

## Editorial Remarks

As a Special Edition that also serves as a brochure for the XV National Conference on Women's Studies at the University of Madras, Chennai, this Newsletter follows a different format from other newsletters that IAWS has been bringing out. It has been put together by the Executive Committee of the IAWS with the Chennai Conference in mind and includes a special focus on Tamil Nadu. There are thus three sections in the Newsletter.

The first section aims at giving news about the XV National Conference, its central theme, sub-themes, special sessions, pre-conference events and cultural programmes. The concept note for the central theme and the 13 sub-themes of for the conference find their place in this section. In addition to these, an introductory note which discusses the programme and organization of the conference has also been included.

The second section of the Newsletter is a special section on Tamil Nadu, where the IAWS National conference is being held for the first time in its 35 years of our Association's existence. Tamil Nadu has a rich and longstanding history of social movements and public debate on women's equality on a scale and manner that is quite unique in India. The creation of a community of scholars promoting women's studies, also has a longer history in the state than perhaps anywhere else in the country. It is therefore unsurprising that there was a greater response to the process of institutionalization of women's studies than elsewhere, and Tamil Nadu now has more Women's Studies Centres and Departments than any other state in the country. The second section of this Newsletter actually serves as a documentation and part account of the engagement with ideas, institutions and movements by generations of IAWS members up to the present moment. Some contributions are written as personal accounts. Through the story of their experiences, readers will get a glimpse into aspects of the journey that often remain undocumented. Other contributions are research based and the combination of the two give us a glimpse into aspects of the history of ideas, experiences, and research by women's studies scholars, including an interesting diversity of views on the same.

The third section focuses primarily on education, and higher education in particular. Special articles outline and raise questions regarding some of the complex challenges on the site of higher education; from the point of access and its quality, particularly for Dalits and Adivasis, from the experience of increasing numbers of girls entering higher education, and from the point of view of the language divide. Included is an analytical account of dalit upsurge in the wake of the Una atrocity followed by reports on some workshops and book introductions.

On behalf of the Executive committee of IAWS (2014-17), we take this opportunity to welcome guests, participants, paper writers and fellow travelers who have gathered together for the IAWS conference in Chennai, and to thank our colleagues, friends and associates in Chennai and around, who have contributed in a variety of ways to the organization of the XV National Conference on Women's Studies.

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**SECTION - 1****XV NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES****Women in a Changing World: Restructured Inequalities, Countercurrents, and Sites of Resistance****Concept Note**

From the first Women's Studies Conference in 1981, where it was decided to form the Association, IAWS Conferences have been landmarks in a united drive by scholars, students, activists, and allies of the women's movement in India to advance the agenda of gender equality. These Conferences have provided an important platform for studies, debates, and clarification of perspectives on a wide range of issues and questions that impact the lives of women.

The XV National Conference in Chennai, January 2017, constitutes one more step in this journey of ideas. Its central theme reflects the current context of a rapidly changing economy and society that is simultaneously and increasingly mired in a lived experience of uncertainty, volatility, insecurity, and conflict. There is accumulating evidence that far from being an equalizing or liberating force, the nature of contemporary change and continued restructuring of the State and the economy by neo-liberalism and globalization has expanded the range of inequalities, modes of discrimination, and forms of violence against women. In the midst of a significantly more complicated terrain of inequality, assertions and resistance by women across several new sites of public action have also come to the fore, even as some others may have become less visible. The intricately intertwined multiplicity of issues, questions, and debates that confronts any student of women's studies today, can indeed appear like an eternally confusing medley of contingent circumstances. It has foregrounded the need to search through the mounting complexities of day-to-day experiences, issues, and incidents for the structural underpinnings of contemporary inequalities and the violence it generates. Troubled and troubling times call for renewed efforts to engage with both accumulated experience and new thinking around the key elements of the contemporary condition, if we are to effectively challenge the structures that breed and feed on inequalities of gender, caste, class and community.

**Changing Political Economy of Education**

A popular recognition of and widespread hunger for education as the way forward, has indeed led to significant increases in enrolment ratios among girls, including in higher education. This surge in women's involvement with education as students and teachers has also been reflected in a heightened presence of girl students and women teachers in debates and movements in colleges and universities across India. Gender issues, feminist perspectives, and resistance against inequality and discrimination have emerged as important components of campus discourse. Even as ascendant privatization is transforming and restructuring the political economy and role of education in India, it appears that public institutions have become important sites of renewed questioning by an increasingly diversified community of students and teachers. At the same time, the academic institutional space seems more fraught, restricted, and subject to new uncertainties at various levels. Nowhere is this uncertainty more directly apparent than in the case of the more than 150 Women's Studies Centres that have been established by the UGC, whose continued existence is still not assured. Debates around quality, interdisciplinarity, employability, accountability in education, thus necessarily intermingle with concerns regarding increasing contractualisation, adhocism, and discontinuities experienced by students, teachers, and practitioners of women's studies, as well as other new and old disciplines. The XV National Conference of the IAWS will provide a platform to discuss, document, debate, and develop collective thinking and strategizing on all these issues to face the challenges ahead.

**Crisis in Women's Employment**

For quite some time, the hyper-visibility of some new forms of employment for women, particularly in urban services, had masked the crisis in women's employment. After a quarter century of entrenchment of the neo-liberal policy framework, we now know that it has resulted in female employment rates having actually dropped to the lowest levels in the history of independent India. Paradoxically, the sharpest fall in women's employment took place during the period that saw the highest rates of economic growth. 21<sup>st</sup> century rural India has also witnessed widespread agrarian crisis marked by increasing non-viability of agricultural livelihoods. Its consequence has been a dramatic reduction in self-cultivation, with a greater fall in the number

of women cultivators. The number of agricultural labourers, on the other hand, continued to increase to record levels. Declining workdays for agriculture suggests that significant proportions of even those counted as employed in agriculture have little work. Interconnected to these processes are the issues of sustainability, environmental degradation, reduction of rights over Common Property Resources, and the impact of climate change.

At an overall level, it has become clear that the narrow range of occupations in industry and services, in which many women had indeed found employment, was unable to compensate for the continuous and increasingly sanctioned process of eviction of millions of women from jobs not only in agriculture, but also in industry and services. There is mounting evidence that the losses in employment and related incomes encompasses even informal work that for long had appeared as forms of labour where particularly poor women seeking employment had been able to find some work, albeit in extremely harsh and exploitative conditions. At the same time, recent years have seen both spontaneous and organized protests by cadres and contingents of workers that are either all women or female dominated, suggesting a new dynamic of resistance that women's studies needs to engage with. The enduring question of unpaid work by women and its contribution to economy and society is also evoking renewed interest with the increased pressure on women's unpaid labour in a context of retreating public services, reduced public provisioning, and the consistent decline in public investment, even as paid care work is also on the rise. In this XV IAWS Conference, our focus is therefore on the structural conditions and nature of change in paid and unpaid work by women across regions and sectors in India and also the experience of other south Asian countries.

## **Restructured Inequalities and Contemporary Sites of Social Ferment**

Once criticized for ignoring the divergent experiences and articulations of women of socially oppressed and Dalit castes/communities, women's studies and the women's movement in India have become significant contributors to contemporary Dalit assertion against caste based discrimination, stigma, inequality, and for affirmative action. Varied positions and arguments have emerged from within women's studies on Dalit women's unique experience and issues including one argument, advocating for feminists who may not be dalits to reinvent themselves as 'Dalit feminists' to enable a more 'emancipatory standpoint'. At the same time, diverse forms of Dalit women's organizations are also increasingly allying their anti-caste/anti-patriarchy assertions with the women's movement. Social perceptions of women's 'honour' being linked to caste identity and endogamy have of course long been accepted as oppressive for women, and the women's movement has indeed stood steadfast beside young couples who cross such boundaries. Yet, in such cases, vulnerability to assaults, degrading forms of public humiliation, and even killings, remain a continuing reality, particularly when a Dalit is involved. We are fortunate that this IAWS Conference is being held in Tamil Nadu, a state which has a rich and long history of anti-caste social movements and ideas that have been ideologically linked with an agenda for women's emancipation. It provides us with a special opportunity for collective learning about this heritage, and also for debating its place and relevance for women located within the restructured correlations of caste domination and countercurrents of resistance that define the contemporary Indian context.

New issues have also emerged from the recent experience of organized attempts to brutally suppress Dalit ferment intersecting with organized attempts at communal polarization and promotion of communal hatred. Recurrent practices of 'dishonouring' women in the name of community honour, and the virulent attacks on inter-faith marriages, do indeed appear to share features in common with violence against inter-caste marriages, albeit on a stridently political and communal register. Women's studies has from its inception, been committed to peace and communal amity as a basic condition for progression towards equality and emancipation. The adverse effects of politicization of religion on the advance of equality for women, the dangers of majoritarianism, as well as contemporary articulations of women's rights from within minority communities, are all important issues before this IAWS Conference.

There are other minorities whose movements for democratic rights and equality have come to the fore in recent years. The disability rights movement has expanded in scope and scale in recent years, and this conference will make space for integrating their location within the broader themes of the conference, while also providing a platform for articulation of their special issues. The Conference will also include voices of sexual minorities, and discuss their key concerns, including but not restricted to discrimination, prejudice, stigma, violence, as well the articulation and assertion of their right to dignity and equality.

Of special significance is the upsurge of different forms of militarization, and the immediate impact on women's rights, external as well as internal to their existence and location in the societal structures and regions. Issues of conflict and peace thus form an essential component of the Conference, in order not only to debate and discuss, but also to develop theoretical research in tandem with women's strategies and movements for peace and security.

## Multidisciplinary Solidarity for Women's Studies

IAWS conferences have always been characterized by a lively cultural component and wider solidarities. Agendas and issues are not only debated in seminar formats or panel discussions, but also through films, plays, music and dance. As we prepare for the conference, it is only fitting to reiterate that women's studies is by nature inter-disciplinary, just as IAWS is innately collaborative in its activities. We draw strength from the support of scholars, students, and teachers from a range of disciplines and departments. So also, we have been privileged to receive the support of several departments in the University of Madras, in collaboration with whom the XV IAWS Conference is being organized. The University of Madras has opened its doors to the women's studies community and given us a historic venue for the conference for which we are truly grateful. This will be the first IAWS National Conference in Tamil Nadu, and we can all look forward to a particularly special conference.

## 35 Years of IAWS

Finally, 2017 marks the 35<sup>th</sup> year of the IAWS. It provides a special opportunity to take stock of how far we have travelled, to look back and replenish our spirit to face the challenges ahead. A time perhaps to remember a little of what our founders felt and thought about the role of the IAWS, so vividly expressed in verse written on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of IAWS as

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

*Vina Mazumdar (in 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'etre —  
Think up new ways to do it better.  
Monolithic models hid most of our reality,  
Bharat darshan opens doors to diversity*

## THE XV NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES, 2017

### Programme and Organisation

#### Introductory Note

As the curtain rises on the XV National Conference on Women's Studies at the University of Madras, Chennai, we begin four days of intense engagement by hundreds of students, scholars and representatives of social movements with the burning questions that confront women in contemporary India.

The theme of the conference expresses the context of such engagement, i.e., the extraordinary rapidity of change; change that in recent years has been marked by extreme volatility, growing uncertainty, and a profusion of cross currents in the social, political, economic, and cultural facets of our daily lives; change that has brought into prominence old and new sites of resistance and assertion by women. Debating and understanding the nature of such change and women's location in it is the primary agenda of this conference. For those who have long been associated with Women's Studies and for those who have recently entered the field, the questions and issues of interest may be similar or divergent across and within generations. But the context provides a common meeting ground in which Women's Studies or the women's movement of which it is the 'academic arm', does not stand isolated, but is more actively associated with and supported by fellow travelers in social sciences, humanities, the arts, law, and even the sciences. This association is reflected in the programme and organization of the conference.

The programme of the conference is organized around **plenary sessions in the forenoon** of all four days, and **parallel sub-theme sessions in the afternoon** of the first three days. Two **special sessions** are also scheduled for the afternoons of 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> January. We begin at 10 am on 22<sup>nd</sup> January and conclude the conference with lunch on 25<sup>th</sup> January. Two **pre-conference events** are scheduled for 21st January 2017.

#### Plenary Sessions

##### Day 1

The XV IAWS Conference is being inaugurated on **Sunday, 22<sup>nd</sup> January** by eminent Agricultural Scientist Professor **M.S. Swaminathan**, who is also Chair of the Reception Committee for the conference. President of IAWS, **Ritu Dewan** will deliver the Presidential Address. Well known social activist **Aruna Roy** who left the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) for social activism at the grassroots, later founded the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan and became the most prominent initiator of the Right to Information Movement, is to deliver the **Madhuri Shah Memorial Lecture**.

The panelists in the **Conference Theme Plenary** session on the first day of the conference are **Utsa Patnaik**, Professor Emeritus at JNU, a Marxist Economist and longstanding analyst of India's agrarian economy; **Gopal Guru**, Political theorist, Dalit scholar, and a Professor at the Centre for Political Studies at JNU; **Faizan Mustafa**, Teacher and Historian of Law and Vice-Chancellor of NALSAR, whose research interests include Minority Rights and Muslim Personal Law; and **Nirmala Banerjee**, with decades of research and study on women's work and employment, and one of the feminist pioneers of Women's Studies in India, and a former President of IAWS.

##### Day 2

On **Monday, 23<sup>rd</sup> January**, the second day of the conference opens with the South Asia Panel on **Changing Contours of Paid**

and **Unpaid Work by Women in 21<sup>st</sup> Century South Asia**, where speakers are **Jayati Ghosh (India)**, well known feminist economist and critical analyst of the impact of neo-liberal policies on women's work; **Simeen Mahmud (Bangladesh)** from BRAC University, Dhaka, a demographer by training whose research interests have varied from population dynamics, women's work and empowerment, from social policy to development and gender; **Sepali Kottegoda (Sri Lanka)** Executive Director of Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR)<sup>1</sup>, whose recent research interest, within a broader body of work encompassing informal work, overseas labour migration, has been on unpaid work by women; and **Binda Pandey (Nepal)** of the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT) with many years of work in its Central Women Workers Department, and a current member of the ILO Governing Body.

Speakers at the special plenary session on Tamil Nadu, which focuses on **Caste and Gender in Tamil Nadu** are **V. Geetha**, historian, Writer, translator, Feminist Activist and co-author of 'Towards a Non Brahmin Millennium - From Iyothee Thass to Periyar'; **U. Vasuki**, left Activist, and leading face of the Tamil Nadu State unit of the All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA); **D. Sharifa**, prominent women's movement Activist, and founder of the Tamil Nadu Muslim Women Jamaat, and **Vincent Raj (Evidence Kathir)**, anti-caste human rights activist of dalit background.

In the afternoon of the second day is a **Special Session on Women with Disability** coordinated by Poonam Natrajan, Founder of *Vidyasagar* (earlier known as the Spastics Society of India, Chennai) and Meenakshi Balasubramaniam, of *Equals* - Centre for Promotion of Social Justice in Chennai. Speakers are **Amita Dhanda**, authoritative voice on the legal position of persons with mental disability and Professor at NALSAR, **Nidhi Goyal**, standup comedian and a pioneer in the online initiative on sexuality and disability, **Bhargavi Davar**, Founder Director of the Center for Advocacy in Mental Health and **Kuhu Das**, founder of the Association for Women with Disability (AWWD) in West Bengal.

In the evening of Day 2, a **Special Lecture on Issues of Transgenders** is to be delivered by **Olga Aaron** who identifies herself as a trans-woman and is founder of Bringing Adequate Values of Humanity (BRAVOH), a movement that aims to make a normal, dignified life accessible to trans-women.

### Day 3

Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January opens with a session on 35 Years of IAWS where a commemorative volume is to be released, comprising of special articles written for the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by stalwarts of IAWS, and collated by Indu Agnihotri and Meera Velayudhan. The session will begin with an **Audio-visual Presentation** and a felicitation by the Past Presidents and General Secretaries and veteran staff of IAWS. The commemorative volume will be released by **Devaki Jain**, Feminist Economist, Founder Member of IAWS, Founder and for many years Director of Indian Social Sciences Trust (ISST). Her remarks will be followed by a brief conversation on special memories of IAWS and its meaning in the lives of some of those who have played significantly in building and sustaining the Association.

The second session on Day 3 has been conceived of as a **Round Table discussion on Women's Studies Centres**. With the growth of the number of Women's Studies Centres to more than 160, if one only counts those that are supported by the UGC, the experience of such institutionalization and the issues that have been thrown up in the process will be the subject of discussion in the round table. Key discussants at the round table would be **Meena Chandavarkar**, Chairperson of the UGC's Standing Committee on Women's Studies, **Samita Sen** from the 'School of Women's Studies' at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, **N. Manimekalai** from the 'Department of Women's Studies' at Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli, **K. Suneetha Rani** from the 'Centre for Women's Studies' at Hyderabad Central University, **Asha Achyutan** from the 'Advanced Centre for Women's Studies' at TISS, Mumbai, **Smita Patil** from the 'School of Gender and Development Studies' at IGNOU, and **Mary John** from the ICSSR Research Institute, Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi.

In the afternoon of the third day, there is to be a **Special Panel Discussion on Social Security and Informalisation of Labour** being organized in collaboration with the Indian Society for Labour Economics (ISLE) where the speakers are **Ravi Srivastava**, Professor, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, JNU and Former Member of the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS), **Alakh Sharma**, Director Institute of Human Development and Editor of the Indian Journal of Labour Economics (IJLE), **R. Geetha** of the Nirman Mazdoor Panchayat Sangam and one of the founders of Pennurimai

<sup>1</sup> CENWOR, founded by activist women scholars and educators in Colombo during the 1980s, which also organizes biennial national conventions in Sri Lanka on women's studies.



Iyakkam (Women Rights Movement) in Chennai, **Renana Jhabvala** of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), and Chairperson, WIEGO (Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing), and Tamil Nadu based Economist **Venkatesh Athreya**, consultant at the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF).

#### Day 4

The concluding day of the conference opens with a public conversation with **Mukta Dabholkar**, daughter of the slain anti-superstition crusader and rationalist Narendra Dabholkar.

The XV National Conference will be concluded on Day 4 with a **Round-Up of the Conference Discussions** where reports on the discussions in the parallel sub-theme sessions will be presented and any resolutions of the Conference will be discussed and adopted. This will be followed by a **Valedictory Address** by **Dr.P.David Jawahar**, Registrar, University of Madras and presentation of the **IAWS President's Award** for the best paper presented in the conference, and the annual **Vina Mazumdar Memorial Award for Young Research Scholars** awarded by the Memorial Fund (VMMF) at CWDS and IAWS on the basis of research papers published or accepted for publication between July 2015 to June 2016.

### SUB-THEMES

The XV Conference has 13 sub-themes where over 400 papers are to be presented in the afternoons of the first three days of the conference. These include on *Women's Work and Employment* (Sub-Theme 1), on *Inevitability of Law and the Impossibility of Law: Resistance and Recognition* (Sub-Theme 2), *Women, Peace and the Women's Movement* (Sub-Theme 3), *Caste: A Site of Inequalities, Discrimination, Violence and Resistance* (Sub-Theme 4), *Cultures of Resistance* (Sub-Theme 5), *Women Farmers: Labour, Livelihoods & Resource Rights* (Sub-Theme 6), *Interrogating and Expanding Feminist Questions on Sexuality and Gender* (Sub-Theme 7), *Women with Disabilities* (Sub-Theme 8), *Sexual Violence and Sexualisation of Violence* (Sub-Theme 9), *Climate Change and Women: Impact and Issues of Adaptation* (Sub-Theme 10), *Gender Religion and Democracy* (Sub-Theme 11), *Marginal Communities and Citizenships* (Sub-Theme 12) and *Teaching Women's Studies* (Sub-Theme 13).

In these sub-themes, hundreds of students, research scholars, teachers and activists have the opportunity to discuss their research and ideas with their peers from across the country. The range of subjects that will be discussed may be seen in the Book of Abstracts that has been published for the conference.

### Cultural Programmes

IAWS conferences have always been known for lively cultural engagements, both formal and informal, that are an integral part of the conference programme.

In this conference, **Mallika Sarabhai** is to perform her iconic 'Sita's Daughters' on the first day, **Sunday, 22nd January** in the evening at 7 pm. a narrative comprised of classical and contemporary dance, story telling, humour and mime, for which the dancer read one thousand testimonies of rape victims and visited police stations to understand how rape victims are treated. In a solo performance, the dancer expresses her understanding of key issues of women through a fusion of varied art forms.

The next day, **Monday, 23rd January**, participants will have the opportunity to be introduced to **Parai Attam**, a folk dance performance with *parai*, which is one of the oldest drums used in the state of Tamil Nadu. Considered as one of the symbols of Tamil Culture, and associated with the State's Dalit Community, Women Paraiattam Performers form part of the backdrop motif in the main hall for the XV conference.

**Film screenings** are being organized in the afternoons of 23rd and 24th including features and documentaries, curated by **Bina Paul**, film editor and Vice-chair of the Kerala Chala Charithra Academy with help from **Sasikumar** of the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai.

## Pre-Conference Colloquium

On **Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> January** a day long **Pre-conference Colloquium on “The Flux in India’s Higher Education System”** is being organized - some 15 Kilometres to the west of the main conference venue at SBOA School and Junior College from 9.30 am to 6 pm followed by a folk cultural performance. Here senior scholars of education and representatives of a spectrum of Student and Teachers’ movements that have erupted across many University campuses will debate the social structure of higher education in India, continuities and changes, ‘Reforms’ in education, and their experience of recent struggles in colleges and universities.

In the evening of the same day a special **Tamil Women Writers’ Panel Discussion** is to be held at Hall No. 50, Main Building, University of Madras from 6.30 pm to 8 pm. Speakers are **Ambai (C.S. Lakshmi)**, Writer, novelist and feminist thinker some of whose fiction is available in English (*A Purple Sea* and *In A Forest, A Deer*). **Bama**, Activist, writer and dalit feminist whose novels focus on caste and gender discrimination, **Tamil Selvi**, Writer, Activist and Teacher, **A. Revathi**, writer and transactivist on issues of sexual minorities, **Salma**, poet, novelist, and columnist, one of the first Tamil Muslim writers, Poet and journalist **Kavin Malar**. Galician Writer/Translator, feminist activist **Maria Reimondez, Vigo** Spain is to be felicitated.

## Conference Organization

IAWS has been fortunate in its collaboration with and support received from teachers, students and indeed the administration and Registrar of the University of Madras. It is only such support that has ensured that our conference, which is being held for the first time in Tamil Nadu, has a truly historic venue in the Chepauk campus of their 160 year old University. Dominated by the graceful Senate House, that has stood there for close to 140 years, and the grand Centenary Auditorium that has been Chennai’s City’s largest Hall for some five decades, the campus venue of the conference is flanked by Chennai’s famous Marina Beach.

Some 200 volunteers have been mobilized by the **Organizing Committee of the Conference**. **Prof. M. Srinivasan** of the Criminology Department and **Bharathi Harishankar**, of the Department of Women’s Studies in the University of Madras as the Committee’s Convenors have sought and received cooperative involvement in the Committee by Faculty and Students of several other University Departments including History, Anthropology, Economics, and Christian Studies. Student volunteers have been mobilized by the Women’s Studies Centres of Ethiraj College, Stella Maris College, Madras Christian College, Chennai, the School of Gender Studies at Rajiv Gandhi National Institute of Youth Development (RGNIYD) in Sriperumbudur, and the Department of Women’s Studies at Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirapalli and Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

**Prof. M.S. Swaminathan** as the Chair of the **Reception Committee** has been an invaluable ally for IAWS, helped raise resources for the funding of Conference expenditures, and offered the facilities of MSSRF for anchoring the Reception Committee comprising of both academics and a wide range of activists from various contingents of the Women’s Movement in the state of Tamil Nadu. **Dr. Yasodha Shanmugasundaram**, as Vice-chair of the Reception Committee and an early supporter of Women’s Studies in Tamil Nadu has also extended all the resources at her command for the conference. **Dr. Kadambari**, Faculty Gender Studies Unit, RGNIYD, facilitated a partnership with RGNIYD for the South Asia Panel in the conference, with the support of Director **Latha Pillai** who had earlier even offered to host the conference in Sriperumbudur.

**Mr. Thomas Franco** of the State Bank of India Officers Association (SBIOA), Secretary & Correspondent of SBIOA Educational Trust was one of the first supporters of the Conference from beyond the usual boundaries of University Academia and Women’s Movements that have traditionally been associated with IAWS conferences. SBIOA Trust, is hosting the pre-conference colloquium at the SBOA School and Junior college.

Apart from the material and human resources provided by the University of Madras, and the other institutions and individuals mentioned above, several individuals, institutions, agencies and business houses have also come forward to help fund the expenditures that a conference of this scale inevitably entails. Agencies, institutions and companies that have already given/committed direct and indirect **funding support** for the IAWS conference include Ford Foundation, SBIOA Educational Trust, ILO, TVS Motor Company, Sundaram Finance Limited, UN Women, ICSSR, RGNIYD, The Raza Foundation, Action aid, CBGA, University Women's Association, Chennai, and Dr. Anita Ratnam, Chennai.

The organization of the Conference in Chennai is still an ongoing learning experience for all involved, within IAWS and its partners and collaborators. An inclusive collaborative instinct has been foundational to IAWS, and every conference leads to new partnerships with a range of individuals, institutions, disciplines, and sections of the citizenry. So has been the experience of organization of the XV Conference, and for that we are indeed grateful for the way our Chennai partners and supporters have taken on the challenge of hosting a conference of more than 1000 participants of which close to 700 are from outside Chennai.

Last but not least, in preparing for the conference, several scores of paper abstracts have been sifted and evaluated by 13 pairs of **sub-theme coordinators** through which selections of papers to be presented at the 13 sub-theme sessions of the conference have been finalised. From formulation of their concept notes to reading through abstracts, asking for revisions in some, receiving and answering queries for those who had sent their abstracts, to planning their sessions and organizing curated panels, 26 sub-theme coordinators worked in long distance and across states collaboration to finalise and inform the writers of papers regarding selection of their papers for presentation at the conference. It is this spirit of voluntarism and commitment to IAWS that is the bedrock on which the Association and its XV conference stands.

As this goes to press, the IAWS **secretariat and financial office team** is still working overtime with registration, mails, preparing publication materials, updating the website, allotment of accommodation appropriate to needs, certificates, budgets and accounting procedures for the running of the conference.

In sum, it is this multi-layered and broad based collective and voluntarist effort and support and the response from the hundreds who have registered for the conference that has made it possible for an eleven member Executive Committee spread across the length and breadth of the country to attempt to fulfil its responsibilities towards the XV National Conference on Women's Studies.

### Sub-theme Concept Notes

#### SUB-THEME-1

## Women's Work and Employment

The issue of a crisis in female employment which became evident since the release of the last 2 rounds of NSSO employment and unemployment survey data has not generated anticipated public interest or debate. A major issue for this lack of adequate engagement has been the unpreparedness of those who are interested in women's issues, both academicians and activists, which could be located at two levels. At the primary level, women's work and employment has been a major area of debate and intervention in the early years of women's studies and movement, over time the issue could not sustain required interest. Issues of invisibility and undercounting which dominated the discourse in the initial period set limits to the discourses and outreach. Though there have been many studies in 80s and 90s that looked at women workers and their employment in specific sectors linking it to labour processes, the link between the economic policy and women's employment remained less focused. Policy shifts on account of globalization however opened up some interest but the discourse was biased by the international experience of feminization. Though at the macro level, empirical evidence in India runs counter to the feminization of labour thesis for several years the myth of prevalence of feminization succeeded in clouding over the issue of low work participation of women and its stagnation, leading to poor analytical understanding of the actual processes. Further, the hype around globalization and its potential for altering gender relations seems to have been accepted by many, leading to analytical inertia.

This sub-theme invites its paper presenters to reflect on the crises of women's employment, and critically reflect upon the debates, issues and concerns that the crisis has raised. The exploration of the complex engagement of women in the contemporary period, as workers as well as unpaid care workers, with social and economic challenges and state policies would help in understanding and situating the prevailing conflicts, opportunities and challenges that confronts women's work and the employment question. This subtheme invites papers on 3 broad areas.

- The first relates to growth and overall labour and employment changes. Papers are invited on broad trends and changes women's employment based on macro trends or micro issues specific to regions or sectors of trade/industry or occupations. The papers may address the following set of questions: How and why the phase of increased rates of growth have not translated into increased rates of employment among women in general. What are the sectoral and occupational patterns and issues which have resulted in women's low or fluctuating employment trends? Which are the sectors or occupations that are key and what have been the challenges? What accounts for sectoral, or regional differences and similarities? In this context

the crisis in agricultural employment and related differentials in social outcomes, require special attention given its link with the current regressive reconfiguration of women's work.

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- The second relates to experiences of women across subsectors and occupation, both with reference to overall changes in product and labour markets as well as policy. What are the specific structures, gradations, and features of various subsectors/occupations/and locations (such as home based) and how do women negotiate with volatilities in labour and product markets. What are the labour market oriented motivations, conditions and constrictions which are experienced by women across various categories such as wage workers or unpaid helpers? How are women negotiating with new and changing sourcing and recruitment practices and forms of intermediaries? How have policy changes and the labour law reform agenda impacted experiences of women and their inter-generational experiences in different sectors? Papers on experiences of specific groups, be it occupations, caste, class or community are also invited.
- The third relates to the interlinkages and challenges around paid work, unpaid work, care work and social reproduction. The question of valuation of women's work in the economy, their contribution to social reproduction, associated policy and political economy perspectives and regimes are important in this context. The distinctions and continuity between paid and unpaid work; unpaid economic work and unpaid care work and its interplay with market forces and how it affects women's labour and employment decisions are key issues that need conceptual clarity and empirical analysis. How the burdens of care and social reproduction are addressed in the lives of various spectrums of women workers across classes and social groups is an important question that needs deliberation. There is also a need to closely interrogate the specificities of unpaid economic activities in the current period of declining female work participation rates.

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## SUB-THEME-2

### **Inevitability of Law, Impossibility of Law: Resistance and Recognition**

The women's movements' engagement with the legal/judicial sphere has been both consistent and insistent. Law has been a site of both hope and despair, although its inevitability is increasingly becoming overwhelming. The discussions around sexual violence and the law often end up overshadowing important changes and debates taking place in the sphere of labour, family or commercial laws. This in turn constructs and fixes the identity of the woman as victims and the law emerges as the sole protector. On the other hand, resisting such a position by foregrounding women as agential subjects also seems to be a simplistic move. In all the areas of women's lives that the Indian women's movement or Women's Studies has taken note of over the years, be it acting in the face of domestic violence or negotiating the labour market or the political sphere, women's lives, thoughts and actions are found to be more complex than what the victim/agent binary allows. Consequently the legal/judicial sphere cannot be seen

in terms of the protector/ oppressor, sword/shield binary either. In the last two decades, law has emerged as the primary site of creating identities and offering recognition to categories and communities. Thus law has evolved as a site to mark (legitimate) resistance. At the same time, the everyday experience of the law in the homes, streets and workplaces, reveals the irrelevance of law, even as it colonizes the meaning of dignity, emancipation and justice. Should we still continue to engage with the law then? Are the considerable feminist “victories” in law since the 1980s merely of symbolic value, that ultimately work to mask the violence of the law? Is there a need to resist juridicalization of feminist politics or to talk back to the law in these rapidly transforming times?

Within this broad framework, this sub-theme will be interested in interdisciplinary papers covering myriad aspects of the law and movement interface; legal and political conflicts as well as convergences; dichotomies between streets-based and court-based forms of resistance, even as we feel the need to move from the streets to the courts. Papers reflecting on contemporary legal developments pertaining to women as well as other subject positions, through a gender lens are welcome. These could be, the legal regulation of parenthood through changes in rules of custody, guardianship, adoption and maternity leave in recent times; the legal recognition of Transgender identity by the Supreme Court of India and how it is being implemented in different state agencies; the right to abort beyond the legally mandated 20 weeks; current moves by regulatory bodies to increase the presence of women in corporate boardrooms; recent amendments to the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act; the impact of experiments in labour law reform by the current government; or the 2016 National Policy for Women, to indicate the wide range of issues and questions that could be pursued under this sub-theme. There is a need to critically engage with the rights discourse, since the abstract rights bearing citizen seems to possess rights yet not exercise it. Finally, as the state continues its violence in the name of “security” and “development”, through the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, the Special Economic Zones Act, or in the everyday working of the criminal legal system, it is crucial to intervene in this area. We welcome paper presenters from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to bring different methodologies to the table, ranging from traditional doctrinal analysis of legal developments to ethnographic and cultural readings of the law and the legal, that lie within the broader framework of the sub-theme.

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### SUB-THEME-3

## Women, Peace and the Women’s Movement

There is an increasing understanding globally that there can be no development without peace, thus the inclusion of Goal (16) of the SDGs. This is an important initiative as SDGs filter from the international to the local. The inclusion was not easy and was the outcome of a relentless struggle by CSOs especially women. This written word attains a dynamism, as in recent years, within the UN itself there has been a growing marginalization of civil society especially of women in its debates.

As peace subdues and conflict increases across the globe, with millions of refugees moving across borders we need much more involvement of women in peace research and activism. In India peace is still an issue which is subdued and usually forced to remain outside the public discourse. As Kashmir comes to haunt us again, in North East a new type of imperialism raises its head in the form of economic militarization and in Naxal regions thousands of Adivasis/tribals face incarceration it is time to bring it into the centrality of our thinking.

This sub theme will bring into our discussions the role of the women’s movement in creating a public discourse on the much needed aspect of women’s inclusion in initiating debates on peace and security. The participants will discuss the specific roles that the women’s movement can play towards creating a public discourse on AFSPA, UNSCR 1325 (National Action Plans vis a vis People’s Action Plan), gendered understanding of the increasing military budgets, women’s inclusion in decision making processes in peace and security. It will identify the ways women in India have been reaching out to women across borders and

new methods for creation of engaging with issues of peace and security. These will help conceptualize new theoretical research while strategizing on inclusion of more women in peace and security decision making.

#### Note from the Coordinators:

We will be especially on the lookout for papers on the following topics (though others are welcome):

- Women in peace processes (official and non-official)
- Women's peace activism
- The women's movement and conflict, peace, militarism and security

Some tips for a good proposal:

- Make it short, no more than 250 words. It's only an abstract or proposal, not the paper.
- Choose a descriptive title; for instance, "Women and Peace-making during Partition" and not "Women and Peace"!
- State clearly what your paper is about; not a topic title (eg. "Women and Peace"), but either a thesis (This is what I argue) or a research puzzle (What I want to know is).
- State clearly how you will argue that thesis or solve that puzzle:
  - Will you use data? What kind of data? Where will you find it?
  - Will you make a theoretical argument? What theories or theorists?

In other words, give us a glimpse of your paper.

- If you can guess your conclusion, share it with us in a sentence.
- If you have references in the proposal, give us a bibliographic citation.
- We have three topics listed above. Indicate where you think your paper fits.

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#### SUB-THEME-4

### Caste: A Site of Inequalities, Discrimination, Violence and Resistance

Caste plays a central role in structuring the socio-economic and cultural order of society in India with its emphasis on concepts of purity-pollution, inferior-superior etc. Socio-culturally constructed ideas are systemized by the stratification process via defining identities, demarcating boundaries, codifying norms and values to human beings in general, and most onerous in relation to women and dalits. The whole process of structuring the society as a caste centric system from the historic period to present has supported multifaceted inequalities in social institutions such as class, religion, family, state and market. Moreover, even in democracy, the combination of political power and caste hegemonic control over the private and public spheres of society has restricted the social space for women and dalits to enjoy constitutionally guaranteed rights. Social practices of caste distinction create the ground for humiliation and discrimination to the people who are marginalized and socially excluded. Due to various forms of marginalization and exclusion based on caste on the one hand their natural rights are denied, on the other hand, when the oppressed assert their rights they encounter heinous violence such as public humiliation, lynching/killing, ostracism in the name of 'caste honour' and purity.

The women's movements and women's studies in India have been engaged for more than four decades on issues related to caste based discrimination and violence against women. Besides, women's movements have significantly contributed to exploring and

addressing the existence of neo-forms of caste inequalities, violence in the neo-liberal and globalization context, in alliance with anti-caste and democratic organisations. However, the increasing nature of caste intensified identity politics consolidates the force of caste oppression and discrimination in socio-cultural and economic spaces and urges us to rethink about the horizontal growth of caste. Further we need to focus our attention on the multiple sites of discrimination and inequalities.

Within this wider context, this particular sub-theme invites inter-disciplinary papers focussing on the changing forms of caste inequalities, representative and affirmative actions, socio-political, economic, and cultural interventions, as well as protests against social and public policy discriminations.

Papers on how and why men and women decide to forego caste norms, the role of individual leaders and movements that have been inspirational towards building humanitarian, anti-casteist movements, and democratic trends that have strengthened equality perspectives are also welcome.

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#### SUB-THEME-5

### Cultures of Resistance

'Culture' has become a buzz word and a challenging concept in social sciences in contemporary times. It is no longer confined to any one field such as media, social sciences or public consciousness. A new discipline named 'Culture/Cultural Studies' has come to stay. Culture as a concept is at once chaotic and slippery; it has been invoked in the name of nation, religion, caste and gender. The challenge is to make sense of this concept in an enabling and empowering way. Modes of negotiating with culture(s) and its various ramifications deserve deep critical analysis. Culture 'marks' the differences; labels cultural practices as 'high' and 'low'; distinguishes the 'elite' from 'masses'. Culture is not a product that is produced, circulated and consumed. It is the process of understanding the life, world view and the systems at large. There is a need to address culture in more nuanced ways. Especially at a time when cultural nationalism is paraded as the most significant identity of our culture, we need to question how to understand the culture people live- in and the ethos produced around it. We need to problematise 'hierarchisation' of cultures. Knowledge about the hegemonic articulation of culture abounds. The need of the hour is to generate debates on the cultures of resistance and the language, aesthetics and power of the same. Culture which was earlier assumed as an expression of some underlying set of pre-conceived assumptions no longer makes sense. It has been fairly established that culture needs to be understood in the context of power as both are interlinked and woven together and any attempt to separate the two or see them in isolation is not only futile but robs its complexity. Another important dimension is to understand how cultural practices are becoming multiple sites of contestation over power and different social movements like feminist, black or anti-caste are attempting to subvert the power which is embodied in everyday conceptualisations and practices of culture. Resistances can take cultural forms and subvert the prevalent conceptualisation of culture and power structures legitimising it. One needs to recognise that culture can serve multiple functions. It can legitimise a system and make it acceptable as part of the common sense of the people or provide the resources for resistance. Thus studying culture is no longer limited to untangling its relationship with power alone; it has to understand strategies of resistance and struggle manifested in cultural practices. Actually culture can be conceptualised as a space within which struggles between social forces are conducted and one needs to look at culture in a relational way.

In this subtheme we aim to analyse and explore the nexus between culture and power on the one hand and on the other would like to explore how culture can be and is a potential site for resistances. The major challenge in doing this is not to lose sight of

the politicised understanding of the concept of culture and to map struggles and resistances as concrete ways of owning culture and becoming part of production of meaning which is countering the hegemonic power structures.

Within this sub- theme, gender implications of the following areas may be explored /interrogated:

- Different ways through which we understand the ethics of protests on the site of culture
- Culture – from rituals to oral traditions- as a site of maintaining / retaining hegemony as well as subverting to build resistance
- New cultural practices- from online videos or internet / social networking spaces as a site to contest hegemonic ideologies and build resistance
- Contested cultural space: Fundamentalist / Revivalist attempting to re-new cultural codes
- Contested cultural space: Notions of Body / Sexuality
- Performance and resistance through art and art forms
- Market, state and production of cultural commodities in neo liberal phase
- Recovery or reinterpretation of cultural practices marginalized by dominant as well as fundamentalist forces
- Denial of legitimacy to different cultural practices as denial of life and claim over knowledge production

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## SUB-THEME-6

### Women Farmers: Labour, Livelihoods & Resource Rights

The term “farmer” tends to evoke the image of a male farmer while women farmers remain largely invisible as far as the State and society are concerned. Within this broad frame of lack of identity and rights for women farmers in general, the situation of more marginalized Dalit and Adivasi women requires much more attention and action. Women’s labour force participation decline in the face of continuing agrarian distress, large scale land alienation and depleting investments in rural sector in general, and social sector in particular, adds to the deprivation and vulnerability of women farmers.

The National Policy for Farmers defined a Farmer as ‘a person actively engaged in the economic and/or livelihood activity of growing crops and producing other primary agricultural commodities and will include all agricultural operational holders, cultivators, agricultural labourers, sharecroppers, tenants, poultry and livestock rearers, fishers, beekeepers, gardeners, pastoralists, non-corporate planters and planting labourers as well as persons engaged in various farming related occupations such as sericulture, vermiculture and agro-forestry. The term will also include Tribals engaged in shifting cultivation and in the collection, use and sale of minor and non-timber forest produce’. Such a definition should have conferred recognition to, and support for women cultivators and agricultural workers, including those who declare themselves to be ‘principally engaged in housework’, but also engage in various activities for obtaining food for the household: working on kitchen gardens, maintaining household animal resources, collection of food and food processing activities. Even such so-called household work is therefore farming, and women involved in such activities should be counted as farmers, over and above the overtly self-employed workers or casual labour in agriculture.

However, this policy definition of farmers, has not been actualized in practice and women farmers continue to be invisible, neglected and discriminated against. Within the broad and systemic and persistent gender discrimination, recent trends of first “feminization” and then “masculinization” of agriculture have only deepened gender gaps and manifested newer forms of violence against women. Expansion of commercial, corporate-driven farming has led to women getting sidelined from decision-



making related to agriculture. In this intensive-agriculture, market-driven paradigm, it is the men who are connected to both input and output markets, and therefore have greater say. Further, despite the greater weight of agriculture in the female workforce in comparison to the male workforce, women's share of operational land holdings is a less than 13% and in terms of operational area, it is even less.

Agricultural research systems, training and extension systems, marketing systems, risk insurance systems, credit and other support systems all systematically ignore women. Land, water and other natural resources are increasingly becoming alienable commodities for the benefit of profiteering corporations. Land rights for women needs to be located within this broader context of privatization and corporations of natural resources.

In the XV IAWS National Conference on Women Studies, this subtheme seeks to gather evidence on the situation and conditions of women farmers, and to build a bridge between movements for rights of women farmers and feminist academicians. For the sub-theme, we invite papers under the following broad areas:-

1. Enumeration - Census definition, informal workers or self employed
2. Recognition or lack of recognition of Women Farmers in Policies, programs and it's impact thereon.
3. Land Rights of Women farmers: Private, Public and Markets
4. Impact of privatization, statisation of commons on livelihoods/ food security of women farmers
5. Evidence on access or Impact of agriculture/ land/ labour/ financial social protection policies on women farmers
6. Commons to include forests, seas/ rivers/ ponds, wastelands/ pasture lands/ web- internet/ Impact of use of ICT's, digitization of data on women farmers.
7. Recognition, support of women's knowledge, practice of Sustainable/ ecological agriculture
8. Role or scope of women farmers participation in Public provisioning to address Malnutrition and food security.

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**SUB-THEME-7**

## **Interrogating and Expanding Feminist Questions on Sexuality and Gender**

Feminism and Women's Studies in Indian contexts have addressed issues of sexuality and gender to some degree of complexity. Both in movement spaces and women's studies academia, there has been a recent attentiveness as well as critical articulation about translives, non-heteronormative sexual choices, the ways in which discrimination operates, as well as the ways in which the heteronormative stands challenged from these spaces. Sometimes, the articulations have also been status quoist, showing a willingness to speak of marginality and vulnerability but not of alternative models of life, loving and politics that may displace existing ones.

This session seeks to engage with questions that have extended from these feminist enquiries into sexuality and gender, but have continued to remain on the margins of critical enquiry within feminist politics in our contexts. This emerges from ideas and instances of lived experience of othering within society of both the sexual and the gendered experience that 'deviate' and continue to deviate from the normative: an emerging nomenclature include those of queer, aravani, lesbian, intersex, gay, trans\*, bisexual, genderqueer, hijra, and so on. Some of these questions have emerged from the articulation of transmen and transwomen among others through engagements with the state and judiciary for citizenship rights; of sex workers seeking a space within the labour market; of two women seeking to form a life together challenging marriage and family, of asexuality and intimacy – challenges

and questions that do not necessarily speak a uniform language either. This ‘queering of feminism’ adds to these questions through engagements with anti-caste/race, labour, ability, mental health, gender and sexual rights’ movements and interrogating state efforts.

Another strand the session would like to set forward for critical debate is the tensions between ‘queering’ and ‘feminism’, inviting discussion on the ways in which a certain language of both feminism and queering that work in the post-globalisation scenario – as individual politics, as identity questions that cannot be shared, or as ways of life that may not question dominant communitarian agendas.

Constantly foregrounding the feminist expression of “the personal is political”, as well as the feminist recognition of experience as mediated through structures, the session seeks to complicate our understanding of sexual desires and gender expressions with these questions emerging from the margins of dominant feminist debate.

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**SUB-THEME-8**

## **Women with Disabilities**

Persons with Disabilities have been defined in the UN Convention for Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) to include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This “social model” of disability has been accepted by people with disabilities across the world as it reflects the paradigm changes in thinking from a charity and a medical perspective to one of disability being a development issue. This approach allows us to examine the intersectionality’s as well, like gender, and the barriers that they present. Article 6 of the CRPD specifically speaks of the double discrimination faced by women with disabilities and recent efforts by civil society to strengthen the State obligations under this Article have highlighted the socio-economic and cultural barriers that doubly marginalise women with disabilities.

As we move forward, with the new way of thinking, the following shifts in the disability sector are slowly happening, they certainly need more robust action.

- a) Over the years, the main concerns have been of education for children six to eighteen years, most services, schemes and programmes and training of manpower have concentrated in this age group. It has led to people with disabilities always being treated as children, with limited capacities.  
There is now a move to look at the evolution of barriers, and consequently, the evolution of support across the life span, from birth to old age.
- b) The segregation of services has led to segregation of persons with disabilities. Budgetary emphasis has always been on general services, and hence specialized services are of poor quality and are not allocated enough resources to take place at the grassroots levels. This in turn leads to women with disabilities being unable to access them. We need to move beyond special schools and institutions to all the requirements for living in the community as equal members.
- c) Even within such segregation, there is further isolation of different groups of persons with disabilities from others. It is essential for us to move from a ‘specialized’ single disability approach to one that is cross disability. Such inclusion is

important to prevent a hierarchy of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ disabilities. It is the disability sector which needs to introspect on the traditional thinking that each disability is highly technical and needs to struggle and advocate only for itself.

- d) From service delivery to inclusion. ‘Mainstreaming’ the inclusion of persons with disabilities in all services is extremely crucial by making them accessible and relevant to persons with disabilities.
- e) We need to push for moving from the ‘solution’ of institutions to encouraging living in the community according to the choice of the individual. Promoting citizenship and active participation rather than living segregated and isolated lives.
- f) We must emerge from the present dismissal of persons with certain impairments as lacking capacity and towards capability development to facilitate the exercise of legal capacity.

Of course, in all of the above endeavours, the specific inclusion of women with disabilities is crucial. Neo-liberal economic reforms and globalisation, coupled with the stigma surrounding disability have further disenfranchised women with disabilities. Studies show that there are failures even in the most elementary entitlements like a birth certificate, being counted in a survey or census, obtaining a disability certificate etc. which leads to gender gaps in literacy, schooling, and access to skills and avenues to self-employment through loans, employment or any chances to convert skills into income. Women with disabilities face the irony of being denied sexual agency and being deemed asexual, while simultaneously facing extreme vulnerability to violence and sexual abuse. In many cases, they are dependent on family and sibling support and are at risk of abandonment, institutionalisation or being rendered homeless.

At the Conference we would like to encourage submission of papers on women with disabilities in all the Sub- Themes, this will ensure that disability becomes part of the general discourse. In fact all studies should include the disability dimension.

For the sub-theme on women with disabilities, the discussions will be around three areas for which papers/presentations are invited.

1. Financial Inclusion: Livelihood and Employment.
2. From institutions to living in the community: services, entitlements and delivery
3. Cultivating relationships: of support, family, friendship and love

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## SUB-THEME-9

### **Sexual Violence and Sexualisation of Violence**

The National Crime Records Bureau in India (NCRB) reports indicate a huge increase in the number of rape cases registered in the country. They rose from 22,172 in 2010 to 36,735 in 2014, an increase of over 65% over the 5 year period. However, it is well-known that the unreported number of cases is extremely high due to various reasons such as fear of retribution from their abusers, lack of remedies for the victims’ situation, fear of skepticism and societal stigmatization. Child sexual abuse is also on the increase, with the 2014 data showing as many as 8,904 cases reported under POCSO. Sexual minorities also face different forms of sexual violence. A disturbing feature is the ruthless brutality witnessed in these cases, be it in Khairlanjee or the Delhi “Nirbhaya” case, and several others that have come to light from time to time.

Rape is often used as a political instrument to control, subjugate and terrorise marginalized and vulnerable communities. Through gang rapes, revenge rapes and communal rapes and so on, women’s bodies have been continuously targeted as symbols of ‘honour’ of caste, class, religion and region, and used to shame, violate and create an environment of fear and insecurity. The number of incidents of sexual violence against Dalit and tribal women are steadily increasing. As women enter different domains of edu-

cation and employment, they are faced with different forms of sexual harassment on educational campuses and at the workplace, including stalking and voyeurism. Date rapes and sexual harassment in cyber spaces are new forms. Declining employment opportunities in this period of neo-liberal economic policies has increased women's vulnerability to sexual violence. Trafficking of women for prostitution continues unabated. As women challenge the status quo, question patriarchal institutions and assert their identity, claim their rights and demand freedom of choice, of mobility etc, sexual violence also becomes a weapon to "teach them a lesson."

The last few years have also seen changes in laws related to sexual violence. The ground-breaking Verma Committee Report, the Criminal Law Amendments of 2013, the passage of the Prevention of Sexual Harassment at the Workplace Act Place Act, increasing the age of consent from 16 to 18, amendments to the Juvenile Justice Act to increase the definitional age of the child from 16 to 18, recent draft legislation to curb Trafficking, judgments related to S377, etc are some of the areas which have provoked intense debate not just amongst activists and legal circles but also within society at large.

Yet, ironically, stringent laws do not appear to have curtailed sexual violence, raising larger questions about the context in which this violence is taking place. Devaluation of women's work, commodification of women's bodies and its expression in different forms, strengthening of sexual stereotypes, the assertion of caste, communal and regional identities, the vast outreach of social media, proliferation of liquor and drugs, etc are some of the inter-related issues that need to be further explored as women and the women's movement in India grapple with this ever growing problem. At the same time, there is a need to examine the responses of the state, and those who make up the state – elected representatives, members of the police, administration and judiciary. Increasing conservatism, self-proclaimed vigilantism and moral policing, and "technocratic" solutions are actually increasing surveillance of women and curtailing their already meager freedoms in the name of safety and security. The trivialization of rape and sexual violence is echoed in comments and remarks by public figures and a popular tendency to hold women themselves responsible for the increase in sexual violence without examining its structural reasons.

How has the women's movement, and different organizations and groups engaged with these issues? What kind of debates and discussions have they provoked? What have been the ground level responses? We invite papers and presentations that explore these complexities of the everyday experience of increasing sexual violence and the sexualisation of violence in India.

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**SUB-THEME-10**

## **Climate Change and Women – Impact and Issues of Adaptation**

Climate change is transforming countries the world over. The nature of risks confronting people's lives and livelihoods are becoming more unpredictable. In India, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) highlights that the impacts of climate change could prove particularly severe for women. Increasing scarcity of water and reduction in yields of forest biomass, are likely to affect women more, as they are traditionally responsible both for water collection and use, and biomass collection for cooking, in rural households. With the possibility of decline in yields and availability of foodgrains, on account of rainfall variability as well as changes in temperatures, the threat of malnutrition, and related health risks, may also increase. While this is likely to affect all poor households, especially those dependent on farming, women's workloads for ensuring household reproduction may be higher, with additional risks to their health. Adapting to climate change then requires a better understanding of the mechanisms for access and control over natural resources that can ensure climate sensitive resource management, attention to gender relations, including male contributions to adaptation, whether through migration, other productive contributions or support with reproductive work, governance, especially in the provisioning of basic services and infrastructure, and the enhancement

of basic capabilities, including appropriate knowledge and technology.

The scientific evidence of climate change for example in decline in agriculture production, repeated disasters occurrence and temperature rise, forest depletion etc needs to be understood from the social and gender lens.

This subtheme seeks to discuss the impacts of climate change on health, socio economic conditions particularly on women. The risks and vulnerabilities that women face in the context of climate change is to be understood so that the national and state specific climate change action plans address these risks. Policies on livelihoods, resource management , agriculture, social protection are inter linked to climate change. Women's participation in policy making as well as gender sensitivity of the action plans and policies is crucial, which need to be analysed. Adaptation strategies, coping mechanisms and approaches of mitigation will be discussed. The cross cutting aspects of scientific and social knowledge will be the basis of discussion.

Fields such as women's studies, sociology, political science, economics and anthropology are central to understanding how people and societies comprehend and respond to climate change along with environmental, ecology and other scientific disciplines.

This subtheme seeks papers to discuss the following:

- Gender dimensions of climate change impact - health, social, economic
- Risk and vulnerabilities in the context of climate change
- Gender analysis of policies (climate change, resource management and social protection, in particular) and legal framework : International, National
- State initiatives on climate change, governance and women's participation
- Adaptation strategies and coping mechanisms
- Migration and climate change
- Linking the evidence of climate change to the social indicators

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## SUB-THEME-11

### **Gender, Religion and Democracy**

Despite the goal of a secular ethos in India, it can be safely argued that the politicization of religion has been making strong inroads in contemporary times. The politics of religion and violence associated with it has strategically deployed gender in multifarious ways. Sometimes in the name of 'honour', sometimes in the name of 'rights' politicized religion has a long record of not only targeting women in times of communal pogroms or riots, but also of suppressing women's attempts at assertion of rights and freedoms.

The growth of communal politics, the deep seated divisions it creates, and the present majoritarian offensive have indeed attempted to further deprive women of independent voice and have complicated the terrain on which women's rights are articulated. Among the majority community, those who fought bitterly against women being conferred a degree of equality in the Hindu Marriage Act, who in social practice have allowed galloping dowry, daughter aversion, and continuing discrimination against girls/women within families, who repeatedly deploy coercion against women who go in for inter-faith marriages, who promote the male breadwinner/female housewife social model and sanction abandonment of wives who fail in their 'duties' on this count - when they speak of personal rights of women in minority communities, particularly Muslims, it reflects a communal agenda and not the interests of Muslim women. At the same time, there remains a continuing tussle between personal laws,

politicized religions, modernization, and equality for women. Further, a growing assertion by women pushing their concerns as women in majority and minority religions, and against marginalization within their communities, is a particular feature of contemporary times. Evolving complexities and their rapidly changing elements and features suggests the need to move away from static conceptions of uniformity or stasis towards dynamic reconceptualization and reconsideration of the significant intersection of gender, religion and democracy in the contemporary Asian societies especially in India.

In recent times democracy is being understood not only as translatable into institutions and structures of the state but also inhering the domains of education, art, popular culture, literature etc. and religion away from textual analysis or institutional structures into understanding everyday practices. As such the relationship between democracy, gender and religion also needs to be remapped through a study of such domains and processes. Gender and religion in popular cinema, television are some of the domains that need to be studied, especially in a context of television serials having contributed to consolidation of Hindu religiosity and majoritarian Hindu 'nationalism' as well as the explicit politicization of the religion. Similarly, we also need to understand how the female and male gurus/babaas/inspirational speakers are reconfiguring the notion of devotion and the female/male devotee in the contemporary period. Also interesting are the ways in which these religious figures reconfigure femininity, masculinity, through their public devotional practices.

In this sub-theme, we invite papers to reflect on gender and religion in public and private spheres, on politicized religions and women's vulnerability; contemporary perspectives about a Common Civil Code; on how the relationship between the State (in terms of policies and laws) and Religions (in terms of institutional structures such as endowments) is changing and how gender is implicated in this process; on the challenge by hitherto structurally excluded sections such as Dalits or women and their forays into forbidden temples and customs, and how such moves re-articulate the relationship between religion, gender and democracy in contemporary India; on women's experiences in relation to religious personal laws and religious education and with community based formal and informal institutions. Other areas that may be explored are religious identity, gender and majoritarian nationalism; state regulation and management of religion, religious devotion and religious practices; minority religions and community/social reform initiatives; religious practices, sexuality and gender identities; feminist politics and women's religiosity; understanding women's activism for equality within religion; personal laws and community identities.

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## SUB-THEME-12

### Marginal Communities and Citizenships

#### Overview

India as a society stands on many contradictions. On the one hand, the Indian Constitution recognises all persons as equal in law and society but in practice hierarchy and differentiation based on caste, tribe and gender distinctions continues to govern social-political-economic-cultural relations and associations in the society.

The sub-theme titled, "Marginal Communities and Citizenships", is seeking to explore the socio-political-economic dimensions of marginalisation and the relationship between marginalised communities and citizenship. Marginality as a concept is broad and inclusive of discrimination as well as oppression. Marginalisation can be experienced by an individual or a social group in ways which may not be measurable or even visible, and it is a challenge to define it adequately. For the purposes of this sub-theme, we limit ourselves to marginalities which we can observe and track to a certain extent, and study in a social scientific way. These social groups could be adivasis, religious minorities, women from the north-east who face challenging situations when they migrate to metropolises for work, people who have got displaced because of 'development' or warlike situations where they

live, e.g. extremist or terrorist related violence ridden areas, or migrants from rural areas into cities, elderly people...there are myriad possibilities.

The sub-theme seek to investigate the contested relationship between marginalised communities and the state. What does being a citizen in a nation-state entail for women from the socially marginalised communities? Papers are invited to explore the constant contestation and negotiation with citizenship rights that is a reality of many communities. The sub-theme will include analyses of the daily economic, social political and cultural negotiation of these marginalised communities in their various and specific locations, with a focus on women and an emphasis on the gendered aspects and nature of such processes.

What will be welcome however is to trace the issue historically as well as comparatively. What makes a particular work or social group 'marginal' to the mainstream, and how did it happen over a period of time? What do we learn from comparing one marginalized group with another, in case the parameters for assessing are roughly the same, e.g. socio economic status, or geographic proximity?

Additionally, if papers are able to tie up more than one kind of marginality with another, and show that there is a complex and overlapping play within the concept of marginality itself, it will be very useful.

### **Special Focus: Stratification Within the Marginalized: Contemporary Denotified Communities**

Among the marginalized communities, this sub-theme will have a special focus on 'Denotified Communities'. The denotified communities are those who were notified as 'criminal tribes' under a notorious piece of colonial legislation called the Criminal Tribes Act, 1871. A large proportion of these communities were nomadic. When the Act was repealed upon independence, the notifications declaring them criminals became null and void, and thus these communities were now 'denotified'.

The independent Indian state, however, has not been able to give these nearly two hundred communities, running into crores of people, their due citizenship rights. They have lost their traditional occupations over the last century and a half, and many are now grossly destitute. Moreover, they still continue to be regarded as hardened criminals by the administration.

These attitudes are shared by Indian rural and urban communities as well. As a result, denotified communities who may be partially nomadic now live in temporary shelters at the outermost margins of villages, and often on peripheries of cities and towns. Women are particularly vulnerable to pretexts for sexual harassment by the police and a state of perpetual homelessness again makes women very vulnerable in terms of physical safety.

At the outset, however, it must be said that the nomadic lifestyle of these communities, has also exposed them, especially the women, to much more of the world than their counterparts in sedentary communities. In addition, having to constantly deal with inhospitable terrains as well as hostile people frequently makes them extremely resilient and resourceful. They often display unusual boldness and ingenuity, and many are tough survivors under subhuman living conditions.

But the particular personal qualities which the denotified community women may be forced to cultivate do not dispute harsh and unsavoury social realities on the ground. Papers around this sub theme can engage fruitfully with the following broad areas of concern:

1. Interface between the Indian state, especially the police administration, and the women of these communities. From the point of view of these communities, how do the policies of a supposed welfare state as well as excesses of a police state impact them?
2. Interactions with mainstream communities, and equally, with other marginalised sections.

Research shows that new hierarchies have emerged within the larger body of marginalized communities (which include SCs, STs, OBCs or poorer sections of religious minorities), wherever there is sharing of geographic space with denotified communities, or wherever there is an uneasy assimilation of these communities within a milieu constituted by a number of other deprived communities. Moreover, since these communities are often included within the SC, ST or OBC category, there is discrimination practiced against them by the more advanced members of the reserved categories, leading to an abysmal record of benefits obtained by denotified communities from reservations. Research also shows that untouchability is practiced against the members of denotified communities by not just high caste communities, but in some cases even by dalits.

Are the communities being Hinduised by the far right as a way of offering integration? Are there conversions to other religions? Where this has happened, how does this impact girls and women?

3. Worsening situation of the women within these communities over the decades.

There is some indication through research that though these societies used to be largely patriarchal as well, there were certain features and practises which tended to a greater degree towards egalitarianism than those amongst sedentary communities. Some of those customs seem to be getting lost, and new norms and value systems are emerging which may have a retrograde impact on the situation of girls and women.

Not all, but some denotified communities have almost all male caste panchayats which are very strong and have considerable authority within the community. What is the role of these panchayats for making decisions, enforcing them, and regulating the community through rewards and punishments? How are they constituted? How are girls and women affected by them?

Are these communities prone to sanskritisation when they settle down, in an attempt to garner respectability, to ward off unwelcome attention from being culturally different or for being 'outsiders', or simply as a way of social mobility? The shift from traditional practices mostly seems to have had a retrograde impact on women, though women often voluntarily participate in the process. Generally, both vulnerable as well as stronger sections of these communities, for different reasons, may give up the previous relatively egalitarian practices of the community, and voluntarily adopt undesirable practices of the mainstream communities regarding their women. These shifts need to be accurately documented.

4. Representation of the communities in popular media, both print and electronic, and their self-representation.

In recent years, particularly the last decade, these communities have attracted a lot of media attention, and have been written about in popular press. Documentaries and films have been made about them, as much out of concern for their welfare as to warn the civil society about their ferocious criminality. These narratives as well as those about the self-image of these communities remain an important area of research. Due to the absorption of the prevailing, unfavorable, hegemonic point of view, a negative self-image and a mistaken sense of their place in history is being frequently formed. Interestingly, self-representation of denotified communities as dangerous criminals in the distant past, by communities themselves, is quite common. In the absence of knowledge of historical facts, a number of denotified communities' members seem to believe that their ancestors were criminals during the British period, and that is what explains to them the wretchedness of their situation today, including unrelenting police harassment.

5. Changing livelihoods and new balances of power within family and community.

In a number of cases, partly because men are absent, or unemployed, or in police lock ups in disproportionate numbers, denotified community women have become the main breadwinners of the family, though earlier livelihoods had to be given up, or can be practiced only partially. What kinds of livelihoods are the women (and men) engaged in today, given that traditional nomadic livelihoods are no longer feasible, or do not give adequate income to the families? How does this impact the power relations within the family and community?

6. Organizing by these communities for citizenship rights, in isolation or in partnership with other marginalized groups.

In a few cases, the concerned communities have become a part of larger democratic movements for equality and dignity, and have become quite assertive. The women are often important driving forces in such cases.

Papers are invited to cover any and every aspect of the denotified communities' lives through a 'gendered lense'. Those along the research areas outlined above will be especially welcome.

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## SUB-THEME-13

**'Teaching Women's Studies'**

Women's studies emerged in India during the 1970s from an acknowledgement that social, political and educational processes after Independence had failed women – a finding established by the publication of the "Towards Equality" report. Initiated by the women's movement to counter the invisibility and marginalization of women, spaces marked as 'women's studies' within universities, research centers, and non-government organizations came forth to challenge the patriarchal structures of institutions, movements and epistemological processes. Within a few decades 'gendering disciplines/disciplining gender' became the totem pole around which revolved debates about the scope, nature, ramifications of institutionalization of women's studies as a discipline. Similar to women's movements, women's studies too shares a paradoxical relationship with the state. On the one hand, the 160 women's studies centres in the country today are funded by state governments, independent, autonomous academic institutions and government institutions under the guidance of the University Grants Commission (UGC); on the other hand, one *raison de etre* of women's studies is to challenge statist structures and spaces that invisibilised woman. Nowhere was the attempt to appropriate women's studies by the state more obvious than the attempt by UGC to rename 'women's studies' into 'Women and Family Studies Centres' in 2005.

'Teaching women's studies' remains both ideologically and politically fraught as has been pointed out by many teachers, scholars, and practitioners. While it is true that there has been a spurt in the visibility of 'gender' in academic discourses (whether in terms of dissertation topics, research papers, and themes for conferences, seminars and workshops), it is also true that mainstream social science disciplines remain recalcitrant to feminist epistemologies. The question of what is to be taught, in what language and how remain pertinent when one tries to address the theme 'teaching women's studies'. Not lagging far behind is the dogged question: Do we need a separate centre/school or should traditional disciplines open up to feminist politics and theories? This sub-theme is also an effort to understand the possibilities and challenges of gendering disciplines better: While Women's Studies have wrought significant changes in some disciplines, some others like Engineering and some branches of Science remain elusive and untouched.

One of the questions that the sub-theme 'Teaching women's studies' would like to foreground is the question of interdisciplinarity: what is to be taught in a women's studies class room? Those who enter women's studies classrooms necessarily may not be open to the interdisciplinary nature of the subject. Coming from varied disciplines of social sciences, humanities, physical and biological sciences, students often find little interest outside their disciplinary training and research interests. While there are some students who feel that there ought to be a greater emphasis on theoretical orientations, others favour cultural constructions of gender and still others felt that what was really relevant was the role of women in development. Following close behind is the positing of the binary of criticality versus employability. Like many other social sciences and humanities disciplines, women's studies too face the inevitable 'what now?' after a degree in women's studies.

The other questions that the sub-theme hopes to raise are the question of building regional histories of women's studies and its relationship with language and the importance of multilingualism in women's studies. While regional variations cannot be ignored, we must also exercise caution whether women's studies should now become region specific, and what then would be the linkages and interconnections between a women's studies curriculum in the South and maybe in the East. The question of regionalism also foregrounds language and whether English be the universal vehicle of teaching? If the vote is for regional languages to be used in classrooms, then one must be vigilant of the relation between hierarchies embedded in regional languages and aspirations of students, particularly from working class, lower caste communities. This would also entail examining process of curriculum building and non-availability of resources in regional languages. The student community (not just in a women's studies classroom) is composed of members both from elite as well as disprivileged backgrounds, but what makes a women's studies class room unique is the linkages between experience and theories, which entail bringing one's social contexts in the class rooms. How does one negotiate the existing inequalities of class, caste, communities, sexualities and disabilities within the classroom while ensuring academic rigour? The connection between the theoretical knowledge and active intervention, including activism in campus, is much more needed today. The linkages between women's studies and women's movements also bring to surface who studies in a women's studies course? What are the criteria of admissions as well as appointments? How does the objective set of criteria that an institution demands negotiate the tensions between academic 'merit' and 'commitment' to activism? We also welcome discussions on the pedagogy of teaching women's studies. The push towards digital humanities has not left women's studies untouched— does it exacerbate inequalities within the class room or does innovative pedagogy help

confront social inequalities?

A great challenge to women's studies is being posed by the rapid growth and consolidation of the right-wing and the escalating caste violence, affecting the campuses as well. Liberal spaces in the campuses are getting constricted and are being claimed by regressive-reactionary elements of the society. Centres as liberal enclaves have already begun to feel the brunt; there being threat of co-opting and losing its radical character. Women's studies in today's scenario are expected to play a far more meaningful role and need to connect with the movement to raise critical issues of local and national importance.

Sub-themes/ theme tracks:

- Mapping change with women's studies initiatives
- Teaching and writing resistance
- Institutionalization of Women's Studies: Issues and concerns
- The 'region' in women's studies: histories, languages and development
- Challenges today: Confronting communalism, sectarian- caste violence
- Caste, class intersections in women's studies teaching
- Women's studies and campus disparities
- Debating women's question in class rooms: local specificities
- Connecting developments in women's studies and the movement
- Women's studies in conflict zones

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## PRE-CONFERENCE COLLOQUIUM

### **The Flux in India's Higher Education System**

21st January, SBOA School and Junior College, Chennai

#### **Concept Note**

A neoliberal techno-managerial approach to the question of what constitutes 'quality education' had started chipping away at the social democratic conceptualization of public education since the Reagan-Thatcher years in the metropolitan centres of advanced capital accumulation. The German state concentrated on developing universities of 'excellence', the French state negotiated the tiering of higher education institutions, the UK and USA moved towards restructuring the entire system of education as 'market enterprises' evaluated in terms of competitiveness, investment, profits and costs. Each of these features coalesced into the claims of a new paradigm of 'stake-holder driven quality education' which formed the rubric of 'education reforms' advocated by the Bretton Woods institutions.

The process of 'integration' into the new world order of the erstwhile Third World since the installation of the dictatorship in Chile in 1973 entailed a new universalisation of paradigmatic change in the ensuing decades in the very design of the WTO where education became a tradeable service (a site of targeted private (foreign and domestic) investment) along with the changes to intellectual property rights which reshaped the nature of hegemony in the contemporary phase of neoliberal integration. This was in the social historical context of non-universal access to school education in most parts of the world except a small metropolitan core. The political economy of this restructuring through the aegis of 'reforms' has played out in very particular social contexts

The last thirty years since the Second New Education Policy[1] or the National Policy on Education has seen a state of continuous flux in India's higher education system. The world of higher education in India has seen both continuities and changes since the 1980s. On one hand, affirmative action of the most limited kind over a period of three decades has led to a reconstitution of the

intersectional social space of the public university; on the other of all students who enroll at the primary level, less than 4% make it to the public system of higher education in India. It is in this highly exclusive context that both the past and present debates on caste, patriarchy, and religious and other forms of social discrimination and oppression have been playing out.

Neoliberalism in India has operated in a society already heavily weighed against women. Gender disparity was already encoded in family and social institutions which colonial capitalism strengthened and used for the purposes of labour deployment and control. A complex process of myth formation has constructed gender in Indian society in the last two hundred and fifty years that was crucial to the social reproduction of class in India. Five decades of state-led capitalism preserved patriarchy in every sphere. The process of liberalisation has brought in its wake newer forms of gender exploitation and gender disempowerment, in both the economic and social spheres, leading to increased violence against women. Market fundamentalism has bred religious and social fundamentalism as well, with disastrous consequences for many sections in society and especially women. The general conclusion from the literature that has evaluated the impact of liberalization on women has established quite forcefully how large sections of women have been significantly disempowered by neoliberal economic reforms. The sectoral shifts in the economy after 1991 have been on clear gender lines. Women were losing many of their earlier occupations, being crowded into less stable employment and being pushed to the margins of the economy. This is in spite of the lofty ideas of the Policy for Women announced in 1994 and the multiplicity of schemes for women's development that the state has ritualistically adopted in the last twenty years. The diversification in employment for urban women is concentrated among women from higher labour status, the section of people who have greater access to jobs. A socially advantaged family background and family education status have been much more important determinants of job access and mobility than skill levels.

Patriarchy has been at the heart of the debate on the role of higher education in India. The continuities and changes in patterns of enrolment in different disciplines, the evidence of setting in of gender gaps at the level of primary education, perceptions of 'hard' and 'soft' disciplines, the inadequacy of analysis that have tried to portray enrolment in higher education as the causal explanation for low rates of women's work participation, the struggle of women against discriminating family structures on the question of accessing higher education, the movements and resistance against discriminatory structures and practices inside the higher education institutions raise the question as to in what ways and to what extent does higher education function as a means of liberation?

Notwithstanding the diverse range of institutions, social space and disciplines/areas that constitute the material space of 'higher education', the flux has cut across the variations – on a range of inter-related questions such as the institutional structure of the public university and spaces of higher learning; quality (reduced to a quantified measures of commoditized output), affordability and access of higher education; tiering through the 'regionalization' of higher education in addition to the knowledge hierarchy of 'streams' and disciplines; layers of social discrimination; the contractualisation of labour and the aggressive attempts and outcomes of privatization. The experience and impact of privatization of higher education in India has been complex and distinct from the experiences of countries in which higher education was universally public. Given that private colleges and private run colleges aided by state funding have existed in India since the late colonial period, the reach of the 'public' system in itself is distinct and limited. Moreover, the aggressive promotion of private universities in the post-liberalization era is also distinct in its ownership mix of family-owned small, medium and big capitalist entities and varies across regions.

While these questions have been central to students', teachers' and education workers' struggles in India, the intensification of both attacks on the higher education system from multiple quarters and resistance to it has intensified in the last few years. The question of cuts in public funding, authoritarian attacks on campus democracy and the right to dissent, intensification of discrimination and oppression on the basis of identity and ideological attacks by the extreme Right have seen valiant resistance by students and sections of teachers both inside and outside the campuses. It is in this phase of intensification that the third New Education Policy 2016 (National Education Policy) is being proposed.

To what extent are these rallying points of an intensified and significant fight-back related to the paradigmatic changes in education policy and larger political economy of the neoliberal global order? How have these movements looked at the different waves of education 'reforms' in India from the Kothari Commission to the Birla-Ambani Report? What implication does this have on spatial hierarchies of school, technical and higher education constituted within the tiering of the regional and the social? What are the experiences and lessons drawn on the struggles against structures of discrimination and oppression and for substantive affirmative action? What drives the present attempts at saffronization of education? What significance does this have in the delineation of structural features of an intersectional social hierarchy in India that facilitates a continuous process of labour cheapening as the sole basis of integration into the neoliberal global order?

And lastly, are there possibilities of new solidarities across the boundaries of nation states for example with the Chilean student movement which has brought to the fore similar questions in a different social historical context?

The IAWS pre-conference one-day colloquium on ‘The Flux in India’s Higher Education System’ aims at a comprehensive analysis to look beyond immediacies into the developments of the last thirty years in this regard. The colloquium is planned as a series of three sessions with a combination of students, teachers, education workers and researchers as participants. The colloquium organizers will attempt to go beyond metropolitan locations in ensuring a representation of the unevenness in higher education in the public distribution of resources for higher education and the variations in social context over which the ‘flux’ of the last thirty years have been playing out.

[1] The first ‘New Education Policy’ was introduced in 1968

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Session I: The World of Education: Continuities and Changes

Session II: The Social Structure of Higher Education in India

Session III: Education ‘Reforms’: Intent and Implications

Session III: The Struggles in Institutions of Higher Education (Panel Discussion)

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[1] The first ‘New Education Policy’ was introduced in 1968