

T H E  
V I I  
NATIONAL  
CONFERENCE  
OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

*Membership et al. (Draft)  
mailed 27th Oct*

**The Indian Association Of Women's Studies**

*Looking Forward-Looking Back :  
In Search Of Feminist Visions,  
Alternative Paradigms And Practices*

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE CONFERENCE THEME

In the past few years, the Indian scene - the economy, politics, political groups, social movements and State response to them - has changed so rapidly that fifteen years seems long ago. The contemporary phase of the women's movement was at its peak then - it had dramatised issues like sexual violence against women, dowry murders and pornography. Some within the movement voiced their dissatisfaction with the prevailing development paradigm, our destructive, unsustainable economy and the feminisation of poverty; others had condemned the coercive family planning practices of the government and focused on the reproductive rights of women. The women's movement's critique of the existing socio-political system highlighted the invisibility of women, their marginalisation, discounting of their issues and the systematic perpetuation of patriarchal controls.

The movement re-introduced concepts like patriarchy, feminism, sexual division of labour into its language and analysis. It started looking at and articulating issues in broader terms and moved from talking about women's issues to developing a feminist perspective on all issues. Activists and academicians had aided in the development of women's studies and made inroads into development planning, census enumeration and government schemes. Along with critiques and debates emerged some alternative policies and practices. Women's studies experimented with an interdisciplinary approach, a different methodology, looked afresh at women's issues and stubbornly attempted to influence entrenched disciplines. The Indian Association of Women's Studies was born out of this churning of activities. Women's groups used different ways of organising, of non formal education, health care, counselling women in distress, and developed a creative use of media and structures for group functioning. Some tried to fuse theory and praxis, beliefs and life-styles. The women's movement called for a transformation and creation of a just, democratic and equal society.

The fifteen year period of struggle has yielded some noticeable changes, some failures, hopes and many grey areas of complexity and confusion. A brief stock-taking would make an impressive list of achievements. This is true especially for the State which has come up with many legal reforms, policies for women, a National Commission for Women, and reservation for electoral seats. Women's Studies has now been accepted as a distinct sphere and women's studies cells are spread to different parts of the university network. The response of women to the movement motivated the growth of many small groups, rejuvenated older ones and political parties co-opted women's issues on to their agendas.

Today, we need to recapitulate our earlier critique, analysis and strategies. How have the alternatives which we had proposed and experimented with, fared? How have the schemes, legal reforms, family courts etc. which we had struggled for helped women? What sort of changes have women's groups undergone? Some earlier campaigns have withered --- e.g. the pornography one has reached a dead end. How do we now look at this issue in the context of satellite and cable TV.? What is the relationship of the State to the movement? How do we understand the rising fundamentalism of women and their active participation in communal riots? New trends have been introduced in industry, agriculture and fisheries as a result of globalisation and liberalisation; what effects will they have on women's domestic and paid labour? Has the presence of women's studies cells sensitised the various disciplines of the social sciences? Has the feminist debate on methodologies been carried into each discipline? What has been the effect of institutionalising women's studies?

During the last fifteen years, women have participated very actively in other movements and campaigns --- the campaign against big dams, campaign against religious fundamentalism, for secularism, civil liberties, democratic and human rights campaigns, etc. Have we developed a feminist perspective on these issues and has that been integrated into these movements? What has been our experience of relating to other mass movements? We need an honest critique of our past actions programs, alliances which will provide us with a concrete basis for evolving our future strategy.

Our understanding of women's oppression has lead us to strategise, devise alternatives and programmes and in that process, evolve a vision of a better society. We need to once again articulate these visions. The first phase of the women's movement hoped for a society in which all backward social practices would be eliminated. From European liberalism, the movement moved towards a more socialist vision of a society free of class, caste and gender oppression. However, today this vision is slowly evaporating under the glare of globalisation and new technology. How have these new forces social, political, economic forces influenced our vision? Do we, today, have one or many visions? The environment and green movements have put forward a plea for sustainable agriculture, curtailed consumerism, decentralised political structures which would entail a different life-style and use of natural resources. Some others have revived the Gandhian vision of a decentralised, technology-free, self sustaining society. How do we in the movement relate to these visions? Does the women's movement need to join other movements to evolve a common vision?

The VII National Conference of Women's Studies will  
focus on:

- ❖ a stock-taking of the women's movement's many programmes and alternatives and a review of how the new trends in our economy and in society have influenced women and men and the movement;
- ❖ encouraging analysis and critiques of our programmes projects and experiments;
- ❖ unfolding of our visions and our hopes;
- ❖ developing strategies for the future.

Everyday will have one plenary session on an important theme in the form of a panel discussion with four to five speakers on each panel.

During the afternoons (three in all) there will be a number of parallel workshops on sub-themes which have been identified and described in the following pages. Caste and class concerns will be interwoven in all the sub-themes. The scope of discussion in each sub-theme will be finalised in consultation with sub-theme coordinators and others interested in and knowledgeable on the subject.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE OPENING SESSION

### *a) Voices of Resistance and Struggle*

*“As we resist and struggle we sow seeds of hope”*

It has been the usual practice of the LAWS to invite an eminent personality, expert or dignitary to address the Conference on the opening day.

In keeping with the main theme of the Conference and the spirit and tradition of the women's movement, it was decided that the conference will be inaugurated by five working class women representing different movements, resisting injustice and different forms of violence, inching their way towards more just, democratic and ecological ways of being, knowing and doing. Examples of these are women working in the informal sector, in the anti-liquor movement, the movement against big-dams, the dalit and tribal women's movement, deserted and single women's struggles. The LAWS will invite some of these women to share their experiences of resistance and struggle, their mobilisation strategies, their aspirations towards a better future for all.

(Since these stories will be told in their own languages, English translations will be arranged).

### *b) Keynote Address: Dr. Vandana Shiva*

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## PANEL I

### *Rajasthan State Panel*

In the last decade, women's mobilisation in Rajasthan has shown two very broad trends. The first is the coming together of women on many issues. The other trend which arises out of the same set of experiences indicates differences in approaches, strategies and understanding. This in a sense is also the emerging pattern all over the country. Both these sets of experiences/trends have thrown up a number of questions over which collective reflection needs to be done. This panel intends to present experiences of women representing the different sections and perspectives of the work done in Rajasthan in Government Programmes, NGOs, Human Rights Organisations, Academics (Universities and Research Organisations) and other agencies and professions.

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## PANEL II

### *Women's Visions and Strategies for a Peaceful and Democratic South Asia*

In 1989 a group of South Asian feminists stated the following in a declaration: "As women, our lives are subject to control through predominantly patriarchal structures and family laws and institutions, often justified on the basis of religion. The onslaught of capitalism and imperialism in the post independence period, has led to increasing restrictions on our space and access to resources and a destruction of our traditional skills and knowledge systems.

"Along with other marginalised communities we have been subject to increasing levels of State, community and family violence. Our voices are not heard as we are excluded from the political process which projects class privileged dynastic rule, whether by men or women leaders. The disintegration of civil society, the increasing centralisation of authority in the hands of the State, often backed with fundamentalist sanction, leaves us vulnerable to constant attack inside and outside our homes."

However women in the region have not remained silent in the face of different kinds of violence within each country of South Asia, and between them. They have resisted and challenged family violence, violence unleashed by the fundamentalists, violence in and by the media, State violence, etc. Although tentative, women have also expressed their dreams and visions of a peaceful and democratic South Asia. They have stated, in different fora, that because of geographical, historical and cultural inter - connections, 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 ahead.

This panel will bring together five or six women from different South Asian countries to share stories of resistance and struggle against one particular kind of violence and their vision of just, democratic, peaceful and sustainable communities, countries — and a region.

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## PANEL III

### *Resurgent Patriarchies*

Patriarchy, as a system of male domination, exists, appears and re-appears in different ways and forms. The forces of fundamentalism have resurrected new and old patriarchal structures. In some communities, women are being encouraged to enter politics and armed conflicts, in others they are told to return to secluded domesticity. New economic policies are creating conditions which are either pushing women into or out of their homes and the labour market. Right-wing economics and right wing politics are simultaneously working against women's democratic and secular rights, their access to resources and to mobility, while at the same time, reinforcing a patriarchal culture. Values, totally at variance with feminist values, like competition, individualism, centralisation, hierarchical leadership etc. are once again gaining ground in an ideology-less world. A different culture/cultures is taking over — of consumerism, of religious intolerance and prejudice, of the mass media, of a patriarchal family. Institutions like the education system, the market, political structures, the judiciary are all affected.

This panel will try and anticipate the concerns of the sub-themes, and ask well-known women writers to speak about the inter-connections and trends they foresee.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SUB THEMES

### SUB THEME 1

#### *Family And Women's Sexuality*

In the standard language of social sciences, the family is regarded as a basic but innocuous, building block of society. There are debates on its forms and changes within it, but rarely on its internal politics or its objective functions. The State accepts the family's authority on its members even at the cost of inroads being made on the constitutional human rights of women and children. Feminists, specially in South Asia, have highlighted the deeply hierarchial nature of the family. They have argued that the family socialises women not as individuals in their own right, but as a family resource to serve its numerous functions in the interest of patriarchal authority. The State does not question this authority because it has made the family responsible for many social security functions, such as care of the young, the old, the sick and the unemployed. In order to accomplish this the family needs to have complete control over women's productive and reproductive labour. As the new economic policies lead to further limits on State expenditure on welfare activities, the later is likely to lead to further support to family control on women.

Women's sexuality is similarly placed entirely at the disposal of the family,

making all expressions of it outside the family, illegitimate. On the other hand, the use of women's sexuality outside marriage in prostitution and sex tourism also benefits their male controllers as well as the State in its new emphasis on the tourist trade. Whether a community permits remarriage of widows and deserted women or not, there are strong taboos on women indulging in any sexual relations outside marriage.

Whether or not there were traditional outlets for women's sexuality in any other form, modern South Asian society is still unprepared to acknowledge other forms of alliances between men and women or between women themselves. This has inhibited the growth of alternative support systems for women when they are outside the marriage and family structures. In this workshop an attempt will be made to conceptualise the feminist understanding of the politics of family and of 'legitimate' sexuality. Special emphasis will be placed on explicating the contradiction between women's rights as citizens, and the State's endorsement of family authority. Lastly, an attempt will be made to visualise alternative alliances and support systems for women which can find a space in our society.

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## SUB THEME 2

### *Women and Media*

The media scenario in the country has undergone cataclysmic changes since the beginning of this decade. It is obvious to even casual observers that the implications for women are grave. However, it is impossible to analyse the impact of these changes on women or to think in terms of interventions and alternatives without seeking to first understand the changes, how they came about and what exactly they mean.

It is therefore proposed that the first session on women and media be devoted to presentations aimed at examining the context in which changes have taken place and understanding their political, economic, legal, social and cultural implications. Among the phenomenon to be investigated in this regard are : Star TV invasion, the ZEE TV success story, Doordarshan's response and changing mandate/role, the status of cable operators, the Supreme court judgement on air waves and tangentially, ISRO's rationale for a dedicated transponder/satellite for development related, interactive communication.

The second session will highlight certain aspects of the changed media through some case studies. Among these may be

the following: the Phoolan Devi/Bandit Queen controversy, the Anjali Kapur brouhaha; the media hype over beauty contests; the Jayalalitha phenomenon; media reporting on Kashmiri women; media reporting on women's anti-arack agitation in Andhra Pradesh; media reporting on the controversy over women poets in A.P.; reporting on the hysterectomies performed on mentally handicapped women in Maharashtra; the training of women elected to gram panchayats via satellite; the middle class celebration via regional language satellite programmes; the implications of the Santa Barbara cult; and what market researchers are uncovering about "the Indian woman".

The third session will focus on interventions and alternatives in this new context, wherein the very nature of cultural production has undergone considerable change. Apart from documenting the ongoing struggles of existing alternative media (like feminist publications), it is proposed that a serious effort be made to evaluate the alternatives media created by women's movement as well as to analyse the motivation, impact and possible future direction of feminist efforts to influence media representation of women.

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### SUB THEME 3

#### *Culture, Identity and Women's Rights: Exploring New Directions in Feminist Praxis*

Feminist mobilisation and writing in India has in the past ten years been preoccupied with questions of culture, the increasing and violent polarisation of difference, and the emergence of a right wing dominant caste and community hegemony. Several women's groups and individual scholars have attempted to grapple with this troubling phenomenon through a range of actions from writing to providing relief to people trapped in violent situations. There is now fairly detailed documentation available of communal and caste riots, as also analyses from various view points about how identity politics impacts on women from different castes, classes and communities. There is a fair degree of consensus for the view that, more often than not, the identity of a community is constructed on the bodies of women. It is also generally agreed among feminists from different streams, that there is an inevitable conflict of rights for women who are located both within communities as well as within the liberal democratic State, and although attempts have been made, that there is no easy or simple solution to this conflict.

With this framework in mind, this sub theme will explore:

— The question of cultural nationalism, customary rights, the rights of indigenous peoples within the larger framework of the liberal democratic, secular State. Specifically, explicating attempts, if any, to evolve feminist paradigms of culture in recent years, and discussing the specific ways in which deep contradictions arising from multiple identities may be resolved.

— Culture and discrimination, explicating efforts by dalit activists and scholars to confront and address discrimination through new frameworks of theorising, and radical mobilisation strategies. The aim here will also be to discuss and develop support and solidarity networks.

— Culture and expression, exploring the spaces women create for themselves in an oppressive environment. This section will discuss efforts in contemporary India, and will primarily be concerned with questions of spirituality religious expression, and religious beliefs - areas that are in an important sense are 'womanspace' and yet have never been seriously thought through and discussed but often dismissed, within the women's movement.

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## SUB THEME 4

### *Women's Writing: Redefinitions, Aesthetics And Future Visions*

Women's writing has been viewed variously in different ages and societies. Often marginalised and viewed as literature restricted in its experience and readership, it has been seen as romantic and unrealistic, or as confined to domestic realism and as a projection of experiences which have less value than mainstream writing. Women's writing and feminist stances have very often resulted in a form of ghettoization. In the present century, it has moved through three distinct phases, the first of women's biographies, autobiographies and experience but still located within an aesthetics of universalization, and with the acceptance of being secondary; then an appropriation and imitation of male models; and now in the third phase there is a conscious exploration of the specific female both in terms of experiences and responses. There is, in this, a questioning of the 'universal' which does not reflect this specificity.

Female specificities, however, do not exist independently in themselves. Their formations are governed by facts of history, class, race, religion and myth. They influence women's perceptions of themselves, their aspirations, their struggles and their projections of alternative structures. Women's experience of space and freedom is framed within these cultural contexts.

Indian women's writing reflects the direction of the women's movement which has sought to work for change and space within the existing social institutions and cultural paradigms rather than opt out of them. It has questioned inequalities, oppression and injustice; it has raised issues of divorce, marriage, widowhood, rape, adultery, female sexuality but primarily within the familial patterns. This sub theme proposes to examine the contemporary writings of Indian women and its aesthetic and ideological dimensions. Literature in any Indian language (including English) can be taken up for consideration but the presentations will have to be either in English or in Hindi. The focus will be on:

— **Redefinitions:** defining feminist writing, identifying female positions within the cultural centres, exploring the relevance and validity of the specifically female vis-a-vis the 'universal'.

— **Aesthetics:** exploring the narrative strategies of women writers, their ways of knowing and stating their experiences.

— **Future visions:** the projections of alternate structures, concepts, societies and view of freedom both within the realistic and the utopian models.

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## SUB THEME 5

### *Creation And Dissemination Of Knowledge And Knowledge Systems*

Women have generally been excluded from mainstream knowledge production. The creation and use of most kinds of knowledge, including science, has been very much a male enterprise. Whatever knowledge women have possessed has not been acknowledged or given legitimacy. Technology as the handmaiden of science has more often than not served patriarchal ends. In the beginning feminists demanded an entry into the male bastions of science and technology, but as their understanding of social processes grew, they saw that merely getting into mainstream science as it is practised would simply perpetuate the same biases - its anthropocentrism, androcentrism, elitism, and its value neutrality.

This led to a search for alternative sources of knowledge, as well as alternative ways of practising science. A critical issue with regard to science, technology and education is the question of who has access to knowledge and who controls knowledge generation and dissemination. It is here that the current threat posed by globalisation of production, technology and media has to be taken seriously. It reinstalls the hegemony of some countries over the rest of the world. Its consequences for international scholarship are severe - turning India into a permanent periphery dependent on the international centres for its research agenda. Knowledge is being rapidly displaced by information. Social sciences are undermined with the over-emphasis on technical education, skill acquisition and vocationalisation, geared to the needs of the market, bereft of any knowledge or ethical base. Another insidious effect is the way homogenisation is paradoxically accompanied by a promotion of cultural relativism that uses ethnicity to defuse the legitimate struggles of women and minorities to forge a more broad based identity. In this scenario, the sub-theme seeks to take up women's responses to these challenges. It proposes to cover the following:

— Analysis of women studies programmes: to what extent have they been successful in achieving their transformative potential; the achievement of women studies in terms of content and direction of scholarship; methodologies in research and teaching; the connecting of theory to practice; impact on students, teachers and university culture; effects on the disciplines, on women's movement and on policy (e.g. through reforming data systems; through advocacy research; through research for gaining information on policy related issues such as new reproductive technologies); the dissemination of this alternative knowledge to people at large (feminist literature, feminist publishing, use of multiple media like posters, videos, theatre, music).

— What kind of interventions have been made through text books and other educational processes?

— What kind of role can or have women played in people's science movements; in alternative technology; and in making a dent in the scientific establishment.

— What type of non-electronic media have been used or have scope in the future for conscientising, for empowering, for mobilising dissent and for reaffirming basic feminist values ?

— What part is played by alliances with feminist network abroad?

Interventions can be in the form of case studies of practices by NGOs or educational establishments such as: production of material at primary school level; non formal educational programmes; use of literacy missions; creative use of government programmes; participation in science and technology programmes to convert them into an opportunity for generating new knowledge; analysis of gender training programmes to understand their potential and limitations; a critical look at programmes of empowerment through knowledge by women NGOs and others.

The workshop will look not at critiques of science but at feminist efforts to overcome them.

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## SUB THEME 6

### *Women-Centered Natural Resource Management: Land, Water And Energy*

In the last few years, the degradation of natural resources has been quite apparent in India in many fields of production and its impact has been well documented. Poor and labouring women in rural areas as well as in urban centres are most vulnerable to these effects. They provide subsistence and contribute to the 'production of life', which is a precondition for the production and reproduction of any society. At present, the centrality of women's contribution is undermined all over the world, and women's labour is further subjugated and exploited to perpetuate the system. Globalisation contributes to the reconstitution of the international division of labour. More claims are made on natural resources from the Third World which is compelled to produce for northern markets, in order to repay its debts. Our search for a paradigmatic shift in resource use and its institutional management is grounded in this contemporary situation.

Our premise is that if poor people's needs and especially women's needs are placed centrally, and the resource use pattern and, thus, the whole economy will be geared differently. It will go beyond the debate of market vs. state run, mixed economy and ground itself in principles of equitability, people's participation and decentralisation. We realise that political decentralisation and women's participation in decision making cannot become meaningful unless a decentralisation of economy is carried out simultaneously. It appears that ecological sciences also prove that the best way of achieving productivity, stability and sustainability is through equitability. The most important question faced by the women's movement is how to achieve the idea of decentralisation, and what kind of alternative institution building should be visualised.

Against this background this sub-theme proposes to examine three sectors based on the use of three natural resources: land, water and energy. The exercise should pinpoint the linkages between the degradation and institutions such as the market, technology and management systems. The discussion will also indicate alternative institution building, on the basis of the principle of centrality of women's contribution, decentralisation, equitability, space for traditional knowledge and cultural practices related to the production process.



Papers are invited to focus on three different aspects of the management of natural resources: — In the colonial period changes were introduced in property rights and entitlements which asserted patriarchy in new forms. Today, the process of restructuring the world economy, have brought about a new regime to enable multinationals to have access to natural resources, further depriving women of subsistence production and food security. This area needs to be investigated.

— While evolving a new paradigm it is essential to understand the ecological characteristics of a particular natural resource and the constraints imposed upon increasing its productivity, due to institutional arrangements of market and technology.

— Alternative institutional arrangements are being initiated by grassroots organisations or government departments so that women can assert their needs and participate in decision-making. These need to be analysed and the principles for alternative institution-building discerned. This alternative material base will constitute one element in a feminist vision, and alternative principles can provide some rallying points for the women's movement.

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## SUB-THEME 7

### *Women And Health*

In the last decade and a half there has been a tremendous awakening of interests in women's health issues, women's relationship with medicine, and women's role in delivering medicare in the past and in modern times. This resurgence of interest has made for a variety of activities and also prompted numerous enquiries.

To recapitulate, this experience has led to experiments in alternative health care delivery, where women-centred issues were given weightage, where the treatment of women's medical problem was informed by feminists-oriented knowledge of the functioning of women's bodies and of their social and economic status. This, in turn, has given rise to a body of experimental knowledge which has so far remained outside the main stream of the medicare practice.

At another level this awareness has also intercepted and informed other campaigns such as the campaign for a ban on sex determination tests and its outcome in the form of legislation; the campaign against EP forte drugs, the public inquiry and subsequent ban on the production and sale of the drug. The campaign against injectable contraceptives, Depo Provera and Net-en and later other long acting contraceptives was the high point of such campaigning in that it contributed greatly to a transformation of main stream/establishment perspectives on contraception and helped to redefine women's needs.

At a third level, the deepening academic interest in women's health has also highlighted the tremendous gap in data and information on women's problems. The fact that much health data does not capture the health status of women is now an acknowledged fact.

At a fourth level, it is increasingly obvious that new economic pressures will change the lives of women in dramatic ways. Will it be possible to assess the impact of these changes on women's health, when there is hardly a reliable data base on women morbidity, mortality, nutritional status, patterns of health care behaviour, survival strategy, etc. Even more important without a genuinely altered perspective, the impact of these changes will remain uncaptured, unrecorded; this in turn will make it difficult

to devise strategies for action; to oppose these changes or to assimilate them with the least dissonance; and even perhaps to be able to utilise the opportunity which are opening up to the best advantage. The big lacuane in the last few years has been the absence of theoretical formulation that could contribute to changing current medical perspectives on women and their health needs.

The sub-theme will attempt such a stock-taking and critiques for a coming together of the experiences of alternative movements, of campaign experiences in countering the medical and pharmaceutical industry and, hopefully, carry forward the discussion on alternative methodology and theoretical perspective.

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## SUB THEME 8

### *Work And Workers*

Several changes have been taking place in the labour market in India during the past decade or so. The economic reforms initiated in 1991 have generated several new forces which have affected, and are likely to affect, the process of change in the labour market in future. Various problems and challenges therefore need the careful consideration of academicians and policy makers:

— Modern industrial growth in India is likely to be labour intensive in nature, to promote flexible labour systems leading to informalisation of the labour market. Since female labour fits very well into this new environment, women will get more employment in diversified industries and activities in the coming years. However, with occupational diversification, the quality of employment (including employment security and terms of employment) is likely to decline. The experiences of East Asia support this observation. The question before us is whether to accept the poor quality employment as part of the development process or to work for improving it.

— With increasing competition and globalisation some sectors are likely to adopt capital intensive technology which may result in employment reduction; frictional unemployment is likely to be generated now and then; and new employment will require better skills and education. For various well known reasons women workers will be in a disadvantageous position and they are likely to lose out. The relevant questions therefore are, how to protect workers in the midst of frictional unemployment; how to improve skill and education of women to enable them to participate in hightech industries; how to train/retrain.

— Unprotected wage earners and self-employed workers working in a large number of traditional industries, handicrafts, and in other sectors need institutional support for credit, market, skill training, etc. as well as infrastructural support. How to improve the organisational and managerial capacity of these workers, access to markets and capital; how to provide them skill training and knowledge; and how to enable them to participate in the new economic environment, are some of the questions which need answers.

— Emerging trends in the labour market call for safety acts and social protection on the one hand and facilities for industrial restructuring on the other hand. The National Renewal Fund (NRF) has proved to be highly inadequate in this context. Again, unorganised workers in general and women workers in particular will be the worst sufferers. How to redesign NRF in a comprehensive fashion is an issue that deserves serious attention.

— The above issues have implications for the speed and nature of the economic reforms. How do we globalize while keeping national economic interests at heart and how to give a human face to the reforms? Can we put limits on the race to globalise? Can we pass laws to keep some resources like forests or water, or agricultural lands out of the reach of large companies? Or get the State to reserve some products/raw materials for the small sector?

— Some organisations and governments have been successful in getting answers to some of these questions. It will be useful to study there experiments and draw lessons from them.

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## SUB-THEME 9

### *Women, Political Participation And Politics Of Organising*

The primary goal of the women's movement is the creation of a just, democratic and equal society. Despite the expansion and the widening arena of the movement, women's impact on the formal political process has changed only marginally during the last two decades. To many in the country the symptoms of criminalisation, with the increasing use of money and muscle power, and violence against women as an instrument for political action signify politics as "dirty". At the same time it is not possible to achieve any of our goals in any area of life without transforming political power relations, structures and processes.

While the movement has been debating its relation with the State, the rapidly changing global and national political scenarios force us to raise fundamental questions about the nature and strength of the present state structure. It is in this context that we need to examine the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which — promise to strengthen the democratic base of the Indian State; and — seek to expand women's participation in the formal representative process by providing one third reservation for them in these bodies. To what extent can these changes contribute to transforming the present culture and structure of politics?

What has been the experience of women's organisations who have been involved in voter education, training for panchayati raj (before or after election), of women's fronts/wings within political parties/trade unions/other people's organisations? To what extent have they succeeded in getting the goals of the women's movement onto the agenda of these organisations? How do we explain the participation of women in communal parties/movements which seek to impose a political identity by birth, and oppose gender equality overtly or covertly? Some people have been talking about starting a women's political party in India -- would it help to get a women's perspective on to the political agenda?

The movement has all along used organising as a mode for bringing women's perspective on to the political arena. We should question our own experiences of organising by examining the dynamics of this organising: have they remained static? Have they reduced, changed, or eliminated the gap between the organisers and the

organised? Have we resolved the problem of hierarchy versus solidarity and movement for change ? What has been the role of resource requirement, the source of such support and the methods of utilising it ? What has been the role and use of autonomy in the aim of changing political structures and processes ?

How are we to deal with the issue of identity ? Who defines it and how? How to relate the perceptions/priorities of the organised to the existing structures/processes in order to change the latter? Is protest enough ? Alternative experiments also generate political force and responses from existing power structures (parties, governments, community organisations, funding agencies etc. - which use methods of co-option/manipulation with different degrees of sophistication. What are our lessons from the experience of the last 20 years ? What should be the warning signals to determine our strategies/ responses ?

Finally - How can the movement balance the three values of rights/responsibilities and accountability, their demands on our own consciousness, the movement's trends, and the rapidly changing local, national, and global scenarios ?

Coordinator

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Centre for Women's Development Studies

25 Bhai Veer Singh Marg

New Delhi

## EVENING ACTIVITIES

### *Information Mela*

The Information Mela will be a feast for the eyes and ears whilst providing food for the intellect. It is a space for the exhibition and sale of material in different forms: colourful posters, cassettes of melodies and songs, provocative videos, and a variety of books, booklets, monographs etc. A decade ago alternative literature, plays, songs and posters were mainly produced by small campaigning groups and concerned individuals. Today, the issues raised by the Women's Movement are being discussed by a wider group of scholars and in the mainstream media. Most publishing houses have a separate women's section. However, the very nature of alternative literature, its critiques and unorthodoxy will require it to have its own channels. A small group of documentation centres and informal distribution networks do a gallant job.

The National Conference would like to support them by providing a space in the main conference area for the display and sale of material. All those who would like to participate in the Information Mela may please contact :

*Norma Alvares*

The Other India Book Store  
Above Mapusa Clinic,  
Mapusa 403507 Goa  
Tel./fax: 832-263305

### *Crafts Mela*

What we call 'crafts' today were once upon a time products which were regularly used within the household for utilitarian or decorative purposes. The modern consumer market has a very small corner for crafts. The support of government bodies and NGOs has been significant in reviving and keeping alive these traditional crafts and creativity. Organisations have made a special effort to encourage craftswomen so that they can retain their traditional skills as well as earn a livelihood. Some women's crafts are very well known like the Rajasthani quilts and embroidered leather goods, mirror work from Saurashtra, Lucknowi chikan kurtas, Madhubani paintings, block printed cloth, convent inspired crochet and cane baskets. The National Conference would like to celebrate women's creativity and encourage their skills. Their products are truly 'alternative' in midst of all the plastic and polyester which floods the modern market.

All NGOs and co-operatives which would like to participate in the crafts mela can please contact:

**IAWS Conference Committee**

c/o Sandhan Shodh Kendra,  
C 196, Baan Marg, (behind L B S College) Tilak Nagar, Jaipur 302004  
Tel: (o) 0141-45549 (r) Kavita 513262, Nirja 370438





### *For Those Writing A Paper*

Please contact the co-ordinator of the particular sub theme and send in an abstract of your paper by the 31st of August, 1995. This is urgent because all abstracts will be published in a booklet to be distributed during the Conference. The co-ordinators will do a final round of selection for presentation at the workshop.

**The last date for submission: abstract - 31st August 1995  
papers - 31st October, 1995**



### *How To Register*

There are two conference registration forms. Please fill both and mail one to the conference committee and the other to the New Delhi central office. The addresses are printed in each form. You also need to be a member of the IAWS. So if you are not one already please fill in the membership form as well and mail it to the New Delhi central office. Your conference registration form will be invalid if you are not a member. Please do not fill up the membership form if you are already a member.



### *If You Need Support*

IAWS usually does not provide financial support except in the case of individual activists or those who are part of non funded organisations. There is no subsidy for the conference registration fee of Rs 300. IAWS will bear the cost of 2nd class train fares. Please write to the Treasurer, Rohini Gavankar at:  
Shiv Prabha, 304 R K Vaidya Rd., Dadar West, Bombay 400 02



### *Bed, Meals And The Rest*

As you will be staying in a hostel, there will be a mattress but you will need to bring your own sleeping bag or sheets and blanket. The weather will be cold. Vegetarian meals will be provided at the hostel and conference venue. For those with children, there will be a creche. The venue is not difficult to locate. Please take a taxi or auto and follow the signs. The local committee will be there to help you.



### *For Further Enquires*

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College) Tilak Nagar, Jaipur 302004  
Tel: (o) 0141-45549  
(r) Kavita 513262, Nirja 370438

**New Delhi Central Office**  
Juhi Jain  
c/o Jagori, C 54 South Extension Part  
II, New Delhi 110 049  
Tel: 011- 6427015  
Fax: 011- 6478065

## SCHEDULE (tentative)

### Day I December 27th 1995

#### *Morning Session*

- a) "Voices of Resistance and Struggle"
- b) Keynote Address: Dr Vandana Shiva

#### *Noon Session*

Panel I State Panel

#### *Evening*

Extempore Sessions, Films, Melas,  
Theatre.

### Day II December 28th 1995

#### *Morning Session*

Panel II "Women's Visions and  
Strategies  
for a Peaceful and Democratic South  
Asia."

#### *Noon Session*

Sub Theme Workshops

#### *Evening*

Extempore Sessions, Films, Melas,  
Theatre.

### Day III December 29th 1995

#### *Morning Session*

Panel III "Resurgent Patriarchies"

#### *Noon Session*

Sub Theme Workshops

#### *Evening*

Extempore Sessions, Films,  
Melas, Theatre.

### Day IV December 30th 1995

#### *Morning Session*

Sub Theme Workshops

#### *Noon Session*

Annual General Meeting - IAWS

#### VENUE

St. Xavier's School,  
Bhagwandas Road, Jaipur 302001  
Rajasthan