

IVth National Conference, 1988: Waltair (Vishakapatnam)

Statement of the President

Ila Pathak

As we begin our general body meeting today a few words from me would be in order. I only want to state how I have felt as the President of the Indian Association for Women's Studies. When my name was proposed for election as per the election rules in IAWS I was, frankly, surprised. My victory in the election redoubled my surprise. But that also was nothing compared to the astonishment I experienced when the outgoing President Dr. Madhuribahen Shah proposed my name as the next President. Before I could realise what was happening, somebody had seconded the proposal and all present in the EC meeting had welcomed it. I had gone to that meeting of 31 March 1987 only to put in an appearance and develop a better understanding of the IAWS. I have formed a habit of gaining experience wherever possible. IAWS election. I thought, gave me an opportunity to wander in "fields fresh and pastures new" as Matthew Arnold expressed in his poem 'Scholar Gipsy'.

I confess I took a long time to understand the functioning of the Association and the personalities connected with it. Even today I do not think I have grasped everything fully. But my almost two-year-long association with the persons concerned and the target we tried to achieve have developed within me a fairly clear sense of what IAWS can take on.

What is achieved during the term of this EC will be reported by our very able General Secretary Dr. Susheelabahen Kaushik and Dr. Vina Mazumdar the dynamic person who took up the onerous duties of the Treasurer. Between Susheelabahen and Vinadi the Association has been efficiently and carefully looked after. I am only trying to put in few words about what I have seen, experienced and thought about IAWS.

It has been my feeling that as a national level Association IAWS is not sufficiently well known throughout the country. We, in Gujarat, tried to inform teachers in universities and colleges. Many responded by saying that they did not know of such an organisation and would become members. What is true of Gujarat could be true of many other states. We perhaps need an awareness-raising campaign about IAWS existence also.

The Newsletters that IAWS is publishing could be a very useful and powerful medium for us. The information we need is about what is happening in this country in the area of Women's Studies and Activism thereby keeping a track of the Women's Movement here. As one wants to know about the fresh research undertaken, so one wants to know the findings of workshops, seminars, conferences etc. convened on women's issues. We have not been able to build the network but that could be done now.

I have always wondered if researchers could be of help to activists. Just as a researcher starts working, available literature on the chosen theme is scanned and also reported. An activist needs to do that too, in a given situation it would be helpful if the activist could find out the details of any action programme undertaken by any activist group in a similar situation. Such documentation would help. But one does not know where to turn to for such help. The activist

also needs to survey the socio-economic status or may be the health status of the target group. The action programme undertaken by activists to be evaluated periodically, not only to find out the impact of the programme on the target group but also for the need to change the inputs or the approach or may be the need to end the programme. However, these need to be quickly done. One cannot take 12 to 18 months, for its relevance to the activist would be lost. Could we have some specific method devised for the use of activists?

Regional seminars on Women's Studies are necessary to spread awareness and provide a wider base to the Association. Regional/ Zonal Secretaries could look after the arrangements which the General Secretary could direct. These would help the IAWS cross the barrier of language as in such seminars regional language could be used with on-the-spot translations wherever necessary. The most important would be that in such seminars activists also could participate and that would help bridge the barriers between the scholars and the activists. The Women's Movement can gain momentum only if the efforts of the researchers and activists are co-ordinated.

More interaction, more dialogue, and better understanding would help generate mutual respect and friendliness which would replace the feeling of discomfort that the activist experiences in the company of her learned sisters. Let us look forward to the future in which the paths of studies and activism meet.