmes to the government of Nepal.

course, and establishment of a resource Centre. This was perhaps the beginning of institutionalized women's studies in TU academy.

4. Starting of Gender/Women's Studies Under TU

In 1996 women's studies as an interdisciplinary academic course was initiated under the Central Department of Home Science (CDHS), TU as a one year PG diploma course and can be said to be the first feminist intervention in Nepalese academis where knowledge is self-reflexively produced which distinguished Women's Studies from studies on women popularly carried out by the emerging women's NGOs or development agencies during that time. As alluded to above, Women's Studies was implemented with three components – capacity building within the Home Science Department in Padma Kanya (PK) to create a core group of women's study faculty⁷, implementation of the post graduate diploma, and establishment of resource centre with CCO funding.

An intensive orientation workshop on GAD was held for faculty/staff within CDHS prior to implementation of the PG course on Gender and Development as most of the teaching staff had long experience and background in Home Science but needed a thorough orientation on conceptual and theoretical grounding in gender and development to be able to teach the course of study. I coordinated and organized the workshop assuming the responsibility of preparing the groundwork, pooling together resources and materials, including resource persons for the workshop as well as to provide technical backstop for the smooth working of the workshop. I pooled together resource persons from Nepal and India from among academic circle who had background/experience in teaching/researching on women's issues and who had made contribution to the field. Once again I reached out to the network in India. I recall first contacting Maithreyi Krishnaraj from SNDT and in consultation with her we invited Uma Chakravarty and Patricia Uberoi from the University of Delhi. From Nepal I worked closely with Meena





Acharya all throughout the workshop. During that time, there were very few qualified persons in the country to teach a post graduate course in gender and development. The few names that come up are Chandra Bhadra and Sangeeta Thapa who also participated as resource persons. Resource Persons from India came for short periods in turns covering different aspect of gender and development and filled a huge gap in capacity development in Nepal.

It was a unique sharing and a learning experience for us, particularly for the participants, to have resource persons from India with long standing experiences in feminist research and teaching. Almost all faculty members who were prepared to run the classes after intensive training expressed the tremendous change they went through both at personal and professional levels as this was the first exposure to internalization of the gender issues. Six weeks of rigorous training created a group of 15 core faculty members from different disciplinary background to teach one year PG course on women and development. Subsequently a PG course was started in PK. A Resource Unit was also created to aid the faculty members as well as the students.

As I recall, starting of the Women's Studies Programme strengthened our ties with India's academic development in women's study. For instance, I and almost the whole group who were trained and involved in the women's studies, were invited to the IAWS conference that was held in Jaipur. A number of our participants had the opportunity to present papers at the conference.

Women's studies is gradually gaining a foothold in academia, gaining popularity and influential impact. At present, 18 batches of students have completed their course work. As this course is also gaining popularity among the planners, policy-makers and students, TU granted the Padma Kanya Campus approval to start a Master's Degree in Gender and Development in 2004. It is running with the 5th batch of students.





Many departments at both Tribhuvan University-the oldest and the largest university of Nepal - and Private Universities, have either incorporated or added gender component in their curricula. Central Department of Sociology and Anthropology and Geography were the first few departments that introduced gender into their courses. The new scholarship on women and gender has not only spread at Higher Education through different departments, but it has trickled down to school level as well. Recently, there is a separate Gender Studies course at Higher Secondary level. And in near future, Tribhuvan University has been introducing Gender Studies at Diploma -level. This is a huge achievement.

In relation to Women's Studies, up to 2011, more than 500 students have been enrolled. More than 80 percent have completed course work. More importantly, most students have jobs which indicate that the programme has created opportunity for entry into job market. They work at different organizations as gender experts. From government service to I/NGOs to teaching fields to community organizations, they have been working as gender experts.

5. Conclusions

Reflecting on my research experiences and my association with the women's studies movement in Nepal and globally, I we have come a long way in impacting change towards gender equality, and women's empowerment and women's movement in Nepal. However, the path has not been easy – it has been challenging, confrontational and conflicting not only with the larger political and governance system, but also within one's own organization. But the feminist network support and solidarity provides tremendous strength in resisting the system and surviving the struggle within. For instance, the feminist support from the India we received and solidarity built with the group in CWDS and IAWS helped in forming alliances, providing platforms for sharing



and developing ideas and sustaining them. Personally I have benefitted tremendously from Vinadi's wisdom, compassion and her wide experiences. The experience of initiation and development of women's studies in Nepal and the support received from resources persons from India helped to fill the resource gap in Nepal. Further, the process of establishing women's studies under CDHS, PK has been an emotive experience in that there was lot of sharing and internalization of gender issues, which helped one define who they are/were and create their own identity and values within the family and society. This has already created an alternative set of normative values and practices.



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Reflection on Teaching Women's Studies

Mira Mishra *

Introduction

This note is based primarily on my 25-year journey as a Women's Studies teacher. During my journey, I was shaped and reshaped by workshops, conferences and trainings. I shall start my note with the impact of some key transformative events, such as conferences and workshops, with which I embarked upon my journey as a Women's Studies teacher.



Then I will share my insights on the evolution of Women's Studies as an academic program in Nepal. I will link this evolution to changing socio-economic processes in Nepal in general, to transitions in women's lives in particular, touching also upon the interconnection between academia and feminism. Through all these themes, I aim to shed light on the continuous challenges that Women's Studies as an academic field has been facing, and efforts to address these challenges head on.

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The Jaipur conference

I will start our conversation by reflecting on my time at the Seventh National Conference of Women's Studies in Jaipur in 1995. I still remember the EVENT, where renowned feminists and activists spoke powerfully about the intersection of feminism, gender and globalization. There was an atmosphere of celebration of womanhood and sisterhood. It was an amazing experience for me. Reflecting back on that day in 1995, I had never thought that more than twenty years later, I would share the same platform as a paper contributor. There were several reasons for my doubt. First, Women's Studies had not yet been introduced in Nepal back then. Second, in 1995 I had no regional exposure in this field. But in spite of this, I dreamed of speaking at such a plenary in front of such an impressive gathering one day. Thank you to everyone who motivated, supported and challenged me to achieve my dream.

The Jaipur conference pushed me to dream big and work hard to achieve my goals. Personally, it broadened my understanding of the power of women's potential and of women's collective strength. It also instrumentally helped me hone my critical faculties to see the interconnection between academia and activism. As I just mentioned, at the time of the conference, Women's Studies was in the process of being introduced as a full-fledged academic program at Tribhuvan University. As a potential teacher of the new discipline - I was a teacher of Home Science at the time - I was quite intrigued by the subject.



South Asian workshop

Three years prior to the Jaipur conference, I had participated in one gender-related regional workshop, which is when I received my first formal introduction to the words "gender" and "feminism." Dr. Meena Acharya, a renowned Nepali feminist economist, called me one early morning and asked me to participate in the workshop. She said, "



Mira, I have proposed your name to Kamla for the South Asian residential workshop at Bhaktapur, Kathmandu. Do you know Kamla?”. I said, “No, I don’t know who that is”. She said with a surprise in her tone, “Actually I thought you might know her. She is a big name. As you are going to teach a course on “Women and Development” in Home Science, I thought you would benefit from the workshop. I have already talked with your department head”. Dr. Leela Devi KC, who was closely in touch with feminist scholars outside of academia, headed the department during the time. My call with Dr. Acharya demonstrated to me that women inside and outside of academia were collaborating to introduce Women’s Studies in Nepal. Within a week of the call, I participated in the workshop. I still recall the five days I spent with South Asian feminists including a few women from Nepal. That was my first introduction to feminism and feminists. It was a learning, frustrating and somewhat intimidating experience. Over the course of the workshop, I realized that “feminism” as a concept was something that I simultaneously wanted to adopt, but also escape from. Feminism felt more intimidating than inviting. Honestly speaking, I could not fully immerse myself in the workshop. Initially, I wanted to separate myself from women whom I thought were too “forward”: i.e. they were too informed, too active, and too vocal, *particularly given that their perception of sexuality clashed against the perceptions of the other women I knew and myself* I held myself back from several physical activities, in particular games that encouraged us to learn more about each others’ sexualities. Yet, the impact of the workshop and of those women has persisted in my life both personally and professionally. I met Kamla Bhasin for the first time at that workshop. She became my friend and a life-long inspiration.


Four years after this workshop, which was my first introduction to feminism, I joined a six-week-long content-focused training in 1996 for potential teachers of Women’s Studies. The Central Department of Home Science, which was a pioneer in its introduction of Women’s



Studies, and was being supported by the Canadian Cooperation Office in its effort to train 15 new teachers from different departments. At personal level, the training played a significant role in my life.

For the first time, since teaching the “Women and Development” class as part of Home Science in 1991, which was the first time I engaged in this field, I slowly started loving and owning Women’s Studies. I felt like I was ready to change. My engagement with Women’s Studies dates back to early nineties when the Central Department of Home Science, where I belonged as a teacher, incorporated “Women and Development” as one paper in its curricula in late eighties (1989). It was arguably the first academic Women’s Studies course in Nepal. I was among nine teachers who were supposed to teach the course collectively. With Home Science degree, and with very limited knowledge of the discipline, I became a Women’s Studies teacher in early 90’s. Honestly speaking, I did not want to teach “Women and Development” course at that time because I did not know about the subject matter.



In the six-week training, I had to reflect on my own life experiences to understand the gendered nature of family, society and the larger society. It was not easy. In fact, it was quite difficult. For — the first time in my life, I saw the practice of excluding menstruating women from public space as a symbol of women’s subordination. What was even more difficult was coming to terms with the realization I was complicit in this subordination, due to the way I was socialized. I was born into a high caste Hindu family and socialized to conform patriarchal norms and values. However, I saw that I was changing. I am grateful to Indian feminist scholars who participated in the training as resource persons. They helped broadened our vision about the social world through their remarkable journey to ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment. I owe a lot of my transformation that happened during this training to the facilitators, who were both academically



and emotionally invested in us. For example, I received calls at home from Dr. Meena Acharya and Dr. Bina Pradhan – both lead trainers - several times during the training. This was unprecedented, given that as a student of Home Science I had never received such calls; neither had I ever called to check up on any of my own students. Dr. Meena Acharya one evening called me and asked, “Mira, how are you doing? Are you learning? We suppose, most of you are changing. I can see the change reflected in how you dress. You are coming to the training in Kurta Shalwar, whereas at Padma Kanya college, I couldn’t imagine you showing up in anything but a sari. It is a great change”. Yes, she was right. We were changing. I saw myself talking confidently and fluently about gender, patriarchy and feminism not only with my colleagues and not only at trainings, but at home with my husband and my sisters. It’s funny, I would be so excited to talk about my training (and nothing else) that sometimes I would bore my husband. However, he was generally very supporting of my personal and professional development during this period. He took a lot of interest in my training, and often helped me link gender with broader socio-political issues. But I always wanted to talk about the training, nothing else. I was completely filled up with excitement. I would be surrounded by books and articles at home. That was a big change for the family as well.

My fear as a teacher of Women’s Studies

In touching upon the changes I was noticing in myself, I can’t help but think of Gloria Bowley. In talking about her experience of engaging with Women’s studies as a coordinator at Berkley, she wrote “All of us who are now teaching and writing in Women’s Studies do have training in a single discipline. We know what it takes to be an ‘expert’ in one area and thus are afraid to cross this boarder into unknown territory. We might be caught saying something utterly wrong about a field nor ‘our own’ (Bowley 1983:40).”





I was fearful as well. Almost all faculty members who were prepared to run the classes had gone through similar experiences because they came from varied disciplines. Not a single teacher had a Women's Studies background. I still remember my first few classes as a teacher. The first one is memorable. I could not sleep the whole night in the fear that tomorrow I had to go to the class. Unlike in Home Science, I did not have adequate knowledge to be a so called "good teacher". However, my fear proved unwarranted after the first class ended. The pedagogy of Women's Studies allowed me to be familiar with the students at personal level. The class began with experience sharing. While sharing personal stories, some cried, some laughed and some remained critical. My experience was similar to what Sheila Ruth discusses about the nature of Women's Studies classes. Ruth notes that the feminist class consists of "an acceptance of an even emphasis on the personal-affective element in learning; and a warm, human relationship among persons in the class, students and teachers (Ruth 1990: 12-13)

Evolution of the program



I wanted to share my personal journey with you to highlight the evolution I have been through, thanks to Women's Studies. Now I want to quickly share with you the complex journey Women's Studies as an academic program has taken in Nepal.

Women's Studies as an academic program is gradually gaining a foothold in Nepali academia. In 2009, Gender Studies was introduced as formal two-year Master's program for the first time in the country. Within two years, Tribhuvan University will likely start rolling Gender Studies as a major in undergrad schools across the nation. Additionally, many departments at both Tribhuvan and other universities have either incorporated or added gender components to their curricula, including Sociology, Anthropology, and Geography. Now WS has spread to other



disciplines as well, including English, Economics and History. What is inspiring is that the new scholarship on women and gender has trickled down to pre-college levels as well - Five years ago, Gender Studies was added as an optional course in the national curriculum for 12th grade. These are all huge achievements.

Publications, refresher trainings and networking have also been key structural components that have supported the evolution of WS in Nepal. A periodic publication by the title of *Hamro Sansar* ("Our world" in Nepali) is an example of a Women's Studies journal that focuses on topics such as gender mainstreaming in Nepal and violence against women. Started in 1998, this journal remains an important source of reading materials for students. Refresher trainings also play an important role in keeping teachers updated about globally, regionally and locally evolving gender issues. The fact that some of trainings are supported not just technically but also financially by feminist friends through organization such as SNV, UNFPA and FAO across South Asia shows just how much commitment there is to help this program flourish. Similarly, networking with local and regional women's organizations has provided a space to connect the program with feminists and feminist issues at local and regional level. For example, there was continuous resistance to violence against women via various INGOs and NGOs in Nepal in the 1990s. Because teachers and students of WS were able to network with members of the larger women's network in Nepal, we were able to participate in such movements. This shows that the WS program has leveraged connections between academic and activism to bring prominent gender issues to light. Women's Studies did not evolve in vacuum. It has huge impact on both students and teachers. I am going to share here the impact of the study program on me as a teacher.



Impact of the program

This program has had a huge impact on me personally, and also on students and the faculties. Women's Studies has over the last 20 years raised a palpable feminist consciousness and also allowed us to develop a nuanced perspective on gender. In a way, the major objective of the program to produce graduates with perspectives on both gender and feminism – i.e., the ability to put women at the center of questions about social structures, and the ability to analyze the relationships between men and women – is en route to being achieved.

At a personal level, Women's Studies changed my life in many ways. It transformed me from a docile, non-reactive, and hesitant woman to a conscious, vocal, assertive and relatively independent individual. In addition, I have become a better partner, more a friend to my daughter(only child) than an over protecting mother and a caring daughter to my aged mother. In other words, without Women's Studies I would not have become a feminist. I developed a distinct way of looking at myself, my surroundings and the larger society I lived in. Feminism for me has since then been a way of living with dignity, respect and purpose. Illustratively, in the initial phase of running Women's studies, I was often challenged with a very patriarchal question. One senior male colleague from the university during a seminar asked me, "We have heard that you have been producing feminists at Padma Kanya campus. Is it true?" He continued, "When I first heard the news from my male colleague from your campus, I could not believe it. I was rather shocked". I immediately answered him, saying, "If we are producing feminists, so what? We are not producing criminals". The atmosphere was a bit tense for a while. When I reflect back on this conversation with the male colleague, I realized that I could only have responded to him with such confidence and clarity because of my engagement with Women's Studies. As a Home Science teacher, I was shy, non-reactive and obedient. I would



have probably not reacted to him and stayed silent. I had never ever realized I could react to him with such courage. I am glad I did so, and even in the moment I felt happy. This change did not happen in a day or a year. It is a gradual process that I am still part of.

Framing the context

In acknowledging how feminist movements, academics and activists shaped Women's Studies trajectory in Nepal (and on my own agency), I now must contextualize the impact of two key larger themes that have affected Women's Studies journey so far. First, I will touch upon the post-1990 democratic set-up in Nepal that fueled significant socio-political changes including a new constitution which for the first time in the country's history, conceptualized men and women as equal citizens. Second, I will describe the interconnection between feminist movements and evolution of Women's Studies.



The Post -1990 era witnessed major socio-political changes in Nepal. The establishment of a multi-party parliamentary system after a sustained struggle against absolute monarchy, a consequent new Democratic constitution, and subsequent democratic processes provided ample opportunities for people of Nepal including women to raise voices for their rights. Women for the first time in Nepal's history were conceptualized in equal term with men constitutionally. In particular, the constitution for the first time explicitly stated that discrimination on the basis of sex was unconstitutional, marking a major victory for the women's movement.

However, I must go back in time even before 1990 to identify the roots of changes in Nepali women's lives. Three structural processes in particular - Nepal's gradual entry into a liberal capitalist economy, the 1975 global conference on women, and the state's emphasis on women's education - were instrumental in transforming the status of women. Due to the liberalization of Nepal's economy, job creation



flourished in both agriculture and non-agriculture sectors, and resultantly, women received significant opportunities to go out of home and earn. Also as a result, women's societal image and roles were re-conceptualized, in that they were no longer just housewives or mothers, but earning members of the family as well. Similarly, as a member state of the UN, Nepal participated in the first global conference on women in 1975 in Mexico City, and subsequently the state committed to ensure women's participation in development activities. For example, a micro-credit program targeted towards women, called "Production Credit for Rural Women," became one of the state's capstone programs to bring rural women into development process. Similarly, as a consequence of the state's commitment, the government set up a separate women development organization to coordinate and enhance quality of all gender-related activities organized by the non-profit sector in Nepal. It is important here to note the landmark interdisciplinary research on women, titled "Status of Women in Nepal," that was carried out in the late 70's by a group of prominent Nepali women scholars. It leveraged an unprecedented time-use survey of women across districts to quantify and interpret the contribution of women to household and thus Nepal's economy. In addition, women's increasing access to education played a key role in shaping WS's evolution. While approximately two percent of women were literate during the 1950s, the number had gone up to 57 percent by 2011 (CBS 2012). In addition, the previously large and seemingly insurmountable gender gap is shrinking in all levels of schooling. Most importantly, women have outnumbered men in higher education (Parajuli et al. 2016:50). It would have been unimaginable even in the recent past. Increasing access to education has led women to be more assertive at home and in the public sphere as teachers, students, political leaders, etc.

During the 90s, Nepal's feminist movement rose to prominence and specifically targeted education. While previously there was no urgency to transform Nepal's educational landscape, including a lack of will to



analyze the androcentric nature of the landscape itself, the feminist movement in the 90s started to question androcentric nature of the whole education system. Though women's movement in Nepal has a long history, feminists and women activists were focused more on the establishment of democracy and multiparty system, less on their own rights and even less on their individual identity as a citizen before 1990 (Acharya 2012: 8). The rise of feminist consciousness during 1990s (Acharya 2012: 8) and the introduction of Women's Studies thus concurs in Nepal. There are many governmental, non-governmental and international non-governmental agencies which have been planning, implementing and evaluating gender focused programs both in the urban and rural areas of Nepal ...therefore, study programs on women are not entirely new in Nepal. However, several features of the new post-graduate- diploma program set it apart from the rest (Mishra 1999).

Women's Studies as an academic program has evolved, and is continuing to grow, amidst many challenges. Some of the challenges are institutional, ranging from universities' unwillingness to fund the program to questioning the legitimacy of the program.

Challenges to introduce the program

It was not easy to introduce a separate Women's Studies program in Tribhuvan University in 1990s. Women's Studies was a new scholarship on women. It had relatively a short history in academia globally. Most people did not know what the discipline actually means. It was, therefore, not surprising that the university authority needed more clarity about the discipline. Nonetheless, several visionary and well informed academicians in Home Science department like Dr. Leela Devi KC., Prof. Laxmi Keshari Manandhar and Dr. Chandra Bhadra played significant role in convincing the authority about the need and importance of the discipline.





Funding issue

Another challenge to Women's Studies was funding. Even after university authorities agreed to formalize the program, they refused to support it financially. One of the members of Tribhuvan University administration told some teachers that in order to run the program, they would need to charge students a separate fee. He added, "University can't support the program they have never heard about. He continued, "Either you have to run the program by students' fee, or stop thinking about running the program. We have so many grounded disciplines such as Political Science, and Economics to support financially. Those disciplines have potentials to contribute to the society. We are already under financial constraint". It was an extremely trying time for the Women's Studies department, which eventually took the bold and quite unique decision in running the program by students' fee. They challenged patriarchal nature of the university system this way. After almost two decades, the bias continues. Tribhuvan University has not supported Women's Studies financially. But the program has been running successfully.

Issue about the program itself

Another challenge the program had to face was criticism from within Padma Kanya campus. As I have already mentioned, the campus is the oldest and the largest women's college in Nepal. There are hundreds of teachers (both men and women) and thousands of students. Ever since gender trainings were initiated in the early 90s to prepare WS teachers, faculty and staff from various other departments would express a range of perspectives, from cautious curiosity to stark rejection, about the program. Some asked, "What is Women's Studies? We heard about women's education, is it similar to that?" A few others were more critical, stating " We have heard that Women's Studies is a sort of feminist training. Padma Kanya has a long history of producing





good women graduates, not feminists” . Some of them even went two steps forward and claimed personally harmful allegations about Women’s Studies teachers, such as: “Those teachers who are already married will get divorced, those who are single will remain singles forever”. Despite such claims, we continued with our work and training. Amidst all personal and institutional challenges, women’s studies has flourished.

Dress-code

I will bring up one final example of how Women’s Studies has been challenged so far in Nepal, and this one resonates with me personally. Padma Kanya Campus has had a long history of not only producing notable women figures of Nepal, but also simultaneously perpetuating patriarchal norms and values. It has had a strong dress code for both students and teachers—a saree. In the early and mid- 90s, wearing anything but a saree to campus meant resisting patriarchy itself. When a few Women’s Studies teachers wore the more logistically-convenient ‘kurta salwar’ to class, they faced quite the furor. Initially, campus-wide authorities reminded them of the campus rule of dress code, warning the teachers that action would be taken against them if they didn’t change their outfits. Perhaps what was even more damaging was that their own colleagues looked at these teachers as “too forward.” Teachers who defied the saree were considered feminist teachers who did not care about the history of the campus. However, Women’s Studies teachers did not listen. They did not care, mostly because they were so pre-occupied with the activities of the new program. Additionally, it was convenient to wear ‘kurta salwar’, and we didn’t see any harm to students, other teachers, or even larger Nepali society in doing so. We see the dress code merely the control over women. We wanted to challenge that authority.



To conclude, Women's studies has transformed me to a feminist as it has continued to transform lives of many women around the globe. It has been playing a significant role in bringing changes in Nepali society in general and women's lives in particular. Women's Studies, which has strong feminist base, has been producing graduates with feminist perspective. Armed with such perspective, they have been able to comprehend and analyze gender issues at home and outside. Nonetheless, Women's Studies as an academic program has evolved, and is continuing to grow, amidst many challenges. It is important to acknowledging how feminist movements, academics and activists shaped Women's Studies trajectory in Nepal.

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POEM
(On the outgoing EC of IAWS)



By Kumkum Roy

We see
The EC
It has been a wonderful place to be
In and a part of our lives together
As we figured out why, when and whether
Things should be done or left unsaid
Working our way towards roses and bread.

Before I begin I must apologize to Geeta who is both young and wise for
not finding a picture of hers and not powerpointing a verse
In her honour and praise. May the young feminists continue to thrive as towards our
goals we strive Anita, for reminding us constantly
Of issues we push beyond memory
That disabilities are a part of our lives
Energetic, strong, courageous and brave
Ensures that we enjoy, think and we save

Chhaya is always pragmatic and wise
Willing to pare down our dreams to right size
Reminding us of what the IAWS can mean
To women in villages, town, in between
The big bad cities where most of us live.

Veena energetic, quiet and precise
Has taught us that in documentation lies
Perhaps the most important way
To preserve the histories of the everyday
Of organizations and ourselves
So we look forward to sifting through the shelves



Of the archives that she has taught us to treasure

Shaila caught in a reflective mood
We may not quite know what makes her brood.
Is it the website, the accommodation?
Is it the call of the wild or the nation?

Ritu our financier par excellence
Is found here in a reflective stance
Perhaps the funds haven't flowed in yet
Or may be there are loose ends to be knotted
And matters of importance to be sorted
Of course we know it is Nandini's job
Sundry creditors to charmingly fob
But she's perhaps contemplating the subthemes
Which range from nightmares to lovely dreams
Ilina steering the motley team
As well as the multitude and the stream
Touching hearts and minds of women and men
As she sang, and will sing again
Of bread and roses...

Not to miss the attentive Samita Sen
Indomitable, resourceful, I could say it again
The big picture, the details, nothing escape her
As she helps us realize our dreams for the future

Indu, of course, multi-tasking as usual
I leave you to decipher what she's doing in the visual
Is she talking, listening, catching a nap?
May be we should ask the photographer who took the snap.

Meera reflecting and news lettering us all
We wait for her mails, we wait for her call





She pushes us beyond the matter of fact,
Compelling us to think, write, and act.

And then...
Finally, ending with my favourite one
Of battles we fought, of wars that were won
Of the spirit that animated our team
And which made these three years seem
Pleasurable, even as we pushed against odds,
Perhaps with the goddesses if not with the gods.

If you are wondering who is this poetess, It is Kumkum, the historian, no less. She watches, quiet in the melee of ECS he rhymes, she writes minutes for us to see All done in a moment in the quite of the capital city, Overall, all in all, wonderful in simplicity!

Samita Sen





Greetings for the Twenty Year Old: From One of the Midwives

Vina Mazumdar (2002)

You are twenty, going on twenty one, soon you will think you are old,
All who surround you, steer and guide you, some not so young, nor bold.
You are a rover, without any cover, not even a permanent home.
Many who love you, want to settle you, within the walls of a room-
Because they believe in - order and ruling
Filing and accounting order.
Records are needed, as and when heeded
To avoid in the future - disorder.
But you, my darling, were born without a farthing —
To challenge a powerful system,
The symbol of a hope, for many who were broke
But believed they could transform the system
Not through destruction, but persuasion,
Carrying the torch for knowledge -
Through research and teaching, action, debating —
Enriching young minds with courage.
Structures these days, age faster than earlier,
And become homes without people,
With declining rationale, sponsors and personnel
The life-force moves away — as natural.
Life is dynamic, Knowledge not static.
'Tis a mistake to tie them down.
Challenge especially, needs strategically
New thrusts, ways and not frown
On changing methodology, for order and maintenance
Of records, history and the spirit -



Of moving on gracefully, welcome affectionately
New people ready to (wo)man it. Retain your youth, and remain a rover
Keep on challenging the system!
Systems — though obdurate, hesitant and cussed —
Know they must bend to the wind.
Fanning that wind is your raison d'être —
Think up new ways to do it better.
Monolithic models hid most of our reality,
Bharat darshan opens doors to diversity



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yks ejhtka dks yk; s gā
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; s nokbZ okys MKDVj ugha
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; s oclZ kklv vuksh gS
dklQd SVt vkj F; kjj; ka dh ; gka ejEer gkrh gS

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□



(Hearing that several big doctors have come,
People have brought patients to the conference.
Oh no, these are not doctors who distribute medicines,
These ones write books which no one reads.
What kind of a fare is this; without any shops and swings,
This is a fare of intellectuals and whoever does not understand jargon
is lonely here.
Look how thick the paper is,
No one has understood it but the discussion is heated.
Come to the conference academics,
We (activists) will give you all the data and you make your theories.
We will take data from all the activists
Then quickly write our papers and publish them only in our names.
We will go to the conference.
And remove the dichotomy between theory and action.)

* * *



**List of Executive Committee Members from
1981-2014**

| Term | Name | Position Held |
|---|---|--|
| 1981-1984 Mumbai Thiruvananthapuram | Madhuri R Shah Hemalata Swarup Vina Mazumdar Neera Desai Jyoti R. Trivedi Devaki Jain | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Member Member |
| 1985-1987 Chandigarh | Madhuri R Shah Leela Dube Lucy M. Jacob Susheela Kaushik K. Saradmoni Karuna Mary Braganza Vina Mazumdar Renu Debi Gita Sen Asok Mitra U. Kalpagam Phulrenu Guha Pam Rajput | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |
| 1987-1989 Visakhapatnam | Ila Pathak Surinder Jetley Susheela Kaushik Prabha Mahale Vina Mazumdar Madhuri R. Shah Lucy M. Jacob | President Vice President & Editor General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Ex-Officio Ex-Officio |

| | | |
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| 1989-1991 Kolkata | Kamalini H. Bhansali Sharda Jain Surinder Jetley Manoshi Mitra Kumud Sharma Vina Mazumdar Rohini Gawankar Ila Pathak Susheela Kaushik S. Andalakshmy Nirmala Banerjee Zoya Hasan Neena Kaplash Irina Sen J. Varalakshmi Jashodhara Bagchi | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Co-opted Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |
| 1991-1993 Mysore | Devaki Jain Amita Verma S. Anandalakshmy C.P. Sujaya Zarina Bhatt Piyali Sengupta Kamalini Bhansali Surinder Jetley V. Bhavani Snyamnarayan Chouhary Susheela Kaushik Rameshwari Varma Radha Bhatt Armaity Desai | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |

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| 1993-1995 Jaipur | Neera Desai Pam Rajput Kamla Bhasin C.P Sujaya Rohini Gawankar Nandita Gandhi Devaki Jain S. Anandalakshmy Ranjana Kakkar Manjeet Bhatia Jai Chandiram Neelum Gorhe Rameshwari Varma Zarina Bhatt Kavita Srivastava Fatima Burnad | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |
| 1996-1998 Pune | Nirmala Banerjee Sunita Pathania Chhaya Datar Kalpana Kannabiran Rohini Gawankar Kavita Punjabi Neera Desai Kamla Bhasin Devaki Jain Gabriele Dietrich Usha Kanhere Usha Thakkar Manu Bhaskar Bhavana Mehta Manjeet Bhatia B. Ratna Kumari | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |

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| 1998-2000 Hyderabad | Vina Mazumdar Rama Melkhote Kalpana Kannabiran Bina Srinivasan Divya Pandey Geetanjali Gangoli Nirmala Banerjee Chhaya Datar Kamla Bhasin Rohini Gawankar Maithreyi Krishnaraj Pam Rajput Seema Sakhare Bina Aggarwal Nandini Upreti Jayashree Vencatesan Vatika Sibal | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member Member |
| 2000-2002 Bhubaneswar | Zarina Bhatt Pushpa Bhawe Lakshmi Lingam Jarjum Ete Rameshwari Varma Vidyut Bhagwat Jasodhara Bagchi Kumud Sharma Gabriel Dietrich Vina Mazumdar Kalpana Kannabiran Seema Sakhare Surekha Dalvi Vasavi Kiro Anjali Bhagwat | President Vice- President General Secretary Jt. Secretary, Coordinator Northeastern Region Treasurer Editor Coordinator Eastern Region Coordinator Northern Region Coordinator Southern Region Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member |

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| 2003-2005 Dona Paula | Kumud Sharma Rameshwari Varma Veena Poonacha Padmini Swaminathan C.S. Lakshmi Sharmila Rege Zarina Bhatt Lakshmi Lingam Asha Hans Indu Agnihotri Ritu Menon Uma Chakravarti | President Vice President General Secretary Treasurer Joint Secretary Editor Ex-officio Ex-officio Member Member Member Member |
| 2005-2008 Lucknow | Sumi Krishna Aparna Mahanta Mary E. John Joy Deshmukh- Ranadive C P Sujaya Kavita Panjabi Zarina Bhatt Kamala Ganesh Nisha Shende Kumud Sharma Veena Poonacha | President, Coordinator Southern Region Vice President, Coordinator North eastern Region General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor and Coordinator Eastern Region Member &Coordinator Northern Region Member &Coordinator Western Region Member &Coordinator Central Region Ex-officio Ex-officio |

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| 2008-2011 Wardha | Anita Ghai Meera Velayudhan Samita Sen Rukmini Sen M Indira Anandhi.S Sumi Krishna Mary E. John Ilina Sen Meena Gopal Uma Chakravarti Wandana Sonalkar | President Vice-President General Secretary Joint Secretary Treasurer Editor, Ex-officio Ex-officio Member, Member Member Member |
| 2011-2014 Guwahati | Ilina Sen Ritu Dewan Indu Agnihotri Kumkum Roy Nandini Manjrekar Meera Velayudhan Shaila Desouza Chhaya Datar Veena Poonacha Anita Ghai Samita Sen | President Vice President General Secretary Joint Secretary & Coordinator Northern Region Treasurer Editor Coordinator Southern Region Coordinator Western Region Member (Institutional) Ex-officio Ex-officio & Coordinator Eastern Region Ex-officio |

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| 2014-2017 Chennai | Ritu Dewan | President |
| | Kiran Moghe | Vice President |
| | Indrani Mazumdar | General Secretary |
| | Syeda Sakira Sahin | Joint Secretary & Eastern Region In -Charge |
| | Manimekalai | Treasurer |
| | Anagha Tambe | Editor & Co-ordinator, Western Region |
| | Mini Sukumar | Co-ordinator, Southern Region |
| | Ilina Sen | (Ex-officio & Joint Co- ordinator, Western Region |
| | Indu Agnihotri | Ex-Officio & Co-ordinator, Northern Region |
| | Kalpana Karunakaran Aishika Chakraborty | Website Co-ordinator Member (Institutional) |
