

SECTION - 2

**Message from Prof. M. S. Swaminathan
Chairperson Reception Committee for
XV National Conference on Women's studies**

I am very happy to greet delegates to the XV National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies. Let me begin by saying that you could not have chosen a better city to host this conference. Chennai is the city of choice for arts and culture. The city boasts of many renowned women performers and artists who command a larger following than their male counterparts.

I might add that the state of Tamil Nadu fares well when assessed from the viewpoint of gender equality, although of course we are far from perfect and have a long way ahead of us on the road to complete equality. Female literacy is high in this state as compared to many others. Although Tamil Nadu has reported female foeticide and other extreme forms of gender bias, it has had greater success than states such as Punjab and Haryana in tackling and arresting this practice. Panchayati Raj institutions have been working reasonably well in the state and this includes women headed panchayats. So far as I know, there are no major temples in Tamil Nadu that forbid the entry of women. In recent times, the right to temple entry for all sections of the population, including women of all ages, has emerged as an important rallying point for women's rights groups and gender equality campaigns in the country.

Tamil Nadu has the most comprehensive and effective maternal services. For example, there is provision for institutional delivery in almost all villages. As a result, Tamil Nadu's Infant Mortality Rate (IMR is 24) has come down drastically. Learning from Tamil Nadu on maternity and childcare benefits can be an important outcome of the conference. The women's Self Help Group (SHG) movement has deep roots in Tamil Nadu and has mobilized large numbers of rural women. Livelihood interventions for women have been strengthened through the reach and spread of women's SHGs. Like in other states, the dairy industry remains largely in the hands of women in Tamil Nadu. Over 75 million women across the country are involved in the dairy industry and the survival of their households is often closely tied to their labour in this industry. Women's livelihoods are also linked to the textile industry in many states. In Tamil Nadu, Kanchipuram is a major production center of saris. The textile sector employs and is, in turn, dependent on the economic contribution of large numbers of women workers.

The five traditional ecological systems of Tamil Nadu mentioned in the Sangam literature are *kurinji* (mountains), *mullai* (forests), *marudham* (cropland), *neithal* (sea shore), and *palai* (desert). In each of these, women have played a leading role in the conservation of bio-diversity by preserving traditional food, seeds and knowledge systems. We see this in a stark way in the Kolli hills of Tamil Nadu's Namakkal district. Women have always been acutely aware of the importance of preserving water as seen in their economic, rather than excessive, use of water. Many studies show that when women operate a well they only take the water they need, not more. In terms of managing the environment, women care for generations yet to be born to a greater extent than men.

Whether in the fields of politics, administration, economics, ecology or livelihoods, women's contribution is undeniable. Until very recently, Tamil Nadu was led by a woman who also happened to be one of the most powerful politicians of her time. In Tamil Nadu, it seems that being a woman is not such a handicap in running a state.

I am very happy that Madras University is hosting this conference. I was once a student of Madras University. In the year 1947, I obtained a B.Sc degree in Agriculture from the Coimbatore Agricultural College (now the Tamil Nadu Agricultural University) that was formerly affiliated to the Madras University. Madras University is one of the three oldest universities in the country, the other two being Kolkata and Mumbai. The Madras University has been compared to the University of London for its exemplary performance as an affiliating institution. Scholars such as S. Ramanujan and C.V. Raman are products of Madras University or colleges affiliated to the University. E. K. Janakiammal, a scientist who specialized in biology and botany and did a great deal of pioneering work with tribal communities, was also part of Madras University.

As I see it, one of the critical issues of our times that this conference will have to engage with is that of violence against women. When speaking of gender justice and equity, the primary challenge that confronts us is this. How do we convert the idea that women are equal partners into attitudinal change? I am of the view that educational programmes at all levels must emphasize respect for women. Such programmes must seek to develop new role models for men which emphasise mutual respect and reciprocity, rather than domination and control. Gender equality and women's empowerment are closely related to such changes in male beliefs, attitudes and practices. Equality between the sexes is a fundamental condition for human happiness. This equality must encompass all dimensions – the social, economic and the polity.

A real issue for women is the absence of land rights in today's scenario. Without land pattas in their name, women cannot access credit. We need to educate people on the difference between dowry gifts to daughters and land rights. Often men refuse to part with land to daughters and argue that they have provided sufficient dowry on the occasion of their wedding. If I wish to give my daughter a gift for her wedding as I would for my son, then that is a different matter. But this cannot become a substitute for my daughter's right to inherit my property. Besides land, water and bio-diversity conservation and regeneration are important areas in which we must guarantee women's access and entitlements.

During my tenure as member of the Rajya Sabha, I introduced the Women Farmers' Entitlements Bill in 2012. It was introduced as a private members' bill and approved by the President of India. As the Bill states in its definition, anyone who engages in agricultural activities is a farmer and the traditional thinking of men alone as farmers is obviously wrong and biased. The Bill sought 'to provide for the gender specific needs of women farmers, to protect their legitimate needs and entitlements and to empower them with rights over agricultural land, water resources and other related rights..' Unfortunately, I regret to say that the House was disrupted and I was unable to have the bill discussed with the seriousness it deserved.

In order to see the changes that we all desire, we need action on three fronts –education on gender equality, social mobilization (including support to women who organize themselves through SHGs or through collective action to make their villages liquor-free) and regulation (such as land rights to women). All the three are necessary for us to move forward.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that I am very proud to be associated with this conference due to my total commitment to the cause that Women's Studies stands for. In my view, Madras University is an excellent location for this conference, which I hope will be a significant landmark in the history of women's movements in India.

ARTICLES

Three Years in Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women: A personal story

■■■ V.Vasanthi Devi¹

This article is a small effort to share my experiences as Chairperson of Tamil Nadu State Commission for Women in the years 2002-2005, a gesture of solidarity I owe to the thousands of women, who came knocking at my doors. Each is a story of irrepressible tears, heart rending screams, of humiliations, indignities, denial of right to life, to shelter, to honour, of torture in marital home, at the hands of dominant castes, and by guardians of law and state machinery, of patriarchy's hundred avatars, some primordial horrors and others modernity's shameless manifestations.

My term as Chairperson of Tamil Nadu State commission for Women started with a bang, laying the cards on the table, knocking down my starry-eyed naiveté of governmental support available to render justice to women. From then on, I had to be creative, evolving strategies, forging partnerships, stretching limits, to skirt around possible roadblocks the Commission would have to encounter.

Immediately on assuming office, I organised a brain-storming session with most of the women's rights groups and civil society organisations in the state, to prioritise gender issues and also draw up an agenda for three years. This consultation won a lot of

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appreciation from women's and other groups, at the same time raising official eyebrows.

At the top of the agenda was a Public Hearing on Female Infanticide and Female Foeticide that had for a long time been rocking the state, with poor sex ratio in certain pockets bearing ample evidence that the two crimes were rampant. The state govt's pet programme to end the abomination was the Cradle Baby Scheme that asked parents to drop the girl babies in the cradles maintained by the Govt.

The Commission's proposed Public Hearing evoked enthusiastic support from civil society groups that swung into action, assembling instances of the crimes, lining up victims and witnesses and preparing dossiers. The official machinery also evinced considerable interest, with collectors of the concerned districts offering to present the measures they were taking to sensitise the community and save girl babies.

One day before the Public Hearing, a friendly Secretary to the Govt. informed me that the programme had drawn the ire of the govt. and strict instructions had been sent round that no support is to be offered to the event. He advised that the programme be called off. I was furious, made it clear I would do no such thing and went ahead with it.

The Public Hearing, in spite of official obstructions, and boycott by some of the Commission members, who were secretaries to the Govt., turned out to be very valuable, with a large number of communities that had resorted to the crime explaining the societal compulsions that drove them to extinguish girl babies and civil society groups sharing their experiences. Far reaching recommendations were drawn up as immediate and long term measures. It was a powerful and poignant expose of some of the chilling trends in the state's development experience and the insensitivity of the entire system to gender related horrors. I was on guard all the time, watching out for any untoward attempt by the police to disturb the Hearing. Fortunately, there was none.

The bitter lessons of the first programme of the Commission helped craft the strategies I adopted over the next three years and account for the successes, failures and limitations of my work.

Tamilnadu State Commission for Women, in those days, was a strange creature, with none of the defining features of a commission. Unlike other commissions, it had no statutory authority, no autonomy, no resources. While other Commissions were set up by acts of legislatures, the Tamilnadu Commission was purely an administrative arrangement, set up by a govt. order in 1993. It functioned from a small office, with a tiny establishment, perched in a corner of the Women Development Corporation building, almost as an adjunct of the Social Welfare Department.

Yet, in the three years under review, the Commission had sprung into limelight, established its presence in many areas of gender concern, made a mark even at the national level and won the respect of all stakeholders, including of authorities. How was this challenging task achieved?

The three years were years of expansion, experimentation, new initiatives, of carefully testing the waters at every step, pushing the frontiers, a little at a time. The halting steps did work, though at differing degrees of success. They were also years of groping, frustration, irritation, disappointment, of facing a stone wall that could not be breached, meeting with apathy, indifference, cynicism in the face of atrocity and misery.

The three years were institution building years, of evolving new procedures, of winning the confidence of women victims, of establishing channels of communication to the proverbially apathetic, non-responding bureaucracy, of forging partnerships with women's groups and peoples' movements.

Below are a few glimpses into the Commission's work. Atrocities and right denials against dalit women and girl children figured prominently in the Commission's concerns, as it was decided to prioritise the most vulnerable in our society.

Village in a time warp

One day in late August, 2003, the Commission office witnessed a strange scene. About thirty women, evidently rural, poor, without a whiff of the city on them, travel weary, disheveled and distraught, trooped into my office. They said they were dalit women from a village in a remote corner of northern Tamil Nadu, where a single bus service connected it each day to the world outside. The tales the women poured out over the next two hours harkened back to the country side of half a century ago, to

the repressed histories of caste, long before the early stirring of consciousness in the dalit community, when their hamlets were torched with impunity and their women violated at any caste Hindu whim.

After a couple of days I, along with the legal counsel of the Commission, Ms.Sudha Ramalingam, reached the village and after exhaustive investigations and interactions with Dalits and caste Hindus, the district administration, including the Collector and the Superintendent of police, arrived at a set of recommendations to immediately put an end to the abominations, got both the dominant castes and the dalits to agree to them and the district administration to strictly implement them.

In the next few months, I kept getting letters and phone calls, saying that the intervention of the Commission was truly a watershed in the wretched history of the dalits of the village, a break with the dark past of caste oppression and sexual slavery. The dominant castes kept away from them and their dignity was safeguarded.

Is this a success story?

A later encounter : the grim reality:

Months after the visit to the village, a State Level Conference of Dalit women was organized in a town near the village, where I was the chief guest. A woman, who had deposed before the Commission, spoke. She profusely thanked me for liberating the dalit women from decades of sexual slavery, but....

It was a big but.

The dalits of the village had lost their livelihood. The backlash had been swift. The dominant castes closed ranks and imposed a ban on employing dalits of the village on their land. And land was theirs, their primordial power base. Labour was brought in from other villages. The liberated dalits starved. The woman pleaded pitifully for another intervention to ensure livelihood to them.

I listened speechless. The Commission could invoke laws, briefly arm-twist the district administration, and get them respite from abuse, violence and bondage. But, where are the laws that would cover their shame with decent clothing, fill their children's sunken bellies with food? Where is the hope of dignity when land is in the vice grip of dominant castes, when land reforms are a lost pledge, when the neo-liberal juggernaut rolls on, mercilessly decimating those at the margins?

A Haunting Custodial Death

It was the worst case of torture and violence against women that the Commission handled in my three years in office. I received a complaint that Karuppi, an Arundhathiar caste (the lowest in the hierarchy of dalit castes in Tamil Nadu) woman, employed as domestic help in a middle class dalit family, was accused of theft of a gold chain, was taken to the police station for interrogation, tortured for six days, at the end of which, she was found hanging from the transmission tower behind the police station on 1st December, 2002. The police had registered a case of suicide. The village panchayat and her relatives, suspecting foul play and death by torture, had demanded action against the police men. I immediately left Chennai for the scene of occurrence in southern Tamil Nadu.

The Collector of the District, at my request, had asked all the relatives of Karuppi and a few others to appear for my enquiry. It was clear, after hours of enquiring with each of them in strict privacy, that they had been severely intimidated by the police not to divulge the truth. However, I was ultimately able to get at the details of the brutal torture perpetrated by the guardians of law. I returned to Chennai with a grim determination that I would, somehow, seek justice in the case and would expose the horrific case of custodial death.

I got hold of the Post-Mortem Report, F.I.R., and Inquest Report and sent them to the head of the Forensic Department in a leading Govt. hospital for his confidential expert opinion. The medical opinion clearly stated that Karuppi's death was caused by "*the use of blunt force for a few days prior to her hanging.*" I wrote to the Home Secretary to arrest the guilty police men. When there was no reply, I decided to expose the crime through a Public Hearing.

Knowing the limited powers I had, I persuaded the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Ms.Poornima Advani, to join the Public Hearing, which was conducted in Madurai, with an eminent jury. The jury recorded their verdict that it was undoubtedly a case of brutal custodial murder by the police.

In spite of the jury verdict and the publicity the case got, the Govt. of Tamil Nadu did not act. Three years later, a Public Interest Litigation was filed in Madras High Court by People's Watch, a Madurai based human rights organisation that had initially brought the crime to my notice. The Hon'ble High Court castigated the Govt and commended the relentless and persistent role of the Women's Commission, without which, the Court observed, the case would have been buried with the culprits getting away scot-free. The final verdict was pronounced in February, 2013, ten years after the crime was committed, when the police men were given ten years of rigorous imprisonment.

It is a sordid story. Karuppi's death shakes our conscience and our faith in the law enforcement machinery in the state. A crime of such brutality anchored in prima facie evidence could not move the official machinery to act. If, ultimately, the law court, with its proverbial delay, is the only recourse, what at all, is the purpose of setting up alternate fora like Women's and Human Rights Commissions?

Unsafe Schools, Unsafe World

Violence against girl children in schools and also in the larger society were taken up in different forms, in two public hearings, where a large number of cases were presented and a number of individual cases of abuse.

The first of the two public hearings was held in October, 2003. An eminent jury headed by a retired Judge of the Madras High Court heard 37 cases of imaginable and unimaginable abuses of the most helpless victims of our society. Almost all the girls very poor dalits and tribals. One case was of repeated sexual violation over months of a nine year old girl by the physical education teacher in the school toilet in a private school in Chennai. Another, of two daughters of quarry workers, who were suspected of theft of a petty sum being dragged to the local temple, where they were subjected to an ordeal by fire of camphor burnt on their palms. Of the 37 cases, 12 were of sexual violence, 2 of girls driven to suicide due to continuous violence and torture. In half of the cases, no FIR was registered; where FIRs were registered, no further action was taken; in no case was the culprit punished; in no case was compensation due to children subjected to cruelties paid.

After the above Public Hearing, many complaints of violence against girl children in schools poured into the Commission. So, another Public Hearing on Violence in Schools alone was conducted in December, 2004. Many cases were of sexual abuse of girl students by depraved teachers. The only punishment the culprits got was transfer to another school.

In both the Hearings, the jury came down heavily on state authorities and made immediate and far reaching recommendations, preventive and punitive. At the end of my term, the govt sent an action taken report, which showed that a semblance of justice had been rendered in some cases, compensation paid in most cases, and a few cases had been filed in the courts. On the long term recommendations that dealt with sensitising, empowering measures to be taken like good residential schools for dalit and tribal girls, school curriculum imparting social awareness, including human rights education, law enforcing machinery to be made strictly accountable in cases of violence against girls and so on, hardly any measures had been initiated.

The above provide a tiny glimpse into the hundreds of issues the Commission dealt with.

The most eloquent testimony to the credentials of the Commission in the three years is the quantum jump in the number of petitions received by the Commission. The number of petitions received increased seven fold while compared to the year before my Commission took charge, from 110 in 2001 (before) to 299 in 2002, 568 in 2003 and 826 in 2004. This was an indicator of the increased visibility and responsiveness of the Commission and its perceived effectiveness in bringing relief and justice to women. A non-existent Commission had suddenly emerged into light. The confidence it had inspired in women victims was heartwarming, but also daunting, particularly in the context of its powerlessness.

As the Commission lacked power, the response of the authorities was the critical component that determined the fate of the complaints. Justice and redressal were dependent on official response. The response of authorities to the letters written by the Commission seeking action on complaints or seeking information and reports, showed a wide variation, from prompt action to total indifference and silence. Petitions of domestic violence were invariably taken up, enquired into, counselling arranged and in some cases, relief and redressal offered. However, allegations against the police, or any other wing of the state, of apathy, abuse and sometimes brutal violence, were totally ignored. Our reminders on such issues evoked no response. In rare instances, where there was a reply from authorities, they always reported exonerating the police personnel, claiming that the allegations were baseless or motivated. The repeated experience in this area made the inference unavoidable that fair internal enquiry within the official system could not be expected. The pattern amply bears out the class-caste-gendered character of the state machinery.

In addition to individually addressing each of the innumerable petitions received, the Commission used Public Hearings as an effective form of focusing on gender injustice. The form emerged as a significant forum for collective search for justice. A single issue of violence or rights violations figures in a Public Hearing. Victims depose before a jury of eminent persons, that usually includes retired high court judges, human rights experts and others. The observations and recommendations of the jury are sent to the authorities for compliance. Though the verdict of the jury is not binding, it has a moral authority, which cannot, always, be ignored.

Many Public Hearings were organized by the Commission during the three years in different parts of the state as on Female Infanticide and Foeticide, Dalit Women's Issues, Violence against Women, Violation of Girl Child Rights, Victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation, Women Sanitary Workers, Violence against girl children in Educational Institutions and finally on Women Victims of Tsunami. Exhaustive recommendations were presented to the government and civil society organizations at the end of each Public Hearing. Some of them were specific to each individual case deposed before the Public Hearing and others were generic to the larger issues raised at the forum and had long term implications. Often, they exposed the inadequacy of law and legal procedures in ensuring justice to women. The jury panels sometimes found that there was a justice beyond law and at such times they also made recommendations for law reforms.

These Public Hearings were a testimony to the strong bonds of partnership with women's movements and NGOs that the Commission had forged. They were the ones that identified the victims and witnesses, instilled confidence in them and brought them to the Hearing. And once the recommendations of the jury were given, these organisations followed up and ensured that the state machinery carried them out. This alliance of mutual trust between the Commission and civil society organisations was its great strength, sustaining its efforts to bring justice to women. The partnership was possible because of my long years of activism, joining their civil society work in many capacities. Understandably, the relationship often led the Commission to head-on collisions with the powers.

The Wretched of the Earth

The Commission also took up investigations of jails and other custodial institutions, where women are kept as prisoners / inmates. I would claim that the Commission succeeded in exposing a world of utter inhumanity and silent despair hidden behind the high security walls of prisons. The women's movement was totally unaware of the dark dimensions of the problem till we brought them to their attention and made them wake up to the condition of the forlorn and forgotten women. The Commission made certain startling discoveries concerning the condition of women prisoners in the state and gave wide publicity to its findings. The revelations had a sobering effect on police-prison administration and led to significant changes in policies of arrest and detention of women.

During the Commission's investigations into the special women's prisons at Vellore and Trichy and also in other sub-jails, it came to light that *Tamilnadu had the dubious distinction of having the largest number of women prisoners in the country. Nearly one sixth of the total number of women prisoners in the country were in Tamil Nadu prisons*, while the proportion of men prisoners in the state prisons was much smaller. Another disturbing aspect was that a very large proportion of women prisoners were not convicts, but were remand prisoners kept in custody without being brought to trial. And they were all apprehended not for breaking the law, but under Preventive Detention laws for possible violation of Prohibition laws. The overwhelming proportion of these women prisoners were wretchedly poor and a large section were dalits. The Commission relentlessly pursued the task of bringing about a change in the sorry state, highlighting the issue before women's and other human rights groups, holding dialogues with authorities and so on. The Commission's espousal of the cause had the desired effect. The number of women prisoners in the category of those arrested under Preventive Detention Laws, came down drastically. The Home Department issued directives that women should not be arrested under Preventive Detention Laws for Prohibition offences.

A few years later, the Hon'ble High Court of Madras set up a one member commission to study the condition of women prisoners in the state and submit a report. The member was the same legal counsel of the Commission, Ms.Sudha Ramalingam, who had assisted the Commission in its enquiry. The recommendations given by the High Court authorised committee largely repeated the ones given by the Commission. With the Hon'ble High Court directing the state to implement the recommendations, they also got judicial authority. This is a work that has given me great satisfaction as it, to some extent, saved hundreds of the poorest, most wretched women, largely dalits, from arbitrary arrest on mere suspicion and from being incarcerated for a long time.

The Commission had organized consultations with stake-holders on certain important gender issues. For instance there were

consultations on Indecent Representation of Women in the Media, Sexual Harassment at Workplace, Crimes against Women in the City of Chennai and others. Each of the consultations, apart from throwing light on the issue, also formulated certain recommendations, which were duly sent to the government, the stake-holders and civil society organizations.

The discussion on Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace revealed that though most of the Tamilnadu state government departments had constituted Complaints Cells as per the Vishaka guide-lines of the Supreme Court, unbelievably, not a single complaint had been received in any of the departments. Probing further, it was learnt that the state government had departed from the Vishaka guide-lines in as much as a third party representation on the Complaints Cell had not been provided for and there was also a shocking provision in the Government Order that if the woman employee- complainant failed to establish the veracity of her allegation against a fellow male employee / official superior, she is liable for official action. The Commission took up the issue with the government as a result of which the offending provisions were changed and a new government order in line with Supreme Court guide-lines was passed.

The Commission also intervened in issues of violation of women's dignity and security, sometimes with success and sometimes otherwise. For instance, huge hoardings put up for AIDS control were found to be offensive, depicting women as carriers of AIDS. The Commission taking it up with the authorities led to discontinuance of the specific hoarding and field-testing of advertisements before their display.

Another issue taken up by the Commission towards the end of its term concerned the most despised and accursed section of commercial sex workers, looked down upon as the scum of the society. With the help of a few organizations working with them and with issues of trafficking, a consultation-cum-hearing was organized. Unlike other hearings, this was conducted behind closed doors, with the women speaking from behind a curtain as they did not want to be seen by anyone, particularly by the police men of the Anti-Vice Squad. It brought to light the commendable initiative taken by the Anti-Vice Squad of Chennai, which was presenting the women apprehended after raids, not as accused, but as victims. The police department and the NGOs also highlighted the possibilities of breaking the inter-state traffickers' network. The Commission had no time to follow up with the work, as its term ended within days of the Hearing.

The Commission, sometimes, also dealt with issues that are not strictly gender related, but of a general nature that equally affected women and men. Such were the issues concerning caste discrimination and oppression, untouchability practices, violence on entire dalit communities and so on. Many such cases came up during a Public Hearing on Dalit Women's Issues. As these hearings were attended by top level state and district authorities, the Commission was able to extract from them assurance of prompt corrective action and ensure they are, indeed carried out. Instances are: 1) temple entry denied to dalits in a village in southern Tamil Nadu; the Collector of the district gave assurance that he would hold talks with both communities and throw it open to dalits; did so within a month. 2) young dalit girls and boys of a village in northern Tamil Nadu prohibited from using their bicycles on the streets in the dominant caste quarters, making the public road inaccessible to them; the panchayat president agrees to abide by the direction of the jury to allow free access to public roads to all castes. 3) a horrific case of honour killing, where both the dalit bride groom and dominant caste bride were poisoned and burnt to death. The jury directed the case be registered under stringent provisions of SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act.

District Hearings

Frequent visits to districts had a galvanizing effect on the functioning of the District Committees on Crimes against Women and on All Women Police Stations. The hearings at district headquarters with the Collector, S.P. and a large number of police and revenue department officials attending, provided women victims of even remote villages a ready forum to ventilate their grievances and seek justice. The Collector was asked to give wide publicity to the Chairperson's visit, asking women with complaints to be present at the Hearing. We were able to considerably shorten the winding red tape and directly take up the grievances of the women.

District hearings went through three phases:

First, a broad-based interaction with women's and other people's organisations in the district, where the issues in the district and suggestions are presented to the Chairperson. It was necessary to safeguard against the district administration bringing to the attention of the Commission only the issues it wants, hiding the rest.

Hearing of pending petitions. The petitioner, respondent and the concerned officials were asked to be present at the Hearing.

In addition, any reasons for the inaction / delay on the part of officials were also taken up in the open forum. Thereby, certain amount of transparency and accountability were brought into official procedures.

Apart from the pending petitions, new petitions from affected women were also received and considered at the Hearings. These hearings often settled many long-pending issues and sometimes provided women with remedies they did not even ask for like admission in Service Homes, educational support to their children, livelihood support and training, medical assistance and so on.

To conclude

The turbulent three years came to an end. While this is the story of an institution, it is a first person account too. Institutions are collegiate bodies, carrying with them a collective responsibility. Very rarely do you find a commission that has, virtually, functioned as a one person commission as the Tamilnadu Commission did. As most of the other members were either senior bureaucrats or ruling party members of legislature, they were reluctant to participate in the Commission's programmes, many of which provided platforms to victims of state's failures. The Legal Counsel of the Commission, Ms. Sudha Ramalingam stood by me, offering invaluable help in most of the cases.

While the state machinery, on the whole, responded with proverbial apathy, there were many individual officials, who were sensitive and extended cooperation. The Collector of the district, where dalits were not allowed into the village temple, promptly took steps to throw it open. The Collector of the District, where the custodial death of the dalit woman took place, sent me copies of the FIR, Post-mortem report and Inquest Report and ordered a Sub-Collector's inquiry. The Home Secretary extended quiet support in many ways.

Before my term ended in March 2005, a stock - taking meeting with the concerned department Secretaries and Directors was convened to assess the responses from state authorities to the hundreds of cases and issues the Commission had sent over the three years. As in all my Public Hearings, the letter convening the meeting was sent by the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Ms. Poornima Advani, who had given me full moral support all the three years. The report of the govt. was a mixed bag, effective action taken in a few, totally ignored in others, half-hearted steps in some, vague assurances of future action in many.

Socio-economic Status of Women in Tamil Nadu

■■■ R. Sujatha
M. Vijayabaskar

Tamil Nadu is recognized for its ability to combine relatively high levels of economic growth with good human development outcomes. Poverty levels, as estimated by the Head Count Ratio and Tendulkar's poverty line have fallen much sharper compared to most states in the country in the post-reform period even as the state has witnessed considerable improvements in literacy and health status. Such improvements have been attributed to public action (Dreze and Sen 2013), competitive populism (Agarwala 2013; Kalaiyaran 2014) and investments in programmatic welfare politics (Wyatt 2013). This brief note maps the interactions between changes in the economy and human development to changes in relative positions of women with regard to human development, labour market and the household based on available secondary data.

Sex Ratios: Regional Variations Persist

Despite being known for its high overall human development, sex ratios across the state tend to vary considerably. Overall, sex ratios have improved every decade since 1971 and at present, stands at 996 which is the third highest, behind Kerala and Puducherry. However, as with averages in general, it conceals disparities across districts, with a high of 1041 in the Nilgiris to a low of 946 in Dharmapuri district. Importantly, Dharmapuri, along with Namakkal, Theni and Salem are districts where the state government has played an important role in addressing practices like female infanticide through a series of campaigns. Such interventions appear to have worked given the improvements in sex ratios between 2001 and 2011 in all these districts. However, there has been a decline in sex ratio in some other districts adjoining these districts such as Cuddalore, Ariyalur, Perambalur, Villupuram and Tiruvanamalai. While the reasons for this fall are unclear, these districts are characterized by high poverty levels, predominance of agriculture and lack of industrial development compared to many other districts. While some

of the fall maybe attributed to outmigration, it is disturbing to note that child sex ratios have fallen sharply in the districts of Ariyalur and Cuddalore. Between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, the child sex ratio in Tamil Nadu did improve marginally from 942 to 943 though there was a decline at the all-India level. Nevertheless, the ratio continues to be low. In urban areas, the ratio actually declined between the two Censuses, whereas the ratio improved in rural areas. Importantly, the adverse sex ratios tend to be correlated with levels of female literacy.

Trends in Educational Attainments

Among the above mentioned districts, Villupuram, Ariyalur and Dharmapuri and in three others (Salem, Erode and Krishnagiri), female literacy levels are even lower than the national average. Thus, despite an overall increase in state level female literacy by almost 10 per centage points, the presence of regional pockets of low female literacy and adverse sex ratios do not augur well for the state's human development status. Though the gender gap in literacy has fallen by 5 percentage points between 2001 and 2011 censuses, in several districts the gender gap continues to be above the state average.

Enrolment ratios at the primary and upper primary level are close to 100% and there is hardly any gender gap. In the case of secondary education, gender differences in enrolment at the high school level has been declining over a period of time. The percentage of girls' enrolment to total enrolment has shown a gradual increase from 36.7% in 1990-91 to almost 50% in 2011-12. District level differences are once again observed. The highest percentage of girls enrolled in high school in 2014 was in Thoothukudi (67.2%) and the lowest in Madurai district at 45.9. Of the total students enrolled, the proportion of girls in both primary and upper primary schools stood at 48 percent in the State. The proportion of SC pupil enrolled in elementary schools (I-VIII) declined marginally from 24.41 percent in 2010-11 to 23.89 percent in 2012-13 though the state occupied the first position among the southern States. Of the total pupils enrolled in elementary schools in Tamil Nadu, the proportion of ST had come down from 1.71 percent to 1.68 percent and was lower than the southern States as well as all-India.

At the upper primary level the net enrolment ratio of girls was higher than the boys. This was also noticed among SCs. Among SCs, the net enrolment ratio of boys was greater than the girls. The net enrolment ratio of STs was lower when compared to SCs and general. This means that the remaining 2.06 percent and 2.19 percent of ST children are either never enrolled or dropped-out from the primary and upper primary level before completing an education cycle. The transition rate from primary to upper primary level in the State was higher than the other southern States as well as all India. The transition rate of girls was higher than the boys in Tamil Nadu.

According to the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) 2014-15, the state has the highest enrolment in higher education among youth in the 18-23 age group at more than 45%. This high rate also is true of women's enrolment which at 43.4% is again the highest in the country among all major states. It would therefore appear that a large segment of female children transition from secondary to tertiary education in the state compared to most states.

Women's Work Participation and Returns to Work

However, despite such high presence in tertiary education, according to calculations done based on NSSO data, 38% of female graduates in the age group of 15-24 from rural areas and 30% of female graduates from urban areas in the state in the same age group tend to be neither employed nor in training or in any form of education (Table 1).

This suggests that higher educational attainments among women may not necessarily translate into their entry into paid employment. Though this is true of male youth as well, as the table suggests, this is even more acute in the case of female youth. Further, the gender differences in this regard for those lower level educational qualifications are even more striking.

Overall, the state is known for its relatively high work participation levels among women. The overall work participation rates for rural women in Tamil Nadu is higher than the all India average, but has fallen drastically since 2004-05. While this is in line with all-India trends, this does require explanation. Though the factors contributing to this decline is as yet unclear, micro-level studies such as by Jeyaranjan (2011) suggests that one factor tends to be withdrawal of women from the workforce following an increase in household income. However, this may not be true of all segments of female workers. Given that there has been a decline in the quantum of agricultural employment in the state and also given that women workers are concentrated in agriculture, it is also possible that decline in demand for female labour in rural Tamil Nadu may have contributed to this phenomenon. Further, though there has been a rise in non-farm employment and incomes in the state, bulk of the employment

generated has been in the construction sector that requires a degree of mobility that may not always be available among women burdened with reproductive responsibilities.

Table 1

Distribution of Youth (15 to 24) by NEET category (2011-12) in %			
	Rural	Urban	Rural + Urban
Upto Primary	31.3	34.2	32.2
Sec and Hr Sec	19.1	15.2	17.4
Graduate and above	33.2	25.6	28.3
Graduate and above	25.6	22.2	24.1

* Not in employment, education or training

Distribution of Youth (15 to 24) by NEET category				
	Rural		Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Upto Primary	15.1	45.6	8.2	57.8
Sec and Hr Sec	5	32.7	2.4	26.1
Graduate and above	28.9	38	21.2	30.3
All	12.2	38.3	8.3	34.8

Source: Computed from NSS, 68th Round

In terms of wage rates, the state has witnessed an increase in nominal agricultural wages, reflecting an all-India trend and even an increase in real male agricultural wage rates. However, gender gaps persist. As the following table on casual labour wages suggests (Table 2), the state has the second highest average wage earnings for male casual workers in both rural and urban areas after Kerala and is much above the all-India average.

Table 2

Average wage/ salary earnings (Rs per day) received by casual labour of age 15-59 years-2011-12							
Rural	TN	AP	Gujarat	Kar	Kerala	Mahar	AI
Male average salary	196.65	167.65	115.77	162.94	345.14	133.69	149.32
Female average salary	110.41	111.19	104.96	99.86	169.61	92.83	103.28
Person average salary	169.93	141.53	112.84	142.4	314.88	117.36	138.62
Urban	TN	AP	Gujarat	Kar	Kerala	Mahar	AI
Male average salary	227.66	193.52	160.64	192.24	335.76	173.18	182.04
Female average salary	126.53	126.6	88.84	101.77	167.56	95.91	110.52
Person average salary	208.34	178.34	144.52	174.05	309.9	154.62	170.1

Source: Key Indicators of Employment and Unemployment in India, NSS 68th Round

When it comes to female wages, the state registers only the third highest wage rate after Andhra Pradesh and levels are much closer to that of other states and the all-India average. Since the wage rates given here are for casual workers, the differences cannot be explained through educational attainments and therefore call for a better understanding of gender based segmentation in the state.

Maternal mortality is one of the lowest in the country at 90 in 2011-12 and has in fact fallen from 111 in 2004-06. However, nutritional outcomes among women have been inadequate. According to the District-level Household and Facility Survey IV, 55.5% of women in the age group of 15 to 49 years) had anaemia in 2012-13. Another point of concern is under-age pregnancies. Births to women aged 15-19 years out of total births was 4.2%.

Female Headed Households

There has been a growing recognition of the rise of female headed households at the national level and the fact that such households tend to be on an average poorer and subject to additional vulnerabilities. According to the 2011 census, 14% of the total households are female headed households in Tamil Nadu and the state stands third next to Kerala and Karnataka. In absolute numbers, the State nearly has 2.59 million female headed households. A study of the size of the family in a women headed households indicates that nearly 18.3% of the female headed households are single member households. Though in Tamil Nadu, a relatively lower share of such households have no assets (less than 15%), the share of assetless households tend to be higher in the case of SC and ST households headed by women. With regard to availing of banking services, Tamil Nadu's average was much lower at 40.7% compared to the all India average of 58.4%, and in fact was ranked sixth from the bottom.

To sum up, while the state has registered significant improvements in women's attainments in the domain of education, health and employment, concerns remain with regard to both regional variations and entry into more dignified work. In addition, demographic changes coupled with shifts in familial structures tend to generate new vulnerabilities even as they may signal new possibilities.

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Higher education and women: Some questions

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Many of us have probably heard the Chinese proverb 'May you live in interesting times'. Some say the proverb is actually a curse in disguise as it wishes on us dangerous, unsettling and turbulent currents to navigate. Curse or not, the paradoxes that mark the present moment and our contemporary societies, are so many that we can be certain that we are living in interesting times! This piece will reflect on one of these paradoxes – the increasing and even impressive participation of women in higher education in India and its somewhat ambivalent implications. The Annual Report 2014-15 of the Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) points to a phenomenal growth in the enrolment of women students in higher education in the country. While they were less than 10% of total enrolment on the eve of independence, girls constituted 45.5% of a total enrolment of 34.2 million students by end-September 2014. The All India Survey on Higher Education 2014 – 2015 tracks the total numbers of students enrolled in the principal programmes of higher education offered by universities and colleges and the gender break-up thereof. The survey reports that female students constituted 53% of the Bachelor of Arts (BA) programme

¹ Some thoughts in this paper are from an earlier write-up of the author titled 'Dangerous Freedoms: Some thoughts on gender, caste and development in India'. The write-up was for a blog produced by the Institute for Asia and Pacific Studies at the University of Nottingham, UK.

across the country; 47.6% of the Bachelor of Sciences (B.Sc); 45.5% of the Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) programme; 52% of the BA Honours; 64% of the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed), 58.2% of the Master of Arts (M.A) and 57.9% of the Master of Sciences (M.Sc).²

In 2014 – 2015, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for higher education in India stood at 24.3%, calculated for the 18 – 23 years of age group. It was 25.3% for men and 23.2% for women. The Annual Report 2014-15 of the MHRD observes that the GER of both men and women has shown an increasing trend, even as the gender gap in GER has decreased between 2010 and 2013. The upward trend in the GER in higher education strongly suggests a clamour for and a surge towards higher education and its potential advantages in an increasingly competitive market economy. The growing female presence in our universities and colleges is no doubt an important part of the emergent diversity of our campuses.

Now that the numbers are growing, this is the opportune moment for women's studies researchers to ask the question that we must always ask – what does it all mean? Is this an unequivocal sign of women's onward march towards progress, autonomy and emancipation? We may need to consider more closely the contexts and conditions in which women's successful entry into higher education institutions is taking place and what it enables women to do and to be before we celebrate their access per se as indicative of gender transformative change. It has been pointed out, for instance, that higher education seems to have had no corresponding effect on women's employment prospects. In recent years, scholars have noted with concern and dismay the alarmingly low female Work Participation Rates (WPR) in India and the ensuing 'employment crisis' that confronts Indian women.³ Further, it appears that women are seeking higher education in a context where the cost of education has shot up as a result of state policies that favour privatization of the sector, the entry of a large number of private players in both school and higher education and the pressures on even state-run universities and colleges to raise their own funds and demonstrate sustainability. In neo-liberal India, households of the poor and middle classes are often subject to excessive stress, leading sometimes to vicious cycles of debt, when they seek education and health care services.

Given this backdrop, we cannot ignore what the data on GER also tells us viz., that 76.8% of women do not access higher education today. In a paper written in the late 1990s, the economist Nirmala Banerjee described an emergent and growing class differentiation amongst women in India, given that a minority belonging to the upper middle and upper classes were gaining professional education and experiencing an expansion of their life-worlds.⁴ She went on to ask, provocatively, if the class-derived differences amongst women were more apparent than real, given the enormous social anxieties there were across classes to contain young women's sexualities within the 'safety' of family-arranged marriages. Banerjee's poser is particularly resonant when we consider the 'choices' that were available to Divya, a young woman from the Vanniyar caste, an intermediate backward caste of Dharmapuri district (Tamil Nadu) who fell in love and eloped with a young Dalit, Ilavarasan. Divya, who had clearly enjoyed some degree of personal mobility and professional education as a nursing student, discovered to her cost and that of the man she chose, that her freedoms did not include the right to love or to choose a partner across caste lines. Divya's elopement with Ilavarasan resulted in the burning down of around 250 homes in three Dalit hamlets in November 2012 following the suicide of Divya's father, apparently shamed by his daughter's refusal to leave her husband and return to her natal village. A year after their marriage, when Divya suddenly left Ilavarasan, allegedly under pressure from her mother and other kin, Ilavarasan's mutilated body was found near a railway track.

What Divya's case illustrates with stark clarity is that caste patriarchies act as intermediaries between women and their constitutionally guaranteed rights. They decide what rights and resources women may access (and a professional or college degree is increasingly part of this it seems) and where the lines must be drawn. It appears that caste and community control over women's lives and choices is re-asserted in the face of developmental trajectories that open up spaces for defiance of the social status quo by subaltern groups and by women. For instance, researchers situate the growing intolerance of the dominant and intermediate backward castes to 'love' marriages and cross-caste elopements in Tamil Nadu with reference to shifting patterns of labour and livelihoods. They point to the increased migration of the young in search of employment (both rural to urban and rural to rural), the diversification of jobs that make it possible for the Dalit poor to refuse degrading agricultural labour on farms and fields and

2 The source of this data is the All India Survey on Higher Education (2014 – 15), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Department of Higher Education, New Delhi.

3 Mazumdar, Indrani and Neetha N (2011) 'Gender Dimensions: Employment Trends in India, 1993-94 to 2009-10,' Economic and Political Weekly, 46 (43), 22nd October.

4 Banerjee, N (2002) 'Between the Devil and the Deep Sea: Shrinking Options for Women in Contemporary India,' in Karin Kapadia (ed) *The Violence of Development: The Politics of Identity, Gender & Social Inequalities in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

the growing caste mobility of young Dalit men.⁵ The objection of the Khap Panchayats in some of the Northern states of India to the use of mobile phones by young women, amongst other things for instance, likewise hints at the anxieties that are at play. There is clearly a palpable fear that the new technologies, the communicative networks they facilitate and the public spaces that women increasingly inhabit may foster 'undesirable' liaisons and 'dangerous' freedoms.

To the list of the new collective spaces that have opened up outside household and close kin confines, we may well add the sites of higher education that have registered women's footfall in increasing numbers. But what do these spaces actually mean for girls and their families? Very recently, I had the opportunity to interact with young women pursuing technical and arts education in a locally reputed co-educational college in Erode district of Tamil Nadu. The arts wing of the college has a majority of girl students, while the technical wing has an equal representation of both genders in the student population. The girls I spoke to said that it was no longer possible for a middle class or even a lower middle class family to not send their daughter to college. Without college education, she would have no value whatsoever in the marriage market. A prospective daughter-in-law who knew nothing useful about the world outside could only be an embarrassment to the groom's family.

The girls I spoke to confirmed that in three-fourths of the cases, the girl was married off soon after the sought-after degree was obtained. Allowing the girls to acquire experience in the job market prior to marriage was no one's priority. Once she was married, the question of whether she would seek employment depended on the in-laws and the husband. The girls pointed out that the marital family's willingness or otherwise depended, in part, on the availability of something suitable fairly close to home. The girls said to me in all seriousness that the overriding fear was that they might come under the influence of 'bad girls' and get 'spoilt' if they left their families (natal or marital) for extended periods of time to study or to work. Often I have heard students and teachers say that 'misuse' of freedom by young women is a real and present danger that they must be warned of and guarded from perennially.⁶ For young women like Divya of Dharmapuri district and hundreds of thousands like her who access higher secondary, vocational or graduate/ post-graduate education as the first generation women of their families to do so, the pressure to not 'misuse' the freedom they have been rationed out is enormous. The chilling nature of the retribution that follows their transgressions costs them and their families dearly.⁷

Not surprisingly then, institutions of higher education take seriously the imperative of 'protecting' girls from whatever subversive potential such education might contain. It is well known that many privately financed engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu (including those in the state capital of Chennai) impose codes of dress, demeanour and conduct that involve intensive micro-policing of the young women and men on their watch. In some cases, students are forbidden to casually interact with or even speak to classmates of the opposite sex. In somewhat more 'lenient' institutions, girls are instructed to not speak to boys outside of their class and warned that any 'odd behaviour' with the boys of their class will be severely punished through verbal abuse, letters to parents and even suspension-at-sight orders. Some colleges reportedly have cut down trees on the campus for fear that students might take advantage of the shade to hang around and chat! When using the college buses that pick up and drop off students from their homes, young men and women are instructed to use separate entrances – the front and the back – to negate any possibility of social interaction.

Many of these institutions vie with each other to create and sustain highly illiberal and even tyrannical campus cultures that are attractively packaged and sold to investor-parents as 'discipline' – the kind that guarantees that no untoward incidents will befall their wards. Students are generally unable (and unwilling?) to defy these disciplinary regimes that thrive unchallenged in a context where their families routinely pay huge amounts of capitation fees to secure seats in desired streams in self-financing colleges. Besides the capitation fee, some colleges, especially those with good infrastructure and reputation, charge annual fees significantly higher than the government-prescribed amount for self-financed colleges. When families rely on banks and their education loans or other sources of informal lending to meet these costs, the students are pressured to find jobs immediately after graduation to avoid a debt crisis. In this context of rampant privatization of higher education, students are painfully aware of the circumstances in which their seats were secured and the punitive consequences that are likely to follow acts of rebellion.

Disciplinary institutional cultures tend to be seen (and rationalized) as necessary in order to assuage parental anxieties and meet parent-driven demands for moral policing and monitoring. It is important to note, however, that this is not a natural response to market demand alone. These cultures owe their existence, in equal measure, to the conservatism of the founders and funders of

5 Anandhi, S and Vijayabaskar, M (2013) 'Where buying a motorcycle can spark a riot', The Hindu, January 7.

6 I have heard numerous times the phrase: 'Freedom okay than, anaal misuse panna koodathu' (Freedom is okay so long as it is not misused).

7 The intrepid journalist Rohini Mohan describes Divya's social incarceration within her home for nearly 3 years after Ilavarasan's death here <https://thewire.in/34119/tamil-nadus-hidden-caste-wars/>

these institutions. It is no secret that entrepreneurs, who made their money through assorted business ventures (including but not limited to liquor sales and sand mining) and engagement in regional or state-level politics, have founded several institutions of higher education in Tamil Nadu. The movement of capital can also proceed in the reverse direction with education tycoons moving into the electoral arena by starting their own political parties. This enmeshing of education as business with other forms of money making and local politics has shaped the institutional landscapes of higher education in the private sector for some years now. In the more recent past, caste-based organizations comprising members of the intermediate and dominant backward castes have campaigned vigorously in several districts of Tamil Nadu to ban inter-caste marriages and to tighten and consolidate the hold of caste and community over young women, restricting the scope of their autonomous actions. We are yet to map the ways in which these political and institutional settings configure knowledge production and classroom transactions at graduate and post-graduate levels.⁸ Of equal if not greater interest is the question of how they might shape the practice of women's studies within the many centers, cells and departments in multiple institutions across the state.⁹

At this point, I would like to reflect very briefly on my own experience of teaching women's studies in the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras. I teach and research in a humanities and social sciences department in an autonomous public institution of technical education and research. Founded in 1959, the humanities department is one of the oldest in the institute and was created with the aim of providing a holistic learning experience, including an appreciation of the social context of technology, to engineering students. The humanities department is mandated to offer a sufficient number of elective courses for the engineering students to choose from. I teach a course titled 'Women in India: Problems and Prospects' to classes ranging in size from 45 to 60 students, the majority of whom are boys. Like other faculty, I have sufficient autonomy in deciding course content and curriculum. The B.Tech students I teach and interact with belong to diverse caste and class backgrounds.¹⁰ In the take-home assignment I give my students, I ask them to discuss and analyze the changing gender relations in their own families over at least three generations. From their write-ups, I understand that many of them are from district headquarter towns, smaller towns or rural parts of their respective states. Some describe with moving detail their parents' decision (and especially their mothers' many sacrifices) to send them to special 'coaching' schools in larger towns to give them a better chance at the highly competitive entrance exams.¹¹

Much of the course resonates with the students I teach. The 'dowry calculator' that measures the market value of different kinds of grooms - IITians, IIM graduates, civil servants of the IAS and doctors provokes both genuine and uneasy laughter, given how close the subject is to the young men in the class. I urge them to see that gender must not be conflated with women or their issues (and to disregard the unfortunate title of the course!), but to understand rather that all individuals are gendered. And so are institutions. They make short presentations in class on how IIT itself might be seen or experienced as a gendered space. They discuss why there are many more girls in computer science and biotechnology than in metallurgy or mechanical engineering - supposedly the hard domains within the engineering fields. We reflect on the number of women who are heads of departments, deans, senior faculty (full professors) or directors in all the IITs. Not infrequently, there are young men in the class who confess a great love for writing, the humanities and the creative arts. However, choosing a career in one of these 'feminized' disciplinary fields has remained out of the question for them. Gender binaries clearly trap and limit men's lives too.

Almost every time I teach this course, at least one student's presentation in class will have a reference (usually visual images) to powerful women and empowered achievers who ostensibly demonstrate that women can get anywhere. The favoured choices tend to be Indira Gandhi, Kiran Bedi and Kalpana Chawla - politician, bureaucrat, scientist. I realize that mainstream notions of power, empowerment and individual achievement are firmly entrenched and rather difficult to dislodge. What is somewhat unsettling is the near-total silence that follows our reading of Gerda Lerner's 'Creation of Patriarchy' and her passages on the origins in history of the sexual control of women of land-owning classes - the enforcement of their sexual 'purity', its importance in ensuring the transmission of property from father to son as well as the purity of the bloodline, the elite wife's consent to patriarchy that is secured through the example that is made of the sexually available women of the landless classes and the twinned emergence of the chaste wife and the sexually deviant woman and their class-caste coordinates. I sense both the rapt attention of my students and their disquiet. Of the girls I teach, it seems fairly certain that many will remain in the workforce. But what other battles they will fight and win or lose, I do not know.

8 While I have only discussed privately financed institutions here, this question is no less salient in the case of the state government's own universities.

9 Private institutions of higher education are more likely to have cells that are variously named women empowerment cells, women development cells etcetera. The cells usually offer awareness-building programmes and invited lectures.

10 Since the year 2009, IITs have implemented 27 per cent reservation for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The much-maligned coaching industry that trains aspirants to crack the entrance exams has also played a part in enabling this diversity.

11 These are highly regimented residential or semi-residential schools that prioritize success in entrance exams to engineering and medical colleges, over and above school curriculum.

I ask my students in the B.Tech course to open their ears and minds to the voices of young articulate women that are emerging from various corners of the country¹² - the voices of women enraged at being shut out of temples and places of worship and the 'proud to menstruate' voices on social media and elsewhere that denounce the shaming of the female body. In particular, the Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage) campaign initiated by women students of Delhi University gives much cause for hope on account of the way it challenges the patriarchies that pervade the sites of higher education. These voices may remain limited to a few elite institutions in metropolitan centers, but they certainly complicate the vexed question of how young women experience higher education today. The challenges before us as practitioners of women's studies remain formidable. In several cases, we may have to ask (as Banerjee did in a different context and with respect to the emerging class differences amongst women) if the emancipatory possibilities conventionally associated with women's access to higher education are more apparent than real, more specter than substance. What remains certain is that we must persistently probe the meanings of higher education for women in multiple regional and institutional sites, so that we are not only living in interesting times, but also producing rich, insightful and interesting reflections and analyses of our times.

Periyar: Countering Caste and Gender Differences and Inequalities

■■■ Excerpts from a 2013 talk by V. Geetha¹

Reams may be written on Periyar's views on women. His radicalism grew with age, and we find him stoutly criticizing marriage, motherhood, and the imperative of women to marry and start a family even when he was well into his 70s and 80s. He was critical of romantic love, of conjugal violence and cultures that led to the objectification of women's bodies, and caste practices which relegated them choicelessly to lives of sexual service. He approved of what was known as 'free love', arguing that it was possible to hold one's passion responsibly – this meant one had to understand that love, marriage, property, lineage and progeny were linked and make choices that did not lead to a reproduction of economic and social hierarchy.

Regarding caste, Periyar and his self-respect movement understood the caste system to be essentially unjust and hierarchical – he likened it to a ladder with castes positioned on each of its steps, but more interestingly he remarked that it was a ladder that we also carried within us, and so we were prone to placing ourselves below some and above others – not very different from Babasaheb Ambedkar's observation that the logic of caste may be understood in terms of an ascending logic of reverence and a descending logic of contempt.

If this was the case, argued Periyar, caste does not make for a healthy sense of the self, and to develop such a sense, one would have to practise self-respect, learn to value one's self. In fact this had to precede all other values and objectives, including freedom and self-rule, in short even swaraj. Periyar defined self-respect in diverse ways, and depending on the context of his utterance and the historical moment in which that utterance was required, self-respect was aligned to socialism, Islam, to the Buddhist notion of samadharma...in fact Periyar's use of the word samadharma, as a counter to Manudharma, and as an adjunct of socialism (which he argued had to do with the logic of just distribution, whereas samadharma required a just and equal ethics which implicates all of us) was not very different from Dr Ambedkar's sadharma: the form of that ethical consensus that we forge with each other, that we shall hold and exercise rights and compassion in common.

Another adjunct of self-respect was comradeship – for in place of that self-serving ethics which made a person view only his caste as worthy of respect, or progress, and against the insistence of no birth-based privilege, one needed an ethics that bound human beings to one another. What was maithri or fellowship for Ambedkar was comradeship for Periyar. In fact it was his movement that gave to the left the Tamil word for comrade, 'thozhar' which is gender-neutral, and can be used to address both men and women and others.

These concepts, of caste as unequal hierarchy and its opposites, self-respect, samadharma and comradeship were also deployed as analytical terms to understand caste society, and it is here that caste and gender emerged as categories that constituted each other. Thus S. Ramanathan, an early self-respect ideologue argued that historically, the enslavement of women and of Dalits

1 The excerpts have been taken from <http://www.countercurrents.org/2016/09/28/periyar-and-his-ideas/> and are a part of a 'Conversation : S V Rajadurai, V Geetha & Vidya Bhushan Rawat on Periyar's ideology, self respect movement and opportunism of political parties'

12 About ten years ago, IIT Madras introduced an integrated (5 year) MA programme. The programme significantly increased the number of girl students on the campus and contributed to a student culture of discussing and debating critical social and political issues of our times, including those of gender. Increasingly, instances of sexism, gender discrimination and homophobia on the campus have been countered and challenged by students of both sexes.

happened at roughly the same time. Dalits were required as captive labour, and women had to be limited and imprisoned within the family and kin group, so that men could exercise control over them, which in effect meant, to control and regulate their reproductive power and labour. Periyar would extend this argument in the 1940s to argue that women not only reproduced their own subordination, but also reproduced family and caste status. The principle of hierarchy, in other words, hinged as much on the organization of reproduction, as it did on Brahminical texts, the social division of labour, and the logic of high and low which divided not just occupations into high and low, but labourers into higher and lower castes.

Elsewhere, while commenting on how the dharma shastras explain varna differences, Periyar too issues with the fact that miscegenation was made the basis for graded differences: whether a Brahmin married or kept a woman made a difference to their offspring, and to which caste he or she would belong to; whether a Shudra man married a upper or lower caste woman had, likewise its own consequences for the status of children, and the future of communities. In other words, hybrid offspring were packed off into castes, and the proliferation of castes meant the continued existence of crossing varna lines to love, mate, produce children. Periyar made it clear that it did not matter to him who married and slept with whom, but since communities appeared to be ranked on that basis, it was important to discard the whole edifice altogether, and think of marriage and children entirely differently: as based not on identities given or taken, or defied or imposed, but on choice, desire, love...

Dalits, Shudras and women could not therefore hope to gain anything at all from the caste system and their liberation lay in refusing hierarchy and opting out of it. The way out for Shudras and Dalits was to emerge into communities for self-respect, to adopt a different ethics of the self, and a rethinking of everyday practices, of labour, rituals, faith, marriage... For women, in addition to all of these, the challenge lay in opting out of the traditional family order, which limited their minds, controlled their bodies and consigned them to domesticity and the family. Comradeship was marked as important for women as well and through the 1940s, after the self-respect movement transformed into the Dravidar Kazhagam and mobilized peacefully to secede from the impending Indian union, we find Periyar addressing women as comrades and citizens in striking contrast to other fellow thinkers and ideologues: he rebukes them for settling into conjugality, asks them to eschew marriage, and work towards realizing the utopia that was to be, in the wake of secession from a unitary, and 'Brahmin-Bania' dominated India.

To resist hierarchy required in Periyar's universe, a radical practice of equality. For, when aligned to self-respect/comradeship, equality meant absolute, substantive equality between all beings: both Dalits and women were therefore comrades and citizens, This meant not only equal access to education, political representation and fair and just labour, but as far as women were concerned, a radical understanding of sexual difference. In the self-respect universe, biological differences were not germane, and as Periyar famously remarked, apart from bearing and nursing an infant for the first few months of its existence, male and female roles are interchangeable. In other words 'difference' could not be made the basis for either complementarity or an un-equal society.

Periyar was likewise opposed to a sexual ethics that was premised on biology, and refused to concede that promiscuity became a man, and chastity a woman. In his later years, he grew increasingly impatient with the notion of difference as such, and spoke and wrote with fervour on technological changes that might render motherhood a matter between a woman and her womb. He welcomed science that would help us move towards non-sexual reproduction, and this along with his growing disdain for marriage as an institution made for a provocative politics of sexual freedom.

Another valuable index of equality was the destruction of 'masculinity', which in an unequal society referred to attributes that men were supposed to have as well as to being 'men' in an unambiguous, unjust way. Sexual justice for women, as well as their freedom, Periyar argued was contingent on the destruction of masculinity. More generally, in Periyar's thought, justice was what equality would bring about: and here both social and cultural transformation as well as political fiat (and state power), which produced policies that would legislate equality and deliver justice, were deemed important.

The challenges that the self-respect movement posed to the caste order, both in an everyday political sense, as well as in terms of the knowledge – the concepts it made available – however constitute only one part of Periyar's critique of existing gender arrangements. The other part owes a great deal to emergent arguments – in the late 1920s and 1930s – on the question of female sexuality, marriage and motherhood. In addressing these concerns, Periyar went on to produce a fascinating set of concepts and arguments – which in retrospect appear to express his sense of what I have earlier referred to as the relative autonomy of the gender and sexuality question.

Periyar and the self-respect movement's understanding of the women's question acquired its distinctive edge in the late 1920s,

when three sets of legal debates were in progress: to do with raising the age of consent to sexual congress, restraining child marriage and finally the devadasi abolition bill. From 1925 onwards, marriage reform was widely discussed. In 1924, H.C. Gour had drafted a bill to amend Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code, which sought to raise the age of consent in marital and extra-marital relationships. Colonial government was reluctant to act on the bill, but a year later, it proposed its own bill, fixing 14 as the age of consent in extra marital cases and 13 in marital cases. It became clear though that very few instances of the infringement of the law in the context of marriage came to the courts. Gour then turned his attention to the existing marriage law and suggested, through his Children's Protection Bill, that parents ought not to marry their children off before they attained a certain age. Even as this bill was on the anvil, Har Bilas Sarada, an Arya Samaj reformer who had consistently addressed infirmities faced by women, advanced his own bill, which eventually came to be referred to as the Child Marriage Restraint Bill.

The devadasi abolition debates, occasioned by Dr Muthulakshmi's bill that sought to end the practice of dedicating young girls to temples, got under way in 1928. The Tamil cultural world was soon beset with a host of questions to do with social and sexual practices in caste society and the sexual subjugation of women.

These legal debates apart, there were two other themes that occupied the attention of reformers and their detractors. For one, Tamil radical thought to do with gender also benefited from nationalist horror over the publication of Katherine Mayo's infamous *Mother India* in 1927 and the subsequent defences of Hindu culture which followed in the following years. Self-respecters utilized Mayo's arguments to put forward their distinctive critique of caste and of women's status in Hindu society. This was also a time when birth control arguments were in vogue, and they proved wide-ranging. Some invoked typically Malthusian spectres of an overpopulated world, teeming with the wretched and ignorant poor; while others, following Gandhi, spoke of the importance of sexual restraint.

Periyar's – and the self-respect movement's – response to this important historical conjuncture was exceptional. They of course endorsed the Sarada Act, and actively propagandized in its favour. But they did more: Periyar offered startling re-definitions of marriage, rights of spouses in marriage, and more fundamentally, produced a critique of conjugality itself. Periyar's views on marriage may be gleaned from the many speeches he made at self-respect marriage gatherings. In a sense, one might say that practice preceded argument in that self-respect marriages had begun to take place in the late 1920s, while the bulk of his most effective writing on the subject belonged to the succeeding years. Starting out as marriages which eschewed the services of Brahmin priests and gradually all ritual and scripture, they evolved into full-fledged 'contracts' entered into by two confident, self-conscious adults who had decided to choose their own life partners. Periyar and his comrades deliberately sought to 'desacralise' marriages by insisting on their contractual – and therefore provisional – nature, and arguing that if there was no god to please or scripture to look up to, a marriage remained what it ought to be, a human arrangement that like all human arrangements work to the extent that the people involved in its making are committed to its continued existence.

In this context, Periyar made the valuable observation that shorn of its sacral quality, and marked as provisional and therefore changeable, marriage could only mean one thing: a context for the expression of love and the resolution of desire, love and desire being 'natural' emotions in Periyar's lexicon. To imagine marriage in this manner required two human beings to come together in freedom, and not in conditions of coercion, servitude or inequality.

For the same reasons that he advocated that marriage be viewed as a contract, Periyar supported the right to divorce, and the right to re-marriage, not only for widows, but for those who desire to opt out of unhappy marriages, and who may be childless or not. In other words, re-marriage was not merely a panacea for the widow's supposedly stifled and ultimately destructive sexuality, but a logical option for those who understood marriage to be a contingent practice that either of spouses could choose to end. Divorce was likewise to be seen as an option, but here Periyar urged the case of female unhappiness as reason enough for creating a divorce law. Dwelling poignantly and sympathetically on the lot of women trapped in loveless and slavish marriages, and burdened to remain monogamous, he spoke of how divorce would free them and offer them hope – currently, he noted, men were allowed to be licentious, and women were prevented from separating, a state of affairs that did not bode well for sexual equality. He refused to be dissuaded by arguments that lamented the loss of morality should the right to divorce come about – and pointed out that provisions for freedom need not automatically imply a total absence of restraint or morality, rather they could become the basis for a new, common morality. One need not fear therefore that women would become immoral, but see how a common morality may be put in place.

For all his interest in marriage reform, Periyar did not think much of the institution itself. He counted it as one amongst the many social arrangements that human beings had devised to regulate sexual love, beginning with the incest taboo. The importance

granted to marriage, he was wont to say, was because of the need to secure property and lineage and thereby keep unequal social arrangements in place. Women saw in marriage a guarantor of food and clothing, and if they had access to education, a trade and property rights, they would not want to get married at all, he argued. Periyar was aware too that the centrality granted to marriage, especially the prohibitions against remarriage and so on, were prevalent mostly amongst the higher castes, and that matters were far more flexible with other castes – but even in those instances, he did not think marriage worked to women's advantage, and this is why he made it clear that women must have the right to not marry as well and in this instance too pooh-poohed male anxiety over unmarried single women.

Periyar was fond of quoting what he imagined were exceptional socialist examples from the Soviet Union – free love, he said, was possible there because there was no property; as for children, they ceased to tie women down, since the state was responsible for them, and so women – and men – loved chiefly because they desired or chose people they wished to be with. In the 1940s and after, Periyar spoke out against marriage forcefully, and argued that women may as well not waste their time getting married, and instead devote their time to the improvement of society and state. In fact this is a theme that occupied his mind in other contexts as well – for instance in arguing against sanctions of beauty imposed on women, he noted that it was only because beauty was the chief measure by which women were judged, they were obsessed with it, and if they saw themselves as valuable in other ways, they might not devote as much time as they currently did to make themselves look agreeable, fashionable and so on. He was not against wanting to appear pleasing, but against the need to dress up, to fall in line with arbitrary social norms, he clarified.

Buttressing Periyar's views on marriage were his arguments on the theme of *karpu* or chastity – Periyar was clear that this was a partisan norm, meant to keep women in sexual servitude while allowing men to be promiscuous. He did not think that chastity resided in any particular thing or emotion or ideal. If at all it resided only in those mutual limits that two human beings in love or those who had agreed to marry set themselves, and in any case, in such circumstances, chastity ceased to be a bind, and so would not impede freedom. As for the persistence of chastity as an ideal, Periyar put it down to two things: women's own acceptance of this imposed ideal on account of ignorance, fear, superstition and scripture; and secondly, men's desire to legitimize their promiscuity by allowing themselves the sexual freedom they denied their wives. This is why, observed Periyar, chastity was linked dialectically to prostitution. In fact the one cannot exist without the other, he said. For, in order for women to be unfree sexually and men to be free, there needed to be a sexually available population and these were women in prostitution, from the traditional *devadasi* to those who offered paid sex.

In this sense, in his universe, prostitution and chastity cancelled out each other – and only acquired the force of meaning that is associated with either term in the context of conscious arrangements that had been made and imposed in our historical evolution. To blame prostitutes, and not men who go to them – even as these self-same men took umbrage when their wives were considered uncontrollable, lewd, etc. – smacked of rank sexual hypocrisy as far as Periyar was concerned.

The larger problem though he conceded was not even this, but that we do not see sexual arrangements as contingent, endlessly relative and constantly changeable – sexual habits vary, sexual taboos are diverse, as are conjugal arrangements; different societies and climates produce different types of behaviour... and so, —Sexual arrangements, howsoever they be, if entered into by two individuals, are their business, and the do's and don'ts that apply such cases may not apply as such when it comes to public morality. Here, in any case, one cannot impose an arbitrary set of rules, but only those that which do not interfere with individual freedom, choice, and which do not discriminate amongst human beings on the basis of birth, wealth or other unjust criterion. Ultimately, and here Periyar rested his case, public sexual morality could only be guided by what appeared just in a given instance, and justice in turn, depended on whether we, as individuals or as group, are willing to grant to others what one wanted to grant oneself. Mutuality and understanding alone could sustain public morality, in this argument.

In this context, it is important to underline Periyar's views on love and pleasure. Time and again, Periyar invoked the order of nature against the order of an unjust society, with respect to love and sexual desire. Yet he was not willing to endorse a romantic vision of love, as effusive, spontaneous, non-rational, overpowering, and so on. While he granted the reality and inevitability of emotional rapture, sexual drives and the desire to seek sexual fulfilment, he did not think that these necessarily had to be driven only by passion and/or power. Love required understanding, comradeship and the freedom to remain true to one's sense of right and wrong – in other words, being in love or being a conjugal unit did not mean that individual rights are secondary or are automatically dissolved in a vague commonly held right.

Like love, pleasure was for Periyar a 'natural' emotion, and marriage or any other arrangement between a man and woman made sense only for the fulfilment of this objective – not that pleasure could not be bought or 'bartered' or 'sold' but free love, in Peri-

Periyar's understanding, sought fulfilment on its own terms. Pleasure and the desire for pleasure were of the natural order of things, and it was because human beings sought to curb, restrict, and manage these in cruel, slavish ways, argued Periyar that there was no dignity or happiness in conjugality or in promiscuity.

Periyar's views on love, marriage, comradeship were shadowed by his views on female promiscuity, which came into focus with the devadasi abolition bills. Like many others during his time, who saw themselves as reformists, endorsed abolition, argued that devadasis had become a 'caste' and that to insist on their continuing to be what they had come to be, was tantamount to supporting sexual slavery. Periyar also protested arguments that held the devadasi system as necessary to protect the chastity of the home, and that if this manner of satisfying men's lust was not available, morality would cease to be. He pointed out that such chastity that required policing 'our' women while demanding 'other' women remain promiscuous cannot be 'chastity' in an ethical sense. Besides, it did seem specious to him that the chastity of wives is to be guaranteed by the promiscuity of their husbands (Kudi Arasu, Sub-editorial, 30.10.1927).

The devadasi remained an ambiguous figure in Periyar's universe: while he did, at times, subscribe to the reformist notion that she represented danger and degeneracy and therefore the system which allowed her to exist, must be abolished; at other times, he was compelled to admit to a) they were independent, mobile and educated, when other women were not and b) that the devadasi existed largely because men had given themselves to be promiscuous and besides were not held to account for their hypocritical attitude to sex: they required their wives to be chaste, when they were not, and besides, they mandated that some women remain committedly unchaste! Periyar also argued that the existence of the devadasi and prostitution in general cannot be seen in isolation and has to be seen in the context of a culture of conjugality, where women could not hope to exercise emotional, sexual or other choices, and remained trapped by what was expected of them.

Domesticity and prostitution, in Periyar's view were thus dialectically linked and he himself sought to resolve the dialectic, so to speak, by suggesting that women become free, rational, learn to exercise control over their lives, especially their wombs – the Tamil word he deploys, *karbaatchi*, literally translates as exercising rule over one's womb – and step outside the confines of family, marriage and into public life.

As a counter to a slavish and bound sexuality, Periyar counselled a free and responsible sexuality and it is in this context that his views on contraception and motherhood assume importance. He made it clear that he supported contraception or what he termed 'women's rule over their wombs' not because he feared that the poor would overrun the planet, or because he was concerned about social hygiene and economic progress. He was of the opinion that child-bearing at best was a nuisance and if women are freed from having to be mothers, their lives would be considerably lightened, and they stood to gain – they would not be bound by the need to marry, they would not have to plan for the future in a restricted sort of way, because 'there were the children'. Importantly, they would not have to put up with loveless and cruel marriages that held no happiness or pleasure for them.

Periyar's views may be summed up somewhat schematically in terms of the five rights for women that he upheld: the right to property, the right to marriage and divorce, the right to 'see' (that is the right to be out of purdah, and to be mobile) and finally the right to make their own moral choices (without being told that their choices are likely to compromise social morality). Ultimately though these rights made sense only if women could be free – a right in this sense was not the same as freedom; it explained and legitimized a claim, or claims that women were likely to make, but it did not guarantee freedom. Freedom in this sense was something that women had to grant themselves: freedom from the bind of beauty and chastity, in short from self-objectification; freedom from child-bearing; freedom to marry or not marry and finally moral freedom, the right to enter in whatever social and sexual relationships they desired, as long as they granted that right to others.

Periyar was a democrat in a fundamental intellectual sense – he was open to differences, to worldviews different from his own, and believed in unfettered expression of ideas, opinions and in conversation and dialogue, and in political decorum that did not allow ideological and political positions to come in the way of everyday civility. He was also a democrat in his understanding of the caste and gender questions – in his commitment to absolute equality and comradeship, as well as justice. Politically, he was uneasy with democracy in practice, fearing as he did, the power of uninformed opinion-mongering and political opportunism, and felt that electoral democracy was the last resort of unprincipled scoundrels. His organization was not democratically managed or arranged, and at various times in its history, his own trusted comrades felt impelled to leave – some for instrumental or limited reasons, others for more principled ones. Yet he was a radical republican and imagined the state as embodying, or as serving as, an instrument of rule that ought to represent the greater common good and that was sovereign only because it was a people's state.

Doing Gender through Theatre in Tamil Nadu

■■■ A. Mangai

This paper attempts to flag off a few major interventions made by women in the field of performance in Tamil Nadu. It addresses how women have questioned/ subverted the conventions of performance, address issues of gender injustice in society and do feminist politics through theatre. I hope to situate the discussion on my own practice of theatre over the years for the sake of thick description and hope that readers can draw parallels from similar work in the State and the Nation or even internationally. Interventions in the Conventions of Performance.

One must bear in mind that as in most other regional traditions in India, female performers are not welcomed into the fold of performance genres. In Tamil the pure dance forms in folk tradition, exclude women except in the case of Poikkal Kuthirai and Karagam; the balladic forms like Villuppattu have many women practitioners; in the total theatre forms like Koothu, it is the males who impersonate female characters. Almost the whole history of theatre all over the world has encountered this tradition of male construction of female characters.

In this context it is relevant to recall the professional female actors in Company / Special Drama choosing to perform Rajaparts. Actors like Jayalatha of Pudukkottai decided to perform male roles, since their expertise in female parts far outshone the male actors and she did not get enough shows for their fear of not being a 'match' to her on stage. Therefore, she performs male roles and has no problem even if she far surpasses the other actors, since she is in a male garb. (Amaithi Arasu, J., Thamizhaga Pen Medai Kalaigargal, Chennai: IITS, 1999 & Mangai, A., 2015). Another fascinating engagement with Thappattam was undertaken by Sakthi group from Dindugal. Sr. Chandra, an artist with training in street theatre and Badal da's Third theatre went on to organize school – dropout, dalit girls into a group in the nineties. Today, it has sustained itself as the only all-female Tappattam group and is patronized by many progressive political groups (www.sakthifolk.org/). They also combine songs with messages of political freedom and resistance to oppression as part of their programme. This is a unique feature of intervention in cultural terms. They have simultaneously addressed issues of caste and gender. However, within the existing feudal system at work, the group will not gain the recognition of a performance group; nor do the members want to perform Tappattam in the context of caste-related rituals, as in funeral houses of rich landed people.

K. P. Janaki Ammal

Using the stage as a political platform was not new in Tamil Nadu. Even during the Freedom Struggle, artists in the traditional genre of Musical drama or 'Special' Drama took to addressing political content however unrelated it was to the puranic play that they were performing. K. P. Janaki Ammal, a leader of CPI (M) and AIDWA began as a 'Special' drama artist well-versed in singing. Mythily Sivaraman, the pioneering Comrade of AIDWA, pays a rich tribute to K. P. Janaki Ammal (1998), by recalling how KPJ began her career in the Boys' Company as early as when she was twelve and was hailed as Rajapart Janaki. In her thirties and forties she became associated with freedom struggle and class struggle respectively. Once fully engaged in politics, she gave up her rich career in drama. But her melodious voice continued to be part of her legacy. In 1939, she was arrested for her anti-war song. She was probably the first female prisoner in South India arrested for anti-war campaign. Within the sphere of stage too, she sang with Viswanatha Das, who was shunned by fellow actors since he belonged to the 'untouchable' caste. It is said that Congress stalwarts like A. Vaidyanatha Iyer would wait for KPJ to sing songs and mobilize the crowd's attention. She joined the Communist Party in 1939. When the Communist Party took up campaigns all over the country to assuage the Bengal famine victims, she participated in the musical drama entitled "Sahodari! Vangathai Paar" (Sister! Look at Bengal!). She also performed in a play called "Kandhanaar" as a takeoff on the story of Nadanaar, a dalit, landless farmer under an oppressive landlord, who was a Saivite devotee. She bequeathed all her property to the Party and lived till her last breath in a small room in the CPI (M) Madurai office.

As I had written elsewhere the role of Left groups in cultural work in Tamil Nadu, especially in the 1940's, when the rest of the country was referring to IPTA, has not been documented yet. In the campaign to assist Bengal famine victims, the Communist Party had taken the lead directly and KPJ, N.S.Rukmani Ammal and others were very much part of that effort.

Taking up the cause of gender justice

Addressing social issues that affect gender equilibrium like in the case of adverse sex ratio has been taken up seriously by pro-

gressive political/ cultural groups in the past three decades. From the early eighties, violence against women, police brutality, dowry deaths, rape, and female infanticide have been some of the major issues taken up by both women's groups and progressive groups. In fact the first play by Chennai Kalai Kuzhu in 1984 was Naangal Varugirom! (Here We Come!), which was a devised play directed by Pralayan. The play dealt with an instance of custodial rape and censorship of voices that questioned police brutality. Around the same time Sakthi, a cultural group of AIDWA, Chennai was also formed. We staged a play called Akkini Kunju (Fireling), a play that spoke of military rapes in Tripura as part of a women's day event. A more sustained campaign was taken up by Pralayan and me to address female infanticide. Pralayan's Kolli Vai (Light the Pyre) and Valliyin Vazakku (Valli's Case) attempted to raise positive images of women. The former argued for the rights of daughters to light the pyre, thereby questioning the norm of male preference. The latter argued in favour of a young woman's case against a powerful man in the village. I have elsewhere written extensively on my work on this issue. I have done four plays – three for AIDWA (Yaar Kutravaali, Karpathin Kural, and Thoppuzh Kodi) and one for Voicing Silence (Pacha Mannu). My later experience of working on issues of transgender community and sexuality were a continuum of this pattern.

In Pani-t-thee, (Frozen Fire) Shikandi, born a female and announced a male child and growing up as one, provided excellent scope to deal with the construction of masculinity. The difficulties of honing the borrowed male body into a warrior body is another story altogether. The dichotomy of polarizing male- female into polarities of sex / gender came under scrutiny in such moments of tensions. Of course this play had Shikandi, transforming himself into Amba, while narrating the story in flashback, willingly allowed the audience to 'look at' the performer 'becoming' a woman. Amba in Pani-t-thee challenged male gaze by means of 'putting on' make-up in front of the audience. The woman looks, instead of being looked at, on stage. That dynamics changes the power structure of the act of seeing.

It has been a revealing experience to work on Manasin Azhaippu, the play by Kannadi Kalai Kuzhu, a group of Aravanis. Here was a group of trans- sexuals who refuse to give up even a wee- bit of whatever femininity they were practicing. They did not want to wear salwars during rehearsals. For them saree was a symbol of their assertion. Voicing their basic demands for decent jobs, dignity at work, a place to stay and minimum human concern, the groups laid bear their lives to the audience. Here was a group questioning the assumptions of masculinity but choosing to lead a life within the paradigm of femininity. The play ends with one of them sharing her experience of being thrown out of a ladies coupe, as not being woman enough. The only recourse she had was to strip naked and challenge the ticket- collector to verify if she had any marks of maleness in her body. That chilling moment makes one question what in essence constitutes maleness. The act of disrobing resonates with conventional meanings, yet signifies something utterly novel and poignant; femininity that must never show itself has to prove its existence through recourse to nudity! I am still resolving the issue of negotiating this group's notion of femininity. They choose to have a male partner, only to be faced for the most part with betrayal, being used and suffering violence. Almost every single one of them is a breadwinner and all that they long for is a patient ear and an open heart.

In Tamil Nadu, the trans -community has begun to engage itself in sustained cultural work. There are groups in many towns performing dances and plays. There are also efforts taken to publish the writings and studies on trans community. Panmai, a theatre group of trans-women has been formed by Living Smile Vidya, Gladys and Gee Imman Semmalar two years ago. My latest play "Naanga Ready" (We Are Ready) was based on the study undertaken by Sunil Mohan and Sumathy Murthy on primarily Lesbian, Bisexual and transwomen or transmen lives in all the five South Indian States.

Doing feminist theatre

I have described in great detail our experience of doing V. Geetha's Kaala Kanavu (A Dream of Time), a play that traces the history of feminist thought in Tamil Nadu from late 19th Century to mid 20th Century (Mangai, A., 2015 168 – 1176). For Geetha and me, the play evolved over sporadic meetings stretched over a two-year period during which we listed the various historical moments that we hoped to revisit. We were also influenced in our choices and understanding by the overtly moralistic debates around women's sexuality and mobility that had erupted in the first few years of the twenty-first century: starting with dress codes in universities, moral policing in public, including by the police who frowned upon young heterosexual couples meeting in parks and on the beach, and the pandemonium that resulted with film actor Khushboo's remark that pre-marital sex was probably more widespread than we imagine. (ibid 169). The process of evolving the script was in itself a novel experience. We had with us a set of extracts from women's writings, diaries, letters and fiction. To work this into a script for the stage, we realized we needed to do more than merely think of what the stage required. Since we were locating ourselves in the present, we imagined that our script had to resonate with widely held contemporary concerns. Thus, we had regular meetings with friends who were part of the women's movement or endorsed diverse liberal progressive politics and, along with them, read some of the extracts

we had chosen (many had come out of V. Geetha's decade-old scholarship on the Dravidian movement) and discussed what we had read from various points of view. These discussions helped Geetha identify five major crucial historic areas for anchoring what eventually turned out to be a history of women's gradual and growing presence in political and public spaces. The five moments were: nationalist social reform, with its emphasis on companionate marriage, conversion and Christian social work, the debates around the devadasi system, the moments of self-respect and socialism. The women whose views we chose to be part of our script were not all well-known – some were iconic figures, some had been co-opted by mainstream historiography, and many were not known at all. Their views were expressed in diverse registers and there was no unified subjectivity – feminist or otherwise – that we could map. But the very rich profusion of voices helped us pose a poignant and important question at the end of the play: 'where has this public space vanished in Tamil society?'

In terms of performance, the play used a level ground as in most street-theatre shows. But unlike street theatre, the performance area was not demarcated as a full circle. Three long, narrow mats were used to make a 'Y'-shaped space defining the actors' movement and the audience sat accordingly around them.

This made for the feeling that the actors, who, initially are seated amongst the audience, are actually part of the latter. Where the mats intersected a centre space emerged, and this was where the actors came together occasionally. At other times, they spoke and enacted their roles from different parts of the 'Y' and the audience had to turn their heads, almost like in tennis courts, to whichever side the voice came from. In terms of the play's relationship to the past, we had managed to move history out of the archive and into the public realm, where it belongs.

Two other plays followed Kaala Kanavu, both based on archival sources and studies undertaken. V. Geetha wrote Aanmaiyo Anmai (Macho o' Macho) that attempted to analyse the Dravidian discourse from a feminist angle. We also had to do that keeping in mind the subaltern masculinity that has found its voice through this movement. But what was lost was Periyar's feminist thrust in the public discourse. It is not an easy task in Tamil Nadu to critique Dravidian discourse, especially by two women who by birth belonged to the privileged Brahmin community. No amount of political involvement and critical engagement in caste politics can absolve that privilege. I think we took that risk and in the processes raised many eyebrows. In terms of performance, we chose to have the basic mode of Comedia del Arte as the style of the show to mark the exaggerated discourse found in Dravidian oratory and rhetoric. We had documented sources to substantiate our argument throughout the play. On second thoughts, my workshop with Arianne Mnouchkine last year at Pondy has made me rethink on our use of the form.

The next play based on archival sources was Karuppi (The Black One). V. Geetha traced the history of indentured labour from Tamil Nadu beginning from late 19th Century. It also touches on the Sri Lankan crisis of displacement, especially the ones who were internally displaced. We performed it as a solo show, initially in Tamil, primarily to be performed in Sri Lanka. Later it was also performed in English. Ponni, who performs this play, presently teaches a course on indentured labour at the University of Toronto. She uses this play as part of her syllabus to raise issues of identity in flux. More recently, a similar pedagogic use of this play script was shared by Dr. Franca Lacovetta of the Department of History, University of Toronto.

The next two plays of V. Geetha were based on two of Mythily Sivaraman's EPW articles. She says, "The shock of State impunity, its deliberate-ness, though depressingly familiar, proved particularly hard-hitting when Afzal Guru was hung. Anguished like many others, I wrote two plays on the subject of State violence, featuring resistant women-" (2016 300). The two plays were Sudalaamma (Gravedigger) and Vakkumoolam (Testimony). The former was structurally based on Antigone and the latter on Dorfman's Death and the Maiden.

Sudalaamma was performed in both Tamil and English. For all practical purposes, they were two different plays performed by Prema Revathi and Ponni respectively. In April 2016, when Ponni performed Gravedigger at Ambedkar University, Delhi amidst the debates over nationalism and student struggles at JNU and many other institutions in the country, the play took on a different life altogether. In Batticaloa, Revathi performed Sudalaamma in August 2016. In a country where unacknowledged deaths and unclaimed bodies are stories of every household, giving a decent burial to the dead resonated with an intensity that is difficult to capture in words. The young group of women from Suriya Cultural Group of Batticaloa, Sri Lanka we were working with, on a new production expressed their many unacknowledged and unexpressed experiences that night. These experiences brought home the fact that however localized the context may be, the content can resonate to different contexts. They were 'grounded universals'.

Writing in EPW about the Delhi rape case of 2012, V. Geetha wrote, "But I felt anger on another count: that here is a state that is

clearly in crisis, for it can only respond with more and more violence and claim more and more impunity when its citizens protest and yet we are inexorably bound to this state, by history, by our investment in democracy and this republic and thus again and yet again we renew the life of the state, in good faith and hope. Meanwhile the state retreats into further impunity". It was around that time that we were working on the play Vakkumoolam.

Interestingly, she quotes from *Death and the Maiden* in the EPW article. Let me quote her positioning of Dorfman's play in Indian context: "In Chilean writer Ariel Dorfman's play *Death and the Maiden*, Dr Miranda who is called in to 'medically' supervise the systematic custodial violence inflicted on political dissidents and is afterwards made to confess to his crimes by one of his victims says:

We're at war, I thought... they want to install a totalitarian dictatorship but even so they still have the right to some form of medical attention... but afterward... bit by bit ... the mask of virtue fell off it and the excitement, it hid, it hid, it hid from me what I was doing, the swamp of what... Everything they have forbidden you since ever, whatever your mother ever urgently whispered you were never to do. You begin to dream with her, with all those women...

Interestingly, this confession is 'extracted' out of him, and the play is ambiguous on what brings it forth: his victim's ability to 'read' his torture, or his own reflective sense of what he did, when he is forced to account for his actions. In any case, torture that has its origin in what is considered 'virtuous' by the torturer makes us ask questions of virtue itself; or by implication the interests of the state, which in our secular parlance constitute virtue."

In 1978, Mythily wrote: "Clad in saffron sari, rosary round her neck, sacred ash plastered in abundance on her narrow, dark forehead, a big round kumkum on it; hair glistening with oil and rolled up on the side, decked with flowers; barefooted Nagammal, aged 40, appeared before the one –man Emergency Excess Inquiry Authority of Tamil Nadu early June this year to tell of her encounter with police. ... Out of police clutches, Nagammal was physically and emotionally battered but not beaten. ... she refused to sign the court record of her deposition unless all the witnesses that she wanted to be cross-examined were called in" (2013 306- 311). It was almost serendipitous for Geetha and us involved in staging this play how young lawyers of that time – Chandru, who retired as the Judge that year, and Gita Ramaseshan, a senior lawyer today, could recall her appearance. It was almost after 25 years Nagammal received her compensation!

"For Vakkumoolam, I chose to invoke Ariel Dorfman's *Death and the Maiden*, the justly famous Chilean play that examines the limits to truth-telling and reconciliation in a democracy founded on a banishment of the rule of generals. In the context of Nagammal's story, I re-phrased the terms of struggle for justice in an everyday democratic context: can the criminal justice system understand and abide by those who endure torture and have to then live with the trauma?" She further adds, "Here is where Dorfman comes in, because reading and re-reading Nagammal, I was struck by the irony of her situation, that she has to seek justice from a state that is often the villain and in this case, from a particular villain (as my EPW essay notes about our ironical relationship to the state). In Dorfman's case, it had to do with the ironies of political transition, sexual justice etc, but in this case, it is about the hapless choices faced by citizens" (Personal communication, Nov. 13, 2013).

The staging of the play proved a challenge. What does one want to portray? Do we highlight the violence and trauma of it all or the memory of the same that is consciously suppressed? How can we re-present the real violence on stage with a focus on social justice? And how does one talk of the everyday running of the household, the labour, especially of those who cannot afford the luxury of wallowing in sorrow/ madness? For us Nagamma was a woman who struggled against odds by her resolve to seek justice. Therefore the Tamil version captured bodily memories – sounds, gaze, pain, loss, affection, touch! The stage was evocative of everyday life of a lower middle class family. Unlike in the original, the play ends with the enactment of a wistful desire of the victims and witnesses. Nagammal and her husband Rangasami, for the first time, corner the torturer loud and open – the tragedy being that he is not present in reality but is imagined by them! A rotating chair serves as the symbol of power that they question. While it feels like angry outburst, it creates a tragic dismay.

In his foreword to the *Resistance Trilogy*, Dorfman says, "I have wanted my readers and spectators to experience, the certainty that the story on that stage has not yet, in fact, ended, that how it really ends will depend on how we, who are watching, act out our real lives" (1998 viii). It is a similar desire that led us to take up this journey. While Dorfman brings his men Gerardo and Roberto – the husband and the torturer – almost colliding with each other in moments and Paulina's 'madness' frightens them, Vakkumoolam makes the husband a helpless supporter. He is presented as the embodiment of subaltern masculinity which is

familiar in a casteist/ racist context. In fact, his endearing acts of nursing her in the nights, his silent admiration of her tenacity and his acknowledgement of her will are rare in our depiction of masculinity. For Geetha this image was inspired by the Irula man who testified in the public hearing. It is also the images of dalit and muslim men in India during times of riots and carnage. In her own words, “the tension is not so much between husband and inspector, but Nagamma, Inspector (as in Dorfman) with the husband as witness - there the husband is the public actor, the prosecutor” (ibid).

My own reading of this text has led me to re-define definitions of discourses on violence. It has also led me to re-think the depiction of masculinity on stage. Here was a simpleton, who was perhaps a cadre in the Left movement. His contribution was to write slogans on the wall in red, bright and big. He was moved by the upper caste girl – Nagamma – who admired him. And when she bore the brunt of caste pride and State violence combined, he was a hapless witness. He sticks to her determination to fight for justice. Even though she considers him as someone who is not strong enough to bear the realities, he sees to it she is not left alone. He also appreciates that she is seeking justice in ways that are legitimate. In the performance, we had a young dalit activist of the left movement play that role. He was utterly new to theatre. And in order to communicate his unquestioning support to her, we actually had a non-overpowering male, who helps in the household – fetches water, folds clothes and tries to live with her moods.

As part of the stage, we tried to create a lower class residence. The same space doubled up as the police station with the hospital curtain providing the back drop for the police station and the government counselor. The conscious underplaying of outburst by Nagamma and the helpless, but stoic support of the neighbor and friend Selvi left one with the churning of the stomach. The sound score helped in capturing that. The embodied details of Nagamma – of how the daughter would come in to the kitchen when she is seasoning curry leaves, when her head was shaven by the police before release, her grandchild’s constant cry, her saree wet with urine at night, the touch of the woman leader, the tree in front of the leader’s house – builds the image of her existence. The inspector sitting in a directly diametrical direction, gazing at her, the shaft of light that falls on a straight line stays with her.

The translation of an actual political event that took place almost three decades ago, documented for us in an article written by Mythily into a theatrical performance – embodied in ways by which the space and time have been ‘crossed over’ is actualizing history for the present generation. By re-memorizing those years of State violence, one speaks of today’s context. The fact that you cannot refer to it in the past tense is itself a recognition of things one does not want to remember but persists!

Conclusion

Being a woman and a theatre person who is interested in doing political art has not been easy. Even without the political aspect of it, the task is difficult. It feels like my search has been to build solidarities of affect. If the professional stage artists with whom I could work and re-work on the conventions of theatre in Manimekalai and Pani Thee, provided a scope to lessen the sense of loneliness, the many students and artists in various productions have evolved the text, themselves and me in the process. Each day at the rehearsal space feels new and energetic. Inquilab and Geetha are the two playwrights whose works have been directed by me. Inquilab worked on interpreting the classical Tamil texts. Geetha is squarely rooted in the contemporary. With Geetha, it has also been a feminist journey – intense, collaborative, open and always challenging!

Around Women Studies – From ignorance to Enlightenment

■■■ Yasodha Shanmugasundaram¹

Back in 1963, the book *Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) was presented to me. I did not open its pages for many years afraid of confronting something obnoxious within. I was a research scholar after my Honours in Economics. Freud, of course, was familiar though much of his theory was beyond my understanding. From such ignorance and illiterateness on matters that concern us most, that I would emerge as someone to be counted in the field of Women Studies is astonishing indeed as I look back at my long journey through an uncharted path of a new discipline. Simone de Beauvoir’s formulation was “one is not born but becomes” I wish to rewrite that as - ‘one is not born and put in a mould difficult to redesign’.

More inspired on women’s issues than many of my friends was Ms Vera Augustus, Prof of History, Women’s Christian College,

¹ Ex. Principal, Ethiraj College for Women Vice Chancellor, Mother Teresa Women’s University, Kodaikanal, Tamil Nadu.

Chennai. She would collect a small group for informal academic discussions on women's problems and perspectives. My earliest colleague (1959), Ms Rhenius ((Economics), Ms Padma (English), Ms. Ambika (Librarian) from the same college along with me from nearby Ethiraj College formed the group. As an alumnus of the college I was a welcome addition to the group. We met frequently and discussed many issues of women that kindled our thought and became part of our classroom lectures to unfold many things we have not so far cared to think of as important for academic pursuits. Terms like discrimination, exploitation, oppression and inequality and the attendant social atrocities attained a new significance in our vocabulary. This happened in the early seventies well before the International Women's Year in 1975. Thus began my journey into studies on women. As the sole surviving member of that group, I fondly remember my friends for the impetus I received. A special mention of Ms. Padma, a graduate in English Literature of the late forties needs to be recorded. Her performance was so extraordinary that University put her answer paper as an exhibit! Appointed as Tutor in the same College, (which turned 100 in 2014) she was kept in that same post till retirement. This incident later became the nucleus for my later presentations on varied forms inequity, for which 'glass ceiling' became the term in later days. Schooling was a struggle, entering college a challenge and when employed, however talented, women remained at the lowest rung of the ladder till they ended their careers, not to mention the several breaks and cracks in between. The International Women's Year ushered in the possibility of 'woman' becoming a core of a discipline; academy became very busy, engaged in all aspects of women's issues. Research gained acceptance and significance. The Towards Equality Report was much talked about but not available in Madras. I fetched a copy from Delhi, safeguarded it for a long time. After a brain storming syllabus committee session, the Report disappeared! Personally to me, stimuli as well as provocations came from many quarters. To my pertinent and to many impertinent questions on computing value for unpaid work of women, the presiding dignitary 'graciously' agreed for some Rs. 150 per month per housewife. The debate, however, gained momentum in all quarters, still there is no solution. A number of such rebuffs and insolent remarks pushed me firmly into the threshold of Women's Studies. The proximity of the first Vice Chancellor (1983-86) of Mother Teresa Women's University (MTWU) at Kodaikanal (KDK), my colleague and predecessor in the College added to the intensity of my involvement.

Sequential Summer M.Phil programmes of the University were unique. Three batches of M.Phils were turned out solely with the help of visiting faculty during summer vacations. Every visit to KDK had its twists and turns. Framing syllabi and running the course were all challenging. The hill climate was both relaxing and taxing. For some, the endurance level was low. Rev. Dr. Helen Vincent was quite exhilarated at the new venture, but with eventual hospitalization in KDK, vowed never to come back. With little infrastructure, the local schools and their hostels served as proxy for university campus. Though it was easy for us to fit into the school class rooms for contact classes, the bunk beds of school children would not well accommodate our adult bodies. But we had good entertainment all the while. For a couple of years, though we had to forego our summer vacation, bonding among ourselves and with scholars was strong and lasting. We also felt proud that we were part of a most cost effective M.Phil programme ever run by a University. A full-fledged faculty and allied facilities were soon in place. Our role in Boards of Studies and other activities continued for long. The visiting faculty, called Resource Persons for audit purpose, would in course of time become Vice Chancellors in the same university like Dr.Jaya Kothai Pillai, Dr.Lakshmi and myself. Dr.Regina Papa was Registrar. Elsewhere – Dr.Rajambal Devadas and Dr.Pankajam Sundaram, held key posts in academic institutions. I would take charge of the Mother Teresa University (later in 1998-2001). The major force of gravitation was the urge to enlarge the horizon of knowledge and make the university a name to reckon with in Higher Education.

I will narrate a few incidents connected with my Women's Studies journey. For a selection committee meeting, I took the train night before. The coach was filled with Muslims travelling to Nagore, They soon opened their food baskets and even offered me sumptuous biriyani. I am a vegetarian. But its aroma went right inside me. To break the small joy of rail friendship, checking my ticket, the TC said, I was in the wrong train and should change train at the next junction two hours thence! It started my hop, step and jump through several train and bus stations, taking a whole night and half of the next day. In the meantime phone lines were busy tracing me in all possible places. When I reached VC's room, I received a mixed welcome of relief and concern. As I am typing this matter in computer, (3.00 pm on 2 Jan 2017), a phone call came informing the demise of the same great lady, Prof.K.Vasanthi Devi, the founder Vice Chancellor of Mother Teresa Women's University. Should I say it is mere coincidence or reflection of our companionship since the sixties? She was 92. May her soul rest in peace. Her tenure was eventful with Conferences, Seminars and Workshops. On one such occasion in 1984, Prof. Noorjehan Qadir, the then College Principal where I served had a key role to play. I was the rapporteur. My Principal had hitherto never travelled alone. She managed with a companion onward. On return she was left alone in the first class coach and my travel was in the second. She insisted that I be with her. Waiting for a bitter consequence, I shared her berth in I class. Till landing at Madras, no one disturbed us. It is still a surprise that I got away scot-free.

My misadventures were many but all with the cinematic end of 'Subham'. I was returning from KDK by bus to rail station. The

bus stopped for a tea break. I got down enjoying tender coconut water. Drinking tea and drinking coconut water are not the same. I was to realize that very soon. Half way through my drink, I saw the bus without a care, moving out running away from me! With coconut still in both hands I ran shouting after it. At least I could have thrown the blessed coconut away and run faster! Witness to this melodrama, the driver of the next bus, a good Samaritan, came to my rescue, overtook the runaway bus after a chase of 30 minutes, put me back in that bus which was carrying my luggage without its owner!

On another occasion at the same university, I even attempted a bit of mountaineering! Instead of taking a safe but long road to my brother's house (the family summer resort), I cut through a cemetery - of course, it was in broad daylight. A steep climb of about 20 feet would take me near the house. Huffing and puffing, I did climb with many a slip (my saree was not at all helpful), and on reaching home, received a good lot of huffs came from my brother and others. That was simply an act of bravado without even thinking about 'process and prospects'. The same 'me' was to take up a responsible position later in the University fifteen years hence. As Head of the University, I was a different person. However it goes without saying that I enjoyed my pre-VC days much more than the post period.

The grand finale arrived on a very happy note. On 7th April 2001, the University organized a huge function to celebrate Women's Day, for release of publications and honouring distinguished scholars. All students and staff from Madurai and Chennai joined at the main campus for a get together at Kodaikanal. The then Governor Ms. Fatima Beevi had already reached the place. Suspense awaited me. The ex-President of India, Fakruddin Ali Ahmed passed away. With state mourning, the governor did not come but she asked me to double up for her as well. Madam Governor stayed on and visited the university on 9th April. For the first time in the history of any University, the Chancellor had an informal meeting with the VC and staff for an hour! The best part of it was that she asked the Aide to stay away! The elated staff were seated on the floor. She was very informal with a few of her anecdotes. A connoisseur of classical music, she enjoyed singing by staff for nearly 30 minutes asking for a few of her favourites. That event remains fresh in memory because that day I laid down office. The magnanimous Chancellor bid me farewell in the forenoon and the entire university in the afternoon. What more could I want?

Study abroad at Oxford University early in 1964 and later visits to a number of the Women's Studies Centres in UK and USA, Canada, France and Belgium were memorable events. Among them my Oxford visit still arouses nostalgia. I spent two years at Oxford with Lady Hicks as my research supervisor and guide. She held a two hour session every Thursday with Indian Administrators on deputation. Her scholars were part of that group. The lighter part of the high profile academic discussions were during our tea breaks. Seeing the tendency for our teatime to extend, Lady Hicks would stand at the door with her walking stick with a smile. That was a reminder to return to the classroom! Dumbly we followed. After twenty years I visited the Centre for Cross Cultural Research on Women of the University of Oxford located in the same Queen Elizabeth House. Director Cathy Lloyd organized a seminar on violence against women for the whole term. She added that it was an add-on to her main work elsewhere. She attended the centre once in a while whenever required. Violence takes different forms. In February 1999, an atrocious burning of a bus with women student was shocking news in Tamil Nadu. Three students succumbed to burns. There were protests all over the State. A Vice Chancellor leading a protest march made news in Kodaikanal and that was myself leading the staff and students of the University and the public. That the perpetrators of the crime are still at large is a different story.

Haleh Afshar and Mary Maynard of University of York, the well-known Gender Specialists of UK were my early acquaintances since 1995. Later, we met at a workshop on the 'Policy for the Aged in India' in Osmania University in Feb 2000. Haleh's first query to me was "Can you make masala dosa?" She said it was a family favourite. I stayed overnight to make the 'Dosa', her husband Maurice Dodson and children were very happy to have the cuisine first hand by an Indian and for my part I still remember the delicious rice made the Iranian way. On my third visit to York I had no agenda but dined with Mary Maynard. York University is a long time Women's Studies hub. Dr. Afshar, a Muslim feminist was made a life peer in the House of Lords and is now the Baroness of York.

My visits inland and abroad had both suspense and surprise in plenty. Some anecdotes would suffice. For teachers, students are their memorabilia and pride! When the students you once taught long ago recognize and run to you, are you not flabbergasted? Many a times that happened. At the entrance of the British Museum, Kalpana Karunakaran... with a big slot in the IAWS now, came running from nowhere greeting me Mam! I am happy that Kalpana, my student in Economics now holds forth in the IITM and takes reins at many platforms. So were my surprises with Priscilla John at Bodleian Library, Oxford, Indu at Leeds temple, Henrietta at the desk of IDS, Sussex and many more in other places. Such meetings inside one's country are taken for granted but outside in far off places they become etched in memories!

The 4th Conference of International Association for Feminist Economics –IAFFE an offshoot of American Economic Association Conference in July 1995 at Bucknell University in Tours, France was a major impetus for my deeper interest in Women’s Studies. Feminist economists focused on major reconstruction and restructuring of economics. My paper on Women and Economic Restructuring was in continuation of my presentations earlier. Rethinking in Economics was needed for building a sound theoretical foundation for Women’s Studies. The conference discussions centred on lack of any perspective of Women in Economics Literature and many felt a feminist solvent alone will cleanse received theories. The exposure to such a deliberations made me realize the large difference in our own thought process.

After the first day’s sessions, there was a notice calling lesbians for a meeting. I was wondering what it was all about. At that point of time, I must confess, I did not know the meaning of a lesbian. A dictionary would have cleared my doubt. I didn’t have one in hand and was shy of asking anyone. I stayed outside. Since then I have come a long way. Feminist perspectives were unfolding. Today, the usage of LGBTQ has become common place. The Tours visit also gave a memorable experience of crossing the English Channel, through newly built Tunnel in its very first year of opening. I travelled by the Channel Express. The undersea tunnel connects England and France – a 50 km rail tunnel linking Calais in France with Folkston in Kent, England. My destination was Waterloo Station, London. I was to cross a similar bridge above waters in Canada at a later day. I had it all in the several happenings along with my academic assignments.

Dr. Saroj Parasuram, a management Don is a remarkable academic of Drexel University, Philadelphia. Her book, 1999, reflected her keen interest in Gender Studies. The same theme was highlighted by me way back in 1977 in the Vasatna Pai Prize winning paper on the Working Mother and the Child. The best part of Dr. Parsuram was her battling with Parkinson and never compromising with academic challenges. In her company at the entrance of the department, another former student of mine gleefully recounted her successful research in the Physics department of the same University. Dr. Parasuram was very keen on developing an academic link between ‘Drexel’ and ‘Mother Teresa’. And so was the case with Royal Holloway College, started in 1876 in Egham, Surrey. I was successful in introducing the Inter University Link Ph. D. Programme thanks to a grant from the British Council. A scholar registered in India could stay in UK for a year for research work. A seminar on “Women and Brainpower” at Royal Holloway was very encouraging. In the Session when an expert was dilating on the nuances of cyberspace and the role of virtual portals, there was another delegate calling for help to load the film in her camera! Quite amusing - a high tech session with delegates not so tech savvy! I was happy that I could load the camera myself. No doubt, in last two decades, we have come a long way.

The 6th IAFFE conference at Ottawa in British Canada in June 1999 was my second such conference. Set in an idyllic location, the University was a gigantic high rise of more than ten floors accommodating all the departments. Shyamala Raman, 1967 graduate of Ethiraj College, a long time faculty of Columbus University surprised me at the registration desk. That was a meeting after thirty years. In the College days her oratory was the talk of the campus, and we felt double pride as she did Economics. I was equally astonished to bump into an American friend Paddy Katz, a PPE at St. Annes, Oxford and roommate of Asha Datar in 1964. Both went to USA after graduation. Paddy to a university and Asha to IMF, a brilliant gold medalist of Bombay University, a distinguished Oxonian. She died in a car accident in New York at the peak of her career. That dear friend was always with me whenever time permitted. At the seventh month of my pregnancy, that youngster organized my ‘seemandam’ with a present of a new green cotton saree, glass bangles and the rest of the paraphernalia. Paddy Katz and a few others, (no other Indian girls in St. Annes), made the gala group.

Curiously united with my old friend Paddy, I set out for sightseeing along with Shyamala and others. We ended up at the Museum of Arts at Quebec in French Canada across the River Ottawa. From this point my so called adventure would start. The rest of the group went to another destination and I preferred returning to Carlton. All road signs were in French and my communication skills in English utterly failed. ‘Merci’ was the only French remembered. Sensing the way we had come, I started walking. The long Bridge Alexandra lay between Ottawa and Quebec. I became an inter country, intercity traveler by walk! The sun was setting. It took quite some time to cross that bridge and I heaved a sigh of relief, said ‘merci’ to God when exultantly I stepped into Ottawa. Imagine a solitary woman in a saree and in her sixties, in that far place, walking across the 600 metre long, century old Alexandra Bridge on the river Ottawa. My confidence, ‘I will cross the Bridge’ meant a good deal to me at that time. That confidence still fortifies me. The spirit is in our gene. We shall not give up.

Women Studies in Tamil Nadu: A Journey replete with Challenges

■■■ N. Manimekalai¹

Tamil Nadu has been marked by a legacy of radicalism that questioned the basic structure of caste system and gender in all aspects of social, political and cultural life. It is a pioneering State which brought so many changes in women's lives through policies followed by political discourse on rights to education, employment, property and governance. With this lineage, Women's Studies (WS) as an academic discipline started gaining significance in various institutions of the State since 1989.

Even before the University Grants Commission (UGC) proposed to offer Women's Studies as a teaching program, Alagappa University, Karaikudi bore the mantle of first introducing it, owing to the tireless initiative of Prof. Regina Papa. It is important to mention here that Tamil Nadu is the second state in India to have a University exclusively for women called Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal. UGC supported Women's Studies Centres began at the above institutions and at Avinashilingam Home Science College during IX plan in the first phase in the State.

Mother Teresa Women's University which introduced M.A. in Women's Studies through distance mode helped to produce several scholars and activists to have P. G degree in WS, across the country who understood the relevance of Women's Studies. During the X plan, Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) were sanctioned for Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore; Lady Doak College and Thiagarajar College in Madurai; Vishalakshi Government Arts College, Udumalpet, PSG Krishnammal College, GRD College in Coimbatore, Ethiraj College, Stella Maris College and Justice Basheer Ahamed College in Chennai. More Centres came during the XI plan to Madurai Kamaraj University, Periyar University, Salem, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul, Arulanandar College in Madurai; Women Christian College, Nagercoil, Holy Cross College and Cauvery College in Tiruchirappalli.

Additionally, in recent years, University of Madras initiated the Department of Women's Studies, while PSG College of Arts and Science and Madras Christian College also started their own Centre for Women's Studies. Lady Doak College, Madurai, offers a Women's Studies foundation course as value education for more than half a century. Bharathidasan University offers a foundation course on Gender Studies to all of its 138 affiliated colleges as an elective paper for final year Under Graduate students, with the prescribed text books published in both Tamil and English. There are several other colleges offering one or more elective Women's Studies paper(s) for their Under Graduate and Post Graduate students that are directed at creating an understanding in the process of women empowerment.

Now in the current XII plan period, a total of 21 UGC Women's Studies Centers in Tamil Nadu in addition to the three more Autonomous Centres have spread their wings to take the discipline into mainstream education, including State Universities, Deemed Universities, Aided Colleges, one Government and one Self Financing College in Tamil Nadu. Apart from this, Rajiv Gandhi National Institute for Youth Development (RGNID), Ministry of Youth and Sports Affairs, Government of India, offers an M.A in Gender Studies at the Gender Studies Unit. The Pondicherry Central University has a CWS, and the Central University of Tamil Nadu, Tiruvarur is expected to establish a Centre soon for which recommendations have been put forth in the Committee meeting of Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Work places.

Though there has been delay or non-receipt of funding from UGC, by virtue of initiatives of the Directors and support of their respective institutions, Departments in Bharathidasan, Bharathiar, Gandhigram, Mother Teresa, Alagappa, Avinashilingam Universities, and other WSCs have got recognition and have been able to source funding also from ICSSR, UNICEF, British Council of India, UNESCAP, US Aid, SSA, UNDEF, UGC Union Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Education, Government of Tamil Nadu, NRDC, EDI, DST, NABARD, Nationalized banks, Ministry of Agriculture, National Commission for Women, Association of Common Wealth Universities, Civil Society Organizations, and District Administrations, and made the Departments visible.

Regional Association for Women's Studies (RAWS) and Networking of Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu and South India: Significantly, Women's Studies Centres in Tamil Nadu joined together to act and represent issues jointly, particularly regarding non-receipt of funds in time from UGC, and absence of clarifications on the guidelines. Bharathidasan University has been quite instrumental in bringing all the WSCs together in South India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular. Directors of Women's

¹ Director and Head, Department of Women's Studies, Bharathidasan University, Tiruchirappalli, and Treasurer, IAWS (2014-17)

Studies, women activists, scholars and students in the region worked together to form the Regional Association for Women's Studies (RAWS) in 2011, to collectively work on various components of Women's Studies including teaching, research, organizing seminars, conferences and extension, etc. RAWS was inaugurated in Tamil Nadu on 9th January, 2012 in Tiruchirappalli. Threadbare discussions at its Annual General Body Meetings revolved around prompt action by UGC and State Governments. While the WSCs are actively fulfilling UGC's defined objectives, they are not encouraged in spirit to come out of the institutional bottlenecks. In connection with this, other issues were expressed at a National Conference on 'Status of Women's Studies in India' in October 2013 at Ethiraj College, Chennai and a RAWS-supported workshop on 'Contributions of Women's Studies to Development' at Stella Maris College, Chennai in Sept 2013. Future course of action was discussed during the symposium on 'Current Issues of Concern of Women and Girls in India' in March 2014 to commemorate International Women's Day 2014, conducted jointly by RAWS and Cauvery College for Women, Tiruchirappalli. The grave issue of Violence against Women was discussed at a three day International Seminar on "Combating Violence against Women" organized in 2013 with the support of Periyar Maniammai University and the proceedings were published as a Book.

RAWS galvanized all WSCs together to productively contribute towards strengthening Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu and South India, in lobbying for recognition and visibility through collaboration and networking among WSCs, Women's Movements, State and Civil Society. Based on such a collective focus, in 2014, the RAWS General Body Meeting resolved to address policy makers and highlight the following needs:

- To introduce Women's Studies/Gender Studies Courses at UG and P.G levels
- To include Women's Studies specialization with B.Ed and M.Ed Courses
- To introduce of Women's Studies/Gender Studies as a compulsory Foundation course in School and College Curriculum;
- To appoint Qualified Women's Studies candidates in Schools, Colleges and Universities, projects in Development Sector, Government Projects etc
- Inclusion of WS and GS as subject in the State recruitment bodies like TRB, SET, Employment Exchange, Public Service Commissions etc.
- To appoint Women's Studies/Gender Studies Graduates for monitoring Safety audit in Private Corporate and Public Sector, and formation of Committee against Sexual Harassment to enhance the employability of WS/GS Graduates.
- To undertake collective State/Nation Wide Policy Research in collaboration with WSCs of various State and regions on the specific areas and Constitution of Committees to prepare proposals to be placed to UGC, ICSSR, Women and Child Development, NMWE, Central Social Welfare, NitiAyog, etc.
- To particularly develop proposals on Gender Disaggregated Data base generation and other suggestive areas of concern for research such as Alcoholism and Domestic Violence, Honor Crimes, lack of Gender Disaggregated Data on women's contributions, Safety Audit at a Micro Level, ICT and Issues of Adolescent Population, Engaging men to ensure Gender Equality, addressing challenges in World of Changing Gender Roles, issues of women in the neoliberal context, privatization of health and education and gender impact of state withdrawal on social sector, issues of informal sector women workers, declining Women's employment, and possible preparatory strategies to address indoor Pollution and health impacts on women and possible pollution resistant strategies.

These demands of WSCs were collectively presented to UGC, State and Central Governments towards following up on mainstreaming Women's Studies like any other Social sciences. WSCs proposed to jointly organize a National Workshop with the support of University of Madras, with the support of Vice President of RAWS, on 'Sensitization of various Stakeholders of the State and Social Institutions on Mainstreaming Women's Studies' inviting officials of Education Department, Teacher Recruitment Board, Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission, UPSC, Tamil Nadu State Higher Education Councils, Departments concerned with Women's empowerment, NGOs, Southern Region UGC officials, etc. primarily to make the various stakeholders recognize the value of WS experts and incorporate them as an integral component of their policy and decision making bodies of appointment and recruitment, nominations in Committees. Engendering Academics and Research and Theorizing Feminism Workshops are in the pipeline for March 2017.

WSCs resolved to implement Saksham Report ensuring Safety of Women in public space, campus etc. and Conduct Safety Audits for Women in the cities in collaboration with the Police Commissioner's Office of the respective districts and regions, to compile the Women's Studies Researches and Publications of their respective regions, and to publish WS Research Abstracts for the entire South in collaboration, as well as initiate the e-News letter of WSCs.

Despite such a promising start, RAWS has not achieved much in the past 5 years; there is a need to systematize and structure

the activities; leadership is missing. An extra push is always needed to conduct activities. There are around 300 life members from academic, research, movements, NGOs, etc, and hardly any initiatives come from the members or office bearers. There is an immediate need for RAWS to regulate, structure and create a system, like IAWS which will be governed by the subsequent members who will take forward in future.

My Personal Experience as Director of WSC:

The Department of Women's Studies, Bharathidasan University, for which I was assigned the task of submitting the proposal as per the direction of the University was sanctioned when I was on the Economics Faculty. The Centre was established in 2005 when I was appointed its Director.

This Centre has now gained visibility at National and International forums and has introduced Teaching programs in WS from 2005 onwards in the belief that only when it has teaching programs, is it possible to mainstream WS and get recognized for necessary academic and administrative support from the University and outside.

Today the Centre has evolved into a full-fledged Department and is getting support and recognition like other Science and Social Science Departments. With its continuous activities in terms of teaching M.A, M.Phil, and Ph.D programmes, training, research, extension, field outreach, documentation, publication, advocacy and lobbying, networking and clustering, organizing Seminars Workshops, Conferences etc, the Dept. remains constantly in the public eye.

One of our milestones at Bharathidasan University, was the institutionalized effort to involve grass-root women in economic and entrepreneurial sphere by establishing Women Entrepreneurs Association of Tamil Nadu (WEAT) with a focus non-conventional and male dominated fields like Engineering and Fabrication industry. This was done in collaboration with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, Tiruchirappalli and Ranipet in Tamil Nadu and the grass root women themselves.

Another initiative was the establishing of the Menstrual Hygiene Management Consortium (MHMC) to break the silence of rural adolescents and women on issues related to reproductive health through which the department conducted research studies. Based on the outcomes of the research, workshops, seminars and conferences were conducted on disseminating knowledge and awareness for Menstrual Hygiene Management. To follow up the issue further, the Department initiated discussion with Women Self Help Groups to involve them in producing low cost sanitary napkins for the rural poor. The stakeholders of the workshops included Public Works Department for construction of Girl friendly toilets, Education department for promoting adolescent health, Doctors Association for clinical support, NGOs to carryout the awareness program as well as distributing low cost sanitary napkins in the villages with the help of small scale industrialists and banks for credit facilities. After such a holistic process, a proposal was submitted to the Government of Tamil Nadu recommending distribution of low cost sanitary napkins and MHMC was instrumental in the initiative of Government of Tamil Nadu to take a policy decision to distribute sanitary napkins freely to the rural adolescent girls and women with the handbook on scientific facts on Menstruation.

There was smooth sailing from 2005 to 2012 with two plan period. But for reasons unknown, a suspension order was served on me on charges of insubordination, women harassment, and misuse of funds. There was no due procedure followed in serving suspension order to me in 2012. No opportunity was given for me to explain or counter the Charges made in any enquiry that was conducted. I was simply victimized, despite working for the University to attain its goal of reaching the underprivileged, and was forced to knock the doors of the Court. The Court Judgment was quite empathetic and speaking for justice of an individual and described the entire episode as malice. It took me a period of 20 long months of legal battle to get restored to the Director position, though the suspension was revoked within two days by the Chancellor of the University, His Excellency the Governor of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu Federation of University Faculty Associations (TANFUFA) which represented the issue to the Chancellor and strongly argued that it was outright victimization. When the Chancellor passed an order to restore me to the same position, I was allowed to join as the Director, WSC; then on the same day I was transferred to Department of Economics as Professor in violation of all norms. A second order to re-transfer to the Women's Studies from the Chancellor was received, but again I was not restored to my original position as Director, but only as Professor in DWS.

All through the 20 months, I was subjected to severe hardships, and was not allowed to function as an academic with any freedom. That was the period when a circular was issued to all the Departments, stating that any press release or interview to the press must be given only through and with permission of the Vice-Chancellor's Office. When the media sought my opinion on women-related issue, be it Nirbhaya incident, Women's Day, or child abuse cases or any law being enacted, I had to say that I cannot speak without the permission of the University. Significantly, a struggle was initiated by the students and research scholars

whom the Department taught 'Women Studies', against such injustice. Fortunately, all our students, scholars, student organizations, Tamil Nadu University Faculty Association, (TANFUFA), AUT, Faculty members of Bharathidasan University Teacher's Association, Associates of RAWs, Senior WS Academicians including former Vice-Chancellors, Women's Movements, Periyar Dravidar Kazhagam (PDK), Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), CITU, AIDWA, AIBEA, AIEA, my own family and many other individual and civil society organizations stood strongly against the injustice done to me. Sections of media also disseminated my cause strongly. Many other well wishers, voluntarily came forward to organize WIND Trust and AREDS- NGOs working as movements in Tamil Nadu, WSCs, Academicians, WS Experts, and other institutions at St. Josephs College. A one day Workshop on "What is Women's Studies", discussed at length how WS should be understood and treated, and submitted the resolutions as Memorandum to the Chancellor, to whom I am greatly indebted. My family encouraged me to approach the Court although they themselves came under strain.

The Association in the University got divided into two; colleagues looked away to avoid interacting with me. My every activity were monitored and any initiative curtailed. Several WSCs felt that it is an internal issue and did not extend any support though there were appeals, but Trade Unions and other bodies with which I did not have any direct connections came forward in solidarity.

The situation has now returned to normal. But the 20 month long disruption in the activities of the Department was a great loss to the progress of the Department in the public sphere and left many important issues unaddressed. Here I would like to register my sincere gratitude to the Women's Studies students and scholars who I taught and learnt from, and the sustained perspectives and frameworks that enabled me to come back with resilient energy to fight against injustice.

Yet my location and experience in Bharathidasan University also opened up many opportunities to work for Women's Studies in other institutions as well. As External Member in the Advisory Committees of various WSCs in Tamil Nadu, and Southern States and as member in Boards of Studies, Governing Councils, Academic Councils, it was possible for me to speak to the several heads of the institutions to take research initiatives, to apply for other than UGC funding from various departments. There were several Universities and Colleges which invited me to serve in their Advisory Committees. In institutions which invite me for general academic programmes, say for conducting Viva Voce, other meetings, I volunteer myself to also arrange gender sensitization programmes in India, and abroad, Srilanka, Spain, etc. As part of the Advisory Board, I often lobby with the management of the respective institutions to help in mainstreaming Women's Studies. Several recommendations like filling the vacancy positions, recommending upgradation to Department Status, advancing salaries in anticipation of the UGC grant, initiation of the teaching programmes, etc could be made through such possibilities for interaction and networking while fulfilling the inevitable requisites of academic and institutional procedures of universities and colleges. I was thus able to help new WSCs who sought the guidance in preparing the UGC proposal, some of which have been sanctioned.

Future of Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu

In general, Women's Studies as an academic discipline in Tamil Nadu still has a long way to go. I admit that the perspectives developed in which the WSCs are now functioning need to be further strengthened and developed. At the same time, the distance between academia and activism needs to be bridged. WS is neither social work nor an extension activity; it has its roots in Women's Movements, philosophies and ideologies that require rigour in thought, but unfortunately WS in Tamil Nadu is hardly recognized as a rigorous academic discipline.

Students must be facilitated to associate with movements. The politics of caste, gender, class etc are hardly understood and it poses a great problem for disciplines like WS to build an analytical perspective on mainstream thinking with decisiveness. There is a need for all WS wings to come together, strengthen the organic link between academia-activism, to prepare the students to be part of the struggle to question the injustices, to sensitize on gender issues and to move towards the objective of equality, justice and fairness in the modern society.

WSCs need orientation in building women's studies perspectives in writings, research, advocacy, and extension in the current context of commercialization education, employment crisis, crime and violence against women in all walks of life. One major challenge for WS in the public domain is the scope for jobs after completing the degree and research. It is quite tiring to explain and convince society including our own academic community that WS is an academic discipline with scope for employment like any other social science subject.

The situation will change when WS is taught as UG and PG courses and placements are made in Government Departments, schools, colleges and the corporate sector. States like Karnataka and Kerala have shown the way forward by recognizing WS course for making recruitments through service commissions. WSCs must complement each other to collectively work, cluster and share the resources, and above all work with all commitment and involvement for the cause of women development which requires an additional effort.

My experience with IAWS

Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) has strong roots and is an established body which has helped in very emergence of Women's Studies in India, as the academic arm of the Indian Women's Movement. Institutionalization of Women's Studies could be thought of by UGC only through the National Workshops and conferences organised by IAWS that was the platform of leading WS Scholars in India. Academic papers, documents etc generated by IAWS are serving as resources in teaching WS. IAWS' democratic practice, the committed ideological base on which it has been working and influencing the State, its lobbying to introduce WS as an Academic discipline, the body of literature being generated on WS, its organisation of workshops and conferences on the themes of contemporary concerns, the readiness to support advocacy and lobbying, making available resource materials for open access, etc cannot be exaggerated. Being part of its Executive Committee, I have gained considerably in further committing myself to the cause of WS; the association with the wonderful EC Members provided an excellent learning in various ways. I feel that there is a need to revive the membership in different regions and for IAWS to undertake researches on the issues of current concerns, on the regional issues, and lobbying for the implementation of positive discriminatory policies for the cause of women. It can help in providing class room reading materials for the WSCs by way of publishing Readers on Women's Studies; WS has not been treated equally with other Disciplines and there is hardly any scope for the public service commissions, public sector recruitment for WS scholars and students, for which continuous lobbying is still needed. The WSCs can be periodically invited to air their issues and the IAWS may take up evaluative studies on the activities of Women's Studies and the critical input may be presented at the WS Workshops; the dichotomy existing between Academia and movements and activism be bridged by exchanging the theories and practices in one platform. Reading material for teaching WS is the utmost priority, for which IAWS may help in generating material from the scholars across the country. Organizing the 15th National Conference at the University of Madras, Chennai is a milestone which will certainly bring a further visibility to WS in Tamil Nadu.

Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu: A Curious Case of Institutionalization

■■■ S. Anandhi, Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai.

Some years ago, myself and Padmini Swaminathan carried out an initial survey of women's studies at the institutions of higher education in Tamil Nadu. The survey highlighted the long history of institutionalization of women's studies in Tamil Nadu, which preceded the UGC initiatives. There were the Christian higher educational institutions which, since 1972, had engaged in debates on making women's studies an academic discipline. The Women's Christian College and the Madras Christian College were pioneers in carrying out research on women and they had also systematically documented the role and status of women. Defined as women's education these institutions were carrying out programmes that could rethink social science disciplines from women's point of view. There were a series of faculty orientation programmes and student workshops to redesign curriculum and courses in women's studies which was seen primarily as an educational activity. There were also other Christian higher education institutions based in the southern parts of Tamil Nadu such as the Lady Doak College, Madurai and the Holy Cross College in Trichirappalli, to name a few, which were actively involved in teaching women's studies even prior to the introduction of women's studies by the UGC. To add to this rich history of institutionalization of women's studies was the founding of Mother Teresa Women's University in 1985 by the Government of Tamilnadu which is the first women's university in this state to teach and research women's issues in all social science disciplines.¹ The survey also provided a critical appraisal of the important trends and the direction that women's studies have taken over the years and the implications of these for the development of women's studies as a discipline. One of the important findings of our survey was that the women's studies centres, departments and the courses have by and large deviated from the initial objectives of making women's studies an academic project and a critical inquiry into

¹ For details on Mother Teresa Women's university's initiatives and its later assimilation into carrying out state's welfare programmes see, Anandhi.S and Padmini Swaminathan, " Making It Relevant : Mapping the Meaning of Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu" , Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XLI, No.42, October 21, 2006.

existing social sciences. Why and how this had happened requires an intense study of these institutions. However, I intend to map here some of the critical issues in institutionalizing women's studies in Tamil Nadu within the context of higher education in Tamil Nadu and its implications for women's studies to develop into a full fledged academic discipline. I also briefly discuss here the potentialities and the challenges before the women's studies network in Tamil Nadu.

The First UGC guidelines, brought out in 1986 for the 'Development of women's Studies in Indian Universities and Colleges', served as an incentive for many colleges and universities across India to start centres and cells for women's studies. A few colleges in Tamil Nadu introduced women's studies in various social science departments either as courses or as a separate graduate program in women's studies. It is significant that the women's studies programme was introduced mainly in the social science and humanities departments, thus, by and large leaving out the science departments and centres. The close linkage between the women's movement and the women's studies programme, leading to critical interrogation of social, political and economic processes and patriarchal biases in social sciences, inevitably placed the women's studies within these disciplines. Interestingly, in Tamil Nadu the science teaching institutions such as the Allagappa University and the Avinasalinigam Home science college (later deemed university) equally took advantage of the UGC's support grants for setting up women's studies centres and they were generally praised as 'pioneers in introducing women's studies' both as teaching, research and as extension programme. But, by and large women's studies suffered the isolation even in these prestigious science institutions as it was considered to be a 'soft social science subject' with no future prospects of good employment. Our survey report had mapped the anxiety of these institutions to make women's studies relevant to employment prospects. With the subsequent UGC grants through 11th and 12th plans, many such women's studies centres (twenty one centres) were established across the region but mainly with the headship of a social science faculty who directed the teaching, research and the extension activities of the women's studies programme. While the UGC incentive enabled these centres to take off, trends in higher education in Tamil Nadu changed towards making it job-oriented and market friendly with the special focus being on science and technology education. The simultaneity of these processes led to the anxiety of making women's studies relevant and employable instead of developing it as a discipline to interrogate social science curriculum, agendas, departmental cultures or institutional cultures.

When women's studies was introduced as a programme in many of these institutions, there were two important trends that also become visible in the field of higher education in Tamil Nadu. The first is the reorientation of higher education towards vocationalisation (initially thirty five vocational courses were introduced) and the introduction of professional degrees to increase the employment opportunities among the first and second generation of learners who could access higher education through a very favourable reservation policy of Tamilnadu. The second is the privatization of higher education in large scale with Tamil Nadu having the highest number of (nearly 85%) private and self-financed colleges with no state funding. According to the recent All India Survey on Higher Education by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (AISHE, 2014-2015), Tamil Nadu has the highest number of private unaided colleges. These developments coincided with UGC initiated women's studies programme mainly in the state funded higher education institutions. The Vocationalisation of courses even in the state funded colleges and universities meant a substantial revision of the UG and PG syllabuses (this trend began in 1993-1994) to meet the requirements of competitive examinations for various state and private sector employments. So much so, the Madras university mandated that all undergraduate and postgraduate students of the affiliated colleges must earn a diploma in vocational courses in addition to their degree courses to increase their job prospects. This meant that a student of history would have to earn a diploma in archaeology or tourism or in travel management or in the investment management course. The student fees too were increased to run these vocational courses. The popularity of these job oriented courses could be discerned from the fact that nearly 3.67 lakhs students enrolled themselves in polytechnic education which is the highest in India. Along this line the Tamil Nadu state council for higher education suggested restructuring of courses in History and Economics followed by the state government declaring that many of the social science subjects such as history, sociology and political science be considered as 'non-utility' (non-merit) subjects. We may note here, that the above disciplines have been integral to women's studies' critical engagements with social and historical processes and they offered methods for women's studies to make academic enquiry into gendered realities.

Declaring social sciences as non-merit or non-utility oriented subjects and otherwise reorienting them as job-oriented courses contributed to the tendency to make women's studies job-oriented and relevant in order to offer visibility to this newly emerging academic field. This meant reorienting the teaching and research in women's studies towards good prospects of employability, i.e., promotion of it as a job-oriented course in order to avoid the fate of the social science subjects. The anxiety to sustain women's studies as a job-oriented programme was quite evident from the change in the titles of courses to attract students. For instance, the Mother Teresa Women's University and the Alagappa University Centre for Women's Studies titled their M.A degree course as "Women's Studies and Computer Applications". Given the thrust on human rights and environmental issues by the Non-Government organizations in Tamil Nadu, to increase the job-prospects of the students in this sector, some of the women's

studies centres considered the degree courses to be a combination of 'women and human rights' and 'women and environment'. This was nothing but adding women to concerns of various groups and market forces which had already begun to market gender. Thus courses like 'women and entrepreneurship' became very popular among the students who could see a future for themselves in such courses. With these changes Women's studies was no longer an intellectual project, but a marketable product that could fetch future possibilities of integrating women into the market economy. The assimilation of market ideas and co-option of women's studies by the state to realize its own objectives of women's empowerment brought in a unique trend in the institutionalization of women's studies in Tamil Nadu.

Despite such accommodation and assimilation of market ideas, the women's studies programme in Tamil Nadu was still marginalized within the state run higher educational institutions. Mainly because it continues to be identified as a field of social science and humanities and therefore without job-prospects. In the early 1990s the primary focus of higher education in Tamil Nadu shifted towards science and technology education with skewed funding and scholarship and total neglect of social science education. For instance, between 1999-2000, only 24 % enrolled in humanities while 40% were in sciences. Equally important is the phenomenal growth of private institutions for higher learning, mainly in science and technical education.

From the 1990s the All India Council for Technical Education began to liberally grant permissions to start self-financed engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu and it also advised the government to start business schools in Chennai which could offer MBA degree with the collaboration of universities abroad. Tamil Nadu has the highest number of engineering colleges in India (571 colleges) and self-financing colleges number around 539. The unregulated and mindless expansion of private engineering colleges in Tamil Nadu have reoriented both the school and higher education to the extent that many state run and private schools do not offer social science subjects at the higher secondary level. Interestingly, this trend coincides with the state's special incentives to women students and its special promotion of participation of women at all levels of higher education mainly at the doctoral level. The recent higher education data for the state reveals that the enrollment of women students at all levels of higher education, except in the diploma courses and in the Ph.D programme, far exceeds male enrollment which is unlike the all India trend. For instance, during 2014-2015, of the total enrollment of students, at the UG level 51% , at the PG level 57%, at the M.Phil level 50 % and in the certificate course 79 % of enrolled students are women, while the male students are more in the diploma courses. Significantly, the proportion of girl students in the science and technology education had increased to 56 %. The employability factor is used by the state as an important incentive to attract women into higher education. The promotion of education and employability courses in higher education is closely linked with the idea of making women socially and economically responsible towards their family and not necessarily to make education as a resource for critical knowledge building. In addition to the above factors, the women's studies centres have to contend with the highly patriarchal, bureaucratically entrenched, Vice Chancellor centered universities in Tamil Nadu.

However, what is surprising is the lack of critical reflection on these trends even by the women's studies centres in Tamil Nadu. Accommodating the above trends has been considered a better strategy to provide visibility and recognition for women's studies. In this context, the UGC mandate of extension work has come in handy to carry out the state government's development programme for women. By and large research in women's studies carried out from these centres tends to merely validate the state project of women's empowerment with no interrogation of available research methods and practices of different disciplines in terms of whether or not these are adequate for studying gender. Even the teaching programme in these centres does not seem to have the objective or the goal of critical interventions into different disciplines.

Post our survey report, some of the women's studies centres have formed a network to address the issue of non-recognition and invisibility of women's studies in Tamil Nadu. This network is known as the Regional Association for Women's Studies (RAWS). While this is an important collectivity and an important space to grapple with the above challenging situations, this nascent network has to go a long way to address some of the issues raised by our survey on the women's studies centres in Tamil Nadu. It is yet to engage with the issues of curriculum revision or pedagogy. This network needs to move beyond the concerns of employability and funding prospects for women's studies. It has to critically evaluate the women's studies programmes that have so far uncritically extended the state and corporate sector agendas of women's employment and empowerment. In my view, RAWS, unlike IAWS, has not expanded beyond the higher educational institutions to incorporate other women's studies scholars and activists located outside these centres, as part of the network. As I understand it, this network has mainly addressed the financial needs and the institutional impediments of the women's studies centres in order to cope with the current situation of invisibility and marginalization.

However it is to be debated as to what kind of recognition is sought by these centres or by the network. While these are important,

the above impediments to women's studies can be overcome only if the women's studies centres seriously debate the question of recognition and visibility. Is the category women adequate enough to seek recognition and is women's studies reducible to identity politics? Are the needs of the centres only financial needs or increasing of budgets? What kind of critical distance from the state is important for a women's studies programme to be recognised as an academic programme? Is it adequate enough to reproduce social activism as academic programme which seems to set the standard of evaluating the success and failure of the women's studies as a field? Having the location in Tamil Nadu what analytical importance do social categories like caste and gender have for the women's studies scholarship in the state? Do women's studies centres play a complicitous role or are they contesting the masculine framework of the state in development politics? How does the state constrain the thinking through feminist perspectives on challenges of higher education, social movements and women's development? Is it possible to render a future for women's studies which could productively encounter identity as a complex subject production? Could there be a distinct academic feminism as an intellectual activity and as a knowledge project that critically intervenes in teaching and research in various departments of higher learning? Has the very institutionalization of women's studies limited the feminist modes of inquiry and their critical engagements with the politics of power and empowerment? These are some issues that require debate by the women's studies network and by the women's studies scholars in Tamil Nadu.

SECTION - 3

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar and Higher Education

■■■ Prof. Sukhdeo Thorat¹, Chairperson, ICSSR, New Delhi

At this juncture it is important to understand Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's views on education. We should remember that we do not pay attention to Dr. Ambedkar's views on education and how to take them forward. In fact, we must assess the current existing educational system and see if it is in line with what Dr. Ambedkar said. We must try and understand how to transform his dream into a reality, how to create new policies based on his fundamental policy and how to approach and challenge the government.

First I will review Babasaheb's views on education. After that, I will talk about the educational policy and his views on that. Further, I will talk about the current situation of Dalits, OBCs, and Adivasis, focussing on the current education policy to point out how it is failing to solve their questions and problems.

Babasaheb has produced immense data on education and looked at education from the point of view of the caste system and structure. He has clearly pointed out how the Hindu social system and education, brought ignorance in this country, and how it became a reason for the nation's backwardness. We will now focus on his analysis of education.

He has written extensively on caste system, education and has shown how it has adversely affected the country. The right to education was granted only to the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas. However, only the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas had the right to learn but did not have the right to use that education. That exclusive right to learn and teach was only with the Brahmins. Shudras and Ati-Shudras had no right to education. In fact, as we all know they were punished for doing so. When Babasaheb studied this aspect, he came up with a very important point.

He stated that in Vedic Brahmanic tradition and Hindu social structure, which is based on the Brahmanical religious structure, the concept of formal education does not exist. What is the meaning of formal education? It is to build institutions and give students education through these institutions. Open schools, open Universities and opportunities for education will emerge from that. We can term this as formal education. What is informal education? It is what we learn from the conversations between educated and the uneducated class in society, what parents in families have learnt and what we learn from them, this is the informal channel of learning. Babasaheb has stated that in Hindu societal structure, the concept of formal education is absent.

It was present in a different tradition in the Buddhist tradition. In Nalanda, Takshashila, and other Universities coming from this tradition, education was open for both women and men. But the predominant culture, the culture which crafted the identity of this country, does not have the concept of formal education. And that is why Shudra and Atishudra women did not have right to education. So from 1780 – 1795 a big mass of humanity in India was illiterate and a very tiny section had access to education. Babasaheb said that it is Hindu philosophy and social organization which is responsible for the illiteracy of this country. It was when the British came and opened up education that opportunities sprung up for all. But the informal method did lead to a little bit of progress in education. What was that informal method of learning? That informal method, which Babasaheb mentioned and defined was in the 'doing', for instance how did Shudra farmers learn farming, the use of technology, of fertilizers, how much water to use, when to sow the seeds etc. This knowledge is knowledge that the Shudras have learned through experience. When did Vaishyas learn auditing and accounting? They learned it from business; there were no commerce colleges, no accountancy colleges, and the caste system had no provision for formal education. Knowledge was passed on from one generation to the other. The knowledge and technology that got created through informal modes, was passed on only from family to family, from generation to generation; there wasn't a separate formal mechanism.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that this is the reason for no growth of scientific knowledge and technological growth in this country. On

¹ This is an abridged version of the key note lecture delivered by Prof. Thorat in the national conference organised on 'Dr. Baabsaheb Ambedakar and Higher Education' organised by the Dr. Ambedkar Research Centre and Dr. Ambedkar Cultural committee the occasion of celebration of 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in Savitribai Phule Pune University.

one hand we did not allow free open education for all, on the other hand religious philosophy was also not supportive towards it. As stated in the religious principles of Vedas, everything in it is truth, final, and permanent; nothing can be changed, nothing can be challenged which is why there was no development of knowledge. Buddha fractured it by writing the theory of creation of knowledge. He said that whatever is happening in the world, there is a reason behind it. Buddha encouraged people to think and search for the cause. This is why resources like Nalanda /Takshashila were started. One can say that researching started with Buddhism.

Nowadays there are claims about Vedic mathematics being advanced and that we should do research on it. My question to that is, who has stopped them from producing this knowledge; the right to learn and teach has always rested only with the Brahmins, so who has stopped them? They should have done it, and if these claims are true, they should show it, prove it to us! No one else had the right to learn Sanskrit, and that is why Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was not able to learn Sanskrit when he was an undergraduate student at Sydenham College, in Elphinstone.

The Indian social system and educational structure denied the right to education to 70 to 80 percent people of India; illiteracy remained and knowledge stagnated. Development stagnated. Technology did not grow. Had the Buddhist thinking been promoted, if Universities/Colleges like Nalanda and Takshashila would have been there, what could have happened in this country? The restrictions on education brought by Brahminical social order are therefore responsible for our under-development.

Babasaheb has also expressed his views on the education policy. He insisted that education should be equal for all, everyone should get equal opportunity. In India, social reformers like Savitribai Phule and Jyotiba Phule and other bodies/associations took up the work of imparting education.. The British made education open, but there was opposition to their decision. Mahars were not allowed to go to schools; the British did not understand the dilemma, so they started separate schools for Mahars. In 1921, when the report of education commission came out, they realized that despite giving opportunity to everyone for education, the Dalits were not getting educated, because there is huge opposition to Dalits' education. Dalits got opportunity to get education because of the cantonment schools in military. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a product of the cantonment school in the early stages. Hence, he stressed a lot on education and made everyone realize the importance of education.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that education increases the capabilities of the person, makes that person employable, and gives values and a personality. If the workforce is educated, the nation can develop, the avenues for development get opened up and personal growth is ensured. So for Babasaheb Right to Education is an instrument of social transformation. At the same time, he discussed the nature of education and pointed out the distinction between a learned person and an intellectual person. He stated that from education you gain knowledge, and when you get knowledge you become a storehouse of knowledge and you understand things. An intellectual person has the knowledge, the capacity, the morality and the integrity to talk about the truth and is motivated by social mission. So there is a difference between intellectual and educated persons. Thus, Babasaheb has clearly stated that curriculum and syllabus in the school, college and University should have content which talks about truth and principles, scientific knowledge, causality, and principles of equality, fraternity, justice. It must talk about discrimination, inequalities and make the student aware of the problems of society. For the past ten to fifteen years, Phule and Ambedkar have become a part of the curriculum and teaching. This is the result of the policy of University Grants Commission who gave grants to open Ambedkar Study Centres for studying Buddhism. The major challenge in this regard is whether the opening up of study centres on Ambedkar, Phule or Tagore has really led to more research in these areas. The question also is, whether mainstream social science departments would teach the research and the knowledge produced by these centres. Do you understand women's issues or teach gender while teaching Sociology or Economics? Even today, in mainstream social sciences, these questions are not addressed. So a student who has passed out of school and enters college, has no knowledge about any kind of discrimination, be it of caste, gender, race or about poverty, inequality, and violence in society.

Babasaheb believed in education for all and the need to have quality education, and education for social transformation. There are no disagreements on the principle but the truth is that the current scenario is getting deviated from Babasaheb's views.

To assess the progress of higher education, one important criterion is – after completion of 12th standard, what proportion of students go to Colleges and Universities? Education scientists have developed an indicator for this called the enrolment ratio. How is this enrolment ratio measured? For instance, in the case of Maharashtra, we would have to take the number of young people from the total population of Maharashtra who are in the age group of 18-22 years and take the ratio of the number of students who are taking higher education, i.e. who are in Colleges and Universities. Multiply this number by 100 and we get the enrolment ratio. This is an important indicator for assessing and measuring educational progress. Whatever progress we see in

higher education is due to public education and certain private aided colleges founded with a philanthropic intention. Today we have state aided Universities, Colleges, State Universities, Government Colleges and private aided Colleges. Apart from these, Self Financing Institutions have come up in large numbers. The access to higher education varies, differs according to caste, ethnicity, religion, gender and class.

The enrolment ratio of the relatively poor in higher education is 15%. If you consider the bottom 20%, their enrolment ratio is 15%. And for the top quartile (in class terms), it is 60%. Why do you have to go to Europe? Europe is right here, where enrolment ratio is 60%. These are based on income disparities.

If we examine the same based on social disparities, we see that the rate for Tribals is 14%, Among SCs it is 29%, better than the Tribals. But how is it in comparison to the 60% of the upper castes? What about OBC's? It is 38% among them and 50% among the higher castes. The speed with which the Dalits, Adivasi, OBC's progress is less than the others, so catching up becomes difficult. Babasaheb had said that caste is based on graded inequality which is clearly visible here. We can see such inequality even after opening up the education system. If you consider the General category then the ratio of women enrolment is less, its 30% and for men its 38%, 8% less (for women), but this gap is less. We have developed policies, stressed upon women's education, started women's colleges, started women's Universities, given scholarships, distributed cycles, distributed books - all of which meant an informal reservation policy for women, but the formal reservation for Dalits is opposed. This informal affirmative reservation policy for women has brought about change. But when Dalits and Adivasis do the same, they face resistance. But we still see the unequal access that has been there as a tradition in different forms; the gap still exists and this is our first challenge. That is why Dr. Ambedkar said that everyone should have equal rights to education.

Education for Dalits and Adivasis should be stressed upon. The Poona Pact gave political reservation for Dalits, but same efforts should have been made in the field of public employment as well as in the field of education. When Babasaheb Ambedkar became Minister from 1942-44 during the British rule, he brought reservation in education and created funds for it. There has been progress; we see a sizeable middle class, lower middle class among the Dalit, Adivasi and OBCs. But we should keep in mind the indication given by Babasaheb that the disparity that should have been reduced, still exists at different levels.

Why are there disparities? There are many reasons for these disparities and I don't want to get into those, but I will focus your attention on one particular reason. In Maharashtra in 2012, the poverty ratio was 17%. Out of the total households in Maharashtra, 17% are poor homes. But the percentage of this is higher amongst Dalits. It is even more in Tribals. 54% STs are poor, 20 to 25% Dalits are poor, and OBCs fall below this. And because of this poverty, getting into higher education becomes a difficult task. Also, the environment at home is not the same; it is different which is why the dropout rate is more. They are admitted in schools, somehow reach middle school, but by the time they reach 12th standard the dropout rate is so much that very few students from SC/ST are going to higher education.

Today we see that Brahmin Women, Dalits and Adivasis (due to reservation), people from urban as well as rural areas, Muslims and poor are coming into the field of higher education. So the higher education campus is now diversified. We have created that opportunity because we started public schools which provided primary, secondary and higher secondary education which enabled students to reach higher education. But what has happened today is that along with public and private aided institutions, a new variant has been started, that is self-financing Colleges and even Universities. But the worst thing is that we have brought in the concept of self-financed schools. We passed the bill in 2013 and now the privatization of schools in rural areas has reached a furious pace. More students now pass out of self-financing schools than out of government schools. But, in these self-financing institutions, in terms the percentage of poor, rich, Dalit, Adivasi you will find immense inequality. The self-financing institution has restricted the entry of the Dalits, Adivasis, poor, and the poor OBC because of high tuition fees. It is in direct contradiction to what is said in the Constitution. We need to remember that education is a public good. There is a need to reshuffle the budget as this unequal access to higher education is direct contradiction to Babasaheb's thoughts.

In order to combat this situation we will have to expand government institutions; because as self-financing institutions grow, the access of the poor, the Dalit and the Adivasi declines. If we increase the inequality in education, then we increase incapability. Some people get good education, some people get bad education. Those who get bad education will not get any employment which means no income, thus reproducing economic disparity.

So the first effort that we need to undertake is the expansion of government institutions and of private aided institutions. We should encourage opening up of colleges by private owners, but the State needs to ask them to apply the same tuition fees as State institutions. We need to create funding organizations so that we can provide access to poor, Dalits and Adivasis, so that the meritorious students who receive admission are not denied education.

At the same time students are diverse and their capacities are different and for them Universities had to start remedial courses. But as I pointed out in my article in the Hindu, written in the wake of what happened in the Hyderabad Central University, nobody runs remedial courses honestly. If they were run as envisaged, then Dalit and poor students would receive quality education. This unequal access should be checked, we need to provide quality education for all. The course content and curriculum should be changed such that the student who passes out of college will become a good citizen. Citizenship education should be provided, only then can the vision of Dr. Babsaheb Ambedkar be fulfilled. I feel that this is the only way we will truly pay him regards.

Gender, Sexual Harassment and the Democratization of Higher Education Today

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Students, teachers and all those whose lives are connected to the worlds of higher education know that we are living in extraordinary times. But strangely enough, we have also been quite caught off guard by the present moment, and cannot claim to have a good idea of what exactly is happening or why. The very recent events in public Universities like Hyderabad Central University and Jawaharlal Nehru University make it amply evident that the Indian state recognises the critical space of higher education today in their very efforts to control it.

I would like to use this opportunity to reflect on questions on gender in higher education today. I am even going to suggest that we may be witnessing a 'silent revolution' where gender is concerned, and that some aspects may not even be particularly silent.

At the time of independence, while there were barely one lakh students in all our Colleges and Universities in the country as of the academic year 2012-13 the total number of students has jumped to 32.3 million, with one lakh students at the PhD level alone. Much of this growth has been happening in the last 20 years, with a doubling of enrolments just in the last decade alone. About one in four young people (rural and urban) across the country (in the age group 18-23 years) attend some kind of higher educational institution, of which the most common is the undergraduate college. As we all know, there has been massive privatisation in education in recent years (75% of India's colleges are now private). And yet, and this is what I find to be truly extraordinary, there has been – side by side – a process of growing democratization in the composition of the student population. Not too long ago (just 30 years ago in fact) most Universities were primarily elite institutions and this was considered normal.

But consider this: While barely 10% of students at the time of independence were women, this number has now jumped to 46%. In other words, there is – on average – close to parity in gender terms among students today. Some of this is undoubtedly uneven – it is even well above 50% in many colleges, but drops to 30% in engineering institutions. There is no other public institutional space in our country where there is this kind of presence of women – certainly not in our parliament or legislatures, and most definitely not in our workplaces. So what should we make of this? Is this simply a 'normal' development, as families aspire to upward mobility for their daughters as well as for their sons? Or could there be something happening here that is potentially more 'revolutionary'?

Notice also that this huge entry of women into our Colleges and Universities is happening when there has been democratization on other fronts as well. Thanks in large part to the implementation of reservations – out of 100 students in 2012-13 (again this is an all India average), 13.1% are Scheduled Caste, 32.4% Other Backward Classes (OBC), and 4.6% Scheduled Tribes. There are also 4.3% Muslims and 2% other minorities, which leaves about 43.6% upper castes (AISHE Report 2013). So while upper castes (who constitute an estimated 15-20% of the population) are still quite over represented, and Muslims in particular are severely underrepresented, the student body today is much more heterogeneous than it has ever been before. Even more interestingly, there is also near parity in gendered terms across all these groups, which makes this space gendered in an intersectional sense as well. But how many of us are aware of this and what consequences follow?

It is one thing to simply talk about access to higher education and quite another to talk about life within a College or University

after one gains entry. One of the few issues to have gained some public attention where gender is concerned, especially in the wake of the Delhi gang rape of 2012, is sexual harassment and violence. It came as a shock to discover in 2013 when we looked into the situation in several Universities in the country (including Delhi University), that the subject of sexual harassment – especially but not only within the administration and among teachers – is a subject of considerable confusion if not outright denial (Saksham Report 2013). The pervasive vulnerability to forms of harassment that constitutes the everyday life of women students on our campuses is exacerbated by the lack of facilities like transport, lighting, hostel accommodation, health care and counselling. And it is compounded by other forms of discrimination and stigma like rural location, caste, class, minority status, disability and sexuality.

Very few members of higher educational institutions take the need for gender sensitization seriously. Moreover, given the heterogeneous nature of student populations – who not only study but often live together for many years – it is not just experiences of discrimination but different ideas of ‘appropriate’ behaviour that creates confusion and alienation among students which must be explicitly addressed. The University or College – precisely because their purpose is education – should be places that are especially well placed to think further about equality, to enable students to take risks and experiment, to learn how not just to tolerate but to also live well with others who are different, whether these differences be social, economic, religious or related to caste, sexual orientation or ability.

The greatest obstacle to gender sensitization is the administrative approach of dealing with the presence of women students – namely protectionism and policing. Most poignant of all is the most effective method for silencing students. Especially in undergraduate colleges and privately managed institutions there appears to be a kind of pact or unwritten contract between the administration and parents whereby discriminatory rules (like hostel timings, dress codes, movement, and so on) must be tolerated if not respected, even though they are oriented towards blaming the victim. If students speak up or act against such rules, the result could well be that they are asked to leave. Here again it is only too obvious as to which students would be most vulnerable to this kind of veiled threat – those already battling ‘conventional’ family backgrounds, with limited economic resources, or coming from marginal communities.

At the same time, the last few years in particular have also seen several moments and forms of open protest against sexual harassment and gender discrimination on our campuses. In Hyderabad, there is the ‘Hyderabad for feminism’ social media network that connects students to other young people across the city and who take up issues relating to harassment in innovative ways. In our own city there is the *Pinjra Tod* movement, which has questioned discriminatory hostel timings for women, but also the huge service industry of PG accommodation with their spiralling rental rates and unregulated modes of functioning. I have been further struck by women students’ effective presence in another movement, #Occupy UGC. Here the campaign, which began in November 2015, is about the sudden UGC directive to cancel non-NET fellowships to research students. They noted, among other things, what a significant role even a very modest fellowship could play in staving off parental pressure for marriage so that they could study further.

So let me conclude by returning to the question I began with – what kind of revolution does all that I have very briefly alluded here to portend? There is near parity in terms of enrolment among women students at a time of galloping expansion, but which has not granted any public attention. Much less silent, especially after the Delhi gang rape, has been the question of sexual harassment in public spaces including our campuses. This is surely a source of hope for a future of more genuine equality. And yet I must also pause.

On 28th January 2016 three girls aged 18-19 years who were studying naturopathy in a private Yoga Medical College in Tamil Nadu committed suicide by jumping into a well blaming the head of the institution, where ‘they learned nothing’ but were subjected to ‘torture’. All three had sold their land and taken educational loans of several lakhs hoping to find employment in the world of alternative medicine. We might simply want to wish away this terrible tragedy as a by-product of corruption ridden commercialised private education.

So – yes something of a revolution in these crisis ridden times is surely underway. But we must find ways to include these young women’s shattered dreams in our contemporary struggles and demands, in order not to fall short of the potential for radical change that characterises this critical moment in the history of higher education.

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Majority in the Margins? A Case for Bilingual Pedagogy

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In 2011–12, I had joined other academics and activist–scholars in attending numerous Planning Commission meetings in the hope that we would have some impact on the priorities for the allocation of funds for the higher-education sector and to seek infrastructural support for the students in state-aided institutions for tertiary education. Till four years ago, the model of the University, and its affiliated colleges, was the prevailing norm, with postgraduate and undergraduate education distributed between these. Enrolment patterns are still skewed in the direction of the traditional arts–science–commerce streams, although these figures are likely to change in the present decade.¹

Today, the field of higher education is crowded with well-funded private Universities, which appear to have abandoned the affiliating college model and its division of pedagogic labour. The dizzying proliferation of new courses does not, however, indicate that knowledge fields have increased exponentially; it may only mean new ways of slicing the pie, with on-campus recruitment opportunities included in the educational promise. While the disaggregated statistics for student enrolment are currently not available, it is apparent that nearly one-third of the degree-granting institutions, which number over 700, are now in the private sector. While the ‘private’ phenomenon has been part of the college system since the beginning of modern general higher education—with colleges that are over 100 years old in Mumbai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Delhi and other metros—the idea of the private University is relatively more recent, having emerged as a significant feature in the last five years or so. The figures for the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) indicate that from a total Gross Enrolment Ratio of 20.4 per cent of the 18–23 age group, 91 lakh students are in private institutions and 58 lakh in government colleges. Of these, 12.5 per cent are from the Scheduled Castes, 4.2 per cent from the Scheduled Tribes, 31.6 per cent from the Other Backward Class (OBC), 4.5 per cent are Muslim and 2.1 percent from other minorities. However, we don’t know how these categories are represented across public and private institutions, or across the college–University spectrum.²In this article, I look back on attempts over the last few years to address the issue of Indian languages in the higher-education classroom, and speculate on what might lie ahead. The webpage on the Promotion of Languages under National Education Policy NEP discussion asserts the following: ‘A multi-lingual society recognizes the importance of education in languages’. The random sampling of 1,102 submissions [accessed on 20 October 2015] indicates that there is overwhelming support for education in the mother tongue at the school level, to be supplemented by English and Hindi, with some even advocating the addition of a fourth language in schools in so-called backward areas. Strikingly, there is no clarity whether they are referring to instruction in multiple languages or simply the teaching of several languages to school children, even as they admit that there is a universal aspiration to acquire ‘English’.

Alongside this on-going ‘curated’ national discussion, we should read the figures put together for 2013–14 by the District Information System for Education of the National University of Education Planning and Administration (NUEPA), covering 14.5 lakh schools in 35 states and union territories.³ The survey indicates the rising enrolment of students in English-medium schools since 2008–09, with Bihar (4,700 per cent increase) and Uttar Pradesh (1,000 per cent increase) topping the charts. Taken together, the purported national discussion on the MHRD website and the NUEPA study can only reaffirm what we have seen since independence: claims about language standing in for claims to a national/subnational identity, and the rights that flow from such a claim through the logic of the welfare state.⁴ Unsurprisingly, there is no apparent tension between the claims and the desire for the aspirational horizon of ‘English’.

1 All India Survey on Higher Education, published by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, 2013. Available at aishe.gov.in.

2 Ibid., p. 10.

3 Reported in <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Number-of-children-studying-in-English-doubles-in-5-years/articleshow/49131447.cms>

4 See Ashwin Kumar (2014) for a concise presentation of this problem.

It must be noted here that the emphasis should not be on how many languages the student learns but on whether s/he is developing cognitive capabilities. This has been a serious blind spot in modern Indian education over the decades, right up to the recent May 2014 Supreme Court judgement on the non-enforceability of instruction in the mother tongue.⁵ The Court invoked the right to freedom of speech and expression, in this instance, to say that children and parents could choose the language in which the child would be educated, thus separating the language question from the right to education. If exposing a child to English at a very young age is dictated either by opportunism or a desperate bid for social mobility, this choice flies in the face of language and education research as well as the most enlightened pedagogic practices available. If the mother tongue or Indian language education is not practical today, it is because of the enormous lack of good educational resources in those languages, another need that state initiatives have failed to address adequately. We see an oblique reference to this failure in the Supreme Court's judgement, which holds that 'prescribing English as a medium of instruction in subjects of higher education for which only English books are available and which can only be properly taught in English may have a direct bearing and impact on the determination of standards of education'.

The Language Divide

The language divide is a persisting aspect of the higher-education sector—my colleagues and I had offered a diagnosis of this problem around 2008: The language divide in Indian higher education, where the default language of instruction is the local language, despite the mandated English medium, is an indicator of a deep-seated problem. It suggests that the majority of tertiary education students in India and often their teachers, too, are unable to comprehend knowledge systems and conceptual frameworks that do not resonate with their own experience. Much of the state intervention, as well as a public understanding of the problem, tends to read it simply as one more indication of social backwardness, to be remedied by the most obvious solutions.

Beginning in the 1960s, the Government of India established four Regional Institutes of English (RIE) to enhance English-language skills, especially for schoolteachers, and, simultaneously, supported the translation of standard textbooks into Indian languages, culminating in the establishment of the National Translation Mission (NTM) in 2007.⁶ However, this latter idea goes back 150 years. In the Education Despatch of 1854, translations from English were made a priority as a way of making European knowledge available to the general public. Despite these strategies, a high failure rate and poor employability continue to haunt the higher education system. The improvement of English skills has no effect when attention is not paid to the relevance of the curriculum to contemporary needs, or to clarifying the larger objectives of higher education. Similarly, translating large amounts of material into Indian languages has little impact because attention is not paid to the effectiveness of the materials produced for higher education.

As an alternative approach to the language divide, we had argued for bilingualism in teaching and research, without either jettisoning English altogether or abandoning the local language. Further, we had contended that the preconditions for bilingual pedagogy need to be actively created, since they did not obtain in our universities and colleges, and that a significant precondition would be the production of new critical resources in Indian languages. A further step would be to translate these resources into English so that they could help raise new questions in the English-only classroom as well.

Mapping Indian Language Resources

In 2009, a mapping exercise was undertaken by the Department of Translation Studies, Kannada University.⁷ This study was intended to collate the available resources for higher education in Kannada and provide an assessment of past strategies in addressing the linguistic divide in higher education with reference to Karnataka. The findings were disturbing: approximately 96 per cent of the local language books used in higher education are translations and only 4 per cent are original resources. The report also drew attention to the severe scarcity of locally relevant materials for higher education.⁸

5 <http://supremecourtindia.nic.in/outtoday/41504.pdf> Accessed on October 21, 2015

6 See, for example, the 'About Us' section of one of these institutes: <http://riesielt.org>. See also the website of the National Translation Mission: <http://www.ntm.org.in>.

7 The principal investigators for the study were V.B. Tharakeshwar and M. Usha of Kannada University. The project was in partnership with the Higher Education Innovation and Research Applications (HEIRA) programme at the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society, Bangalore. Available from the HEIRA webpage at cscs.res.in.

8 The Federation of Indian Publishers Annual Report (2006) shows that the per capita book production in Kannada is 5 per cent (as against English, which is 23 per cent), a figure indicative of the general lack of resources in Indian languages.

The Kannada study pointed out that from the 1980s onwards, in a majority of the universities in Karnataka, the most widespread language of examination has become Kannada, even though the language of instruction is still supposedly English. Increasingly, students are also choosing to write their research dissertations in Kannada. But even as the number of students pursuing higher education through the resources available in Kannada is increasing, this is not matched by a corresponding increase in the availability of quality materials in Kannada that can be put to use in higher education.

Interestingly, even in other states where all the state resources being poured into the development and propagation of Hindi, the situation there is not very different from that of a much smaller language like Kannada. An inventory and review of the quality of curricular resources in Hindi in three social science disciplines—History, Political Science and Sociology—at both the B.A. and M.A. levels was taken up in 2010 by a group of scholars from New Delhi.⁹ Six major universities in five states of north India were considered: Patna University, Patna (Bihar); Allahabad University and Banaras Hindu University (Uttar Pradesh); Barkatullah University, Bhopal (Madhya Pradesh); Maharshi Dayanand University, Rohtak (Haryana); and Rajasthan University, Jaipur (Rajasthan). The textbooks were evaluated for their coverage of course content, the academic quality of content, their suitability for the relevant educational level, and production quality. Since Hindi is used in 151 universities and deemed universities in the 10 Hindi-speaking states, it is likely to occupy a key position in any initiative dealing with Indian languages in higher education. This inventorying exercise helped us understand that students use whatever textbook material there is, irrespective of whether that material belongs to the very small category described in the study as ‘excellent’, to the moderately large ‘reasonably competent’ category, or to the very large ‘deficient’ category (Deshpande, 2010: 100).

Private Universities and the Language Divide

In the second scenario sketched in the opening section of this article, I touched upon the new private universities which have become visible on the Indian higher education scene in the last few years. We don’t as yet know, except in an impressionistic way, the kind of students that are entering these private universities, especially those for liberal arts/liberal studies. However, we can guess their economic background from the kind of fees charged in these institutions, many of which claim to be non-profit.¹⁰ While all the private universities promise scholarships, we have no idea of the percentage of students who obtain them. An examination of the curriculum may give us another insight into what might be happening to the language question in the private Universities: e.g., a B.Sc. in Art and Design (the course closest to a humanities degree that I could find in a non-liberal studies University in northern India) offers Soft Skills, Foreign Language, English, Manners and Etiquette. At Azim Premji University, substantial support is provided to undergraduates of liberal studies seeking to improve their English skills. They don’t learn any other language, although they are encouraged to work in an Indian language under the mentorship of a faculty member.

Has the language-divide problem disappeared in the new institutions? Another improbable thought: Have the students been so thoroughly filtered that they all appear at these institutions fully formed by English and without any mother tongue impediments? What new challenges do we face in such classrooms? Have the old challenges disappeared? Are we observing a new segregation in higher education, such as air-conditioned buses for ‘international school’ students? If all the readings on Indian society and history are in English—as is evident in the liberal studies syllabi of leading private universities—are students encountering an India already processed and pre-digested?

At this crossroads in Indian higher education, it may be worth asking whether we should persist with the effort to advocate bilingual teaching and research. My answer would be that we need to think both about the student disadvantaged both for lack of English and knowing only English. I cannot emphasise enough that bilingual education is not about addressing only those who are struggling with English—it is about fomenting a crisis in English education by bringing in material with which the English curriculum is not designed to deal. While we know that most of our languages cannot sustain teaching and research in the context

9 See Deshpande (2010). The principal investigator was Satish Deshpande, Department of Sociology, Delhi University. Available from the HEIRA webpage at cscs.res.in.

10 A sample of fees for an undergraduate course at Ashoka University, a private non-profit institution, in 2015: tuition, Rs. 5,70,000; hostel fee, Rs. 1,25,000, mess charges extra; security deposit, Rs. 50,000, etc. At JNU, a central University, the tuition fee for the postgraduate course is around Rs. 1,350. At SNDT, Mumbai, it is about Rs. 14,000. An M.A. programme at TISS, a deemed University, is approximately Rs. 2 lakhs, inclusive of the hostel. In Mumbai University, a state University, fees for the M.A. is approximately Rs. 9,000. While this range is quite varied, the new liberal studies private University is clearly in a league of its own. However, amongst these, Azim Premji University is closer to TISS in the fee structure, with its undergraduate fees amounting to one-fourth that of Ashoka University.

of the modern University and its disciplines, we should also be aware that enforced monolingualism in English will make higher education unsustainable. We need to create critical vocabularies across several conceptual domains to feed into the creation of relevant knowledge. Students need to learn the ability to distinguish between levels of meaning, to contextualise/translate, and to create new concepts that capture the life of our societies and our institutions. And in doing this, they have to learn to draw on multiple linguistic resources. To include bilingual pedagogy in our horizon of aspiration for higher education would be to ensure that bi- and trilingualism are not seen only as the situation of everyday interaction in India, but also as an important feature of knowledge production and dissemination.

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Women's Studies In Regional Languages Tichi Bhakri Koni Chorli? The question of Education for the Bahujan woman¹

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After Maharshi Karve started his Ashram school for girls, Maharshi Shinde approached him, requesting that his sister Janakka who had been deserted, be given admission. However, Karve refused arguing that he did not want to bring the complicated caste question into education and that the time was not yet ripe for giving education to girls of non-Brahmin groups. Thus the Bahujan Janakka was declined entry into a school meant for Brahmin orphans and widows and had to be sent to a missionary school. The history of the debate around women's education in Colonial India, highlights that it was never debated as a question of 'all' women. Since women's education began in the colonial times, the caste system has been intertwined with it and this continues to date. Historical evidence shows that even before women's education was started, the caste system had created a massive regulatory wall around knowledge, such that while Brahmin women got educated, women from other castes would be denied access to knowledge.

The sphere of knowledge was the site on which Brahmanical supremacy was most profoundly exhibited. If we have to make sense of the education of Bahujan women, try to understand why her journey is incomplete and full of struggle, we will need to make sense of it in the context of this history.

While Bahujan women first accessed education through schools started by missionaries, it was undoubtedly Jotirao and Savitribai who opened the gates of knowledge for them. An essay by one of their pupils, Mukta Salve, who laid bare the politics of Brahmanical control over knowledge, attests to the radical approach of the couple towards the question of knowledge and power. What Mukta was able to do so many years ago, is barely seen in the writings of upper caste educated women subsequently. This is because education was introducing them to the alphabet, but not equipping them with the tools to analyze and challenge the system that subordinated them.

The upper caste reformers had a different perspective as compared to people like Phule, Maharshi Shinde, Chatrapati Shahu and Dr. Ambedkar who had come from the Bahujan communities. For them, education was necessary for social transformation. While for Upper Caste Reformers, education was meant to construct a companionate wife for the newly western educated man, within the boundaries of the caste-community. This duality in thinking about women's education is reflected in the Native Observer, a newspaper from that time, which argues for Upper Caste women to be taught to cook, take care of children etc. while advocating a ban on education for the Bahujan woman.

¹ This is the translation of an abstracted version of the chapter on education from Nare Pawar, S. Tichi Bhakri Koni Chorli?: Bahujan Streeche Vartaman. 2012. Manovikas Prakashan: Pune. The title loosely translates as "Who stole her bread?: the contemporary reality of Bahujan women"

It is on this historical background that education for women started in post-independence India. Brahmanical Patriarchy had become slightly flexible with respect to the education and development of its own women; upper caste women used this opportunity to their advantage, scaling the ladder of education, slowly but surely. But at the same time, women from Bahujan Castes and Communities continued to be deprived from education. Though leaders from the Bahujan Communities made attempts for women's education, the grasp of the caste system and of the ensuing economic hardships was so extreme that education was not even reaching the Bahujan boys and men.

If we look carefully at the statistics for education and start disaggregating them, we realize that beneath all the sheen and shine of girls outshining boys in board exams and the increasing numbers of literacy, lies a rather complex tale of continued deprivation of Bahujan girls from education, of drop-outs at every stage of education and the extremely low levels of Dalit-Bahujan girls making it even to High School, forget College and Universities. The success stories highlighting the success of 'girls' does not take into consideration this caste reality, mostly girls from Upper castes, Middle classes succeeding and only an exceptional Dalit/Bahujan girl succeeding.

These drop-outs need to be understood in the context of the poverty of the family and the necessity of the girls' paid and unpaid labour for the survival of the same. The importance of this labour in the present means that education cannot be accessed and therefore all possibilities of material advancement through education in the future are stopped there, trapping her in a condition of life-long hardship and labour. The other major reason for the drop-out of girls is the labouring mother, who works outside the home to sustain the family, which means the burden of unpaid domestic labour often falls on the girl child. Most women I interacted with in the course of this study said "those who can afford, educate their girls." Even when the government has made education for girls free, most Bahujan families cannot afford to lose out on the wages she can earn. There are a number of agricultural jobs and even jobs as domestic help for the urban elite where adults are not employed and adolescent girls are preferred. Alcohol addiction of the men of the household, whether it is the brother or the father, also contribute to the girl dropping out and becoming a labourer. The primary need of food and shelter often outweigh her primary right to education. Distance of educational institutions from home, lack of safe transportation, lack of facilities like toilets in schools and colleges and a constant source of insecurity in terms of sexual harassment that girls face are other hurdles in the way of girls reaching higher education. The State while saying that free and compulsory education is the right of all children from 6-14 years, does not make provisions for schools in villages beyond standard seventh, which means many Bahujan girls drop out of school after seventh since parents do not want to send their daughters to another town/village for education. Sexual harassment is an extremely important issue, because both the public and the private patriarchy target the girl and her reputation. It is important to remember that this private patriarchy is of the Bahujan and labouring classes, who do not enjoy social prestige, do not have nexus with politicians and police; in short, this patriarchy is not empowered enough to protect its own women, leading to greater control over their own girls. Apart from the father, the brother becomes a major enforcer of honour on the Bahujan girl. The access to public space becomes extremely important because it is here that she can think for herself and the possibility of her developing as an independent individual is present. Therefore, controlling and minimizing this access through dropping out from education becomes primary for the continuance of caste and patriarchy. The unavailability of employment after higher education also deters girls' education. Parents feel that once girls are educated, they are unwilling to do agricultural labour and other kinds of employment are seldom available. Educational courses like nursing which have better job opportunities are also beyond the reach of most Bahujan families.

For girls who enter higher education after crossing all these hurdles, the primacy of marriage continues to haunt them. The heavy reliance of Bahujan communities on agriculture and the current crisis in agriculture is another factor affecting girls' education. However, some girls from these communities and the first generation learners are now struggling to enter the world of higher education. Neo-Buddhist and Dalit girls are at the forefront of this struggle in many ways due to Ambedkar's influence, which has not reached other Bahujan caste groups to that extent. Education gives these girls a new way of looking at the world, but to continue inhabiting their old world which they cannot change much. It means that many of these girls are depressed and dejected; their self-confidence and self-esteem gets destroyed. Education leads to changes in these girls - in the way they dress, speak, carry themselves; but when the basic fabric of their living does not change, the feeling that education does not make a difference becomes acute. Also, for most of these girls higher education means a BA or BCom degree, not professional education in private institutions.

One of the most positive finding has been how a poor Bahujan mother is the greatest supporter of her daughter's education. To understand the reality of the Bahujan girls' education, we need to locate it in the context where on one hand the State in the name of universal education is giving meaningless education to the masses while at the same time encouraging the stratification and

privatization of education, making meaningful education beyond the reach of the common people. The educational experience of Bahujan girls are caught in the bind where that which is accessible is meaningless and they cannot reach that which they aspire. As poverty is feminized, the impoverishment of education in this country also has a female face, the face of the Bahujan girl.

UNA (Gujarat): Young Dalit women and men forge new alliances

■■■ By Meera Velayudhan¹

An atrocity took place on 11 July 2016. In Una Block of Gir Somnath district, dominant caste youth attacked four dalits. The incident took place between the villages of Mota Samadhiyala and Bediya. The four dalits – Vasharambhai Balubhai Sarvaiya and his brother Rameshbhai Bhalubhai Sarvaiya as well as their cousins Becharbhai Ugabhai Sarvaiya and Askokbhai Bijabhai Sarvaiya had been skinning dead cows. The dominant caste youth – in the name of gau raksha – attacked them.

The father (Balubhai Sarvaiya) and mother (Kuarben Balubhai Sarvaiya) of the two brothers were also attacked. Neither was an isolated incident. The caste-based work of the family – who belong to the Rohit community – was to collect carcasses not only from their village of Mota Samadhiyala, but also from other villages.

The village head, Prafulbhai Korat, who represents the dominant caste, had threatened Balubhai and had issued a notice to demolish his house. Six months ago, Korat said that if Balubhai did not stop skinning carcasses, he might one day find that the cows are alive and that he would have paid a heavy price. Balubhai ignored this chilling threat.

Details of what transpired have been collected by a fact-finding committee of social activists – Kaushik Parmar, Dr. Nitin Gurjar, Subodh Parmar, Kirit Rathod, Kantibhai Parmar, Jagdish Parmar, Kantibhai Makwana, and Baldevbhai Parmar.

In the morning of 11 July, Balubhai received a phone call from Naajabhai Daanabhai Ahir. A lion had killed Naajabhai's cow, which Naajabhai wanted Balubhai to collect and skin. Jivabhai Koli from Motisara also called to say that his dead cow needed to be collected for skinning. Balubhai asked his son to go collect the cows. The dead cows were brought to an empty area around 10 am and the four dalit youth started skinning the dead cows. Soon a four wheeler came and the men in it saw them and left. Then two four wheelers arrived with about thirty-five youth, who started beating the dalit youths with sticks and iron bars. They yelled anti-dalit abuses and also abused the mothers of the men (that they would slice off their vaginas). They shouted, 'They are cutting up live cows'.

The dalit youth said that these were dead cows.

A villager from Devipujak caste who saw the attack, called Balubhai and said that his sons and nephews were being beaten by a mob. Balubhai and Kuarben rushed to the spot and requested the mob not to beat the dalit youth who were involved in their traditional caste work of skinning dead cows. The dalit youth were beaten for one and a half hours. They were stripped of their shirts, and forced into a car. When Balubhai tried to enter the vehicle, he was hit by an iron pipe on his head and fell down. Kuarben, who tried to protect him, also received blows. The attackers drove the vehicle towards Una town. On the way they met a police vehicle. The men talked to the police and said that they were taking the dalit youth to Una town. The police told the attackers that they were on their way to the place of the skinning.

On reaching Una town, the four youth were tied to a car (number plate DD 03F1294). The car carried the notice – President, Shiv Sena, District Gir Somnath. The men hit the dalit youth with iron rods and sticks. They paraded them through Una from the bus stand to the police station. They flogged them along the way. The police arrested the dalit youth, even though no complaint was filed or noted in the police station's register. The attackers videotaped the entire incident.

An ambulance took Balubhai and Kuarben to Gir Gadhda instead of Una for medical treatment. When they insisted on going to Una, the police abused and threatened them. A woman police inspector abused Kuarben. As news spread and other dalits gathered, the attackers fled. Their plan to immolate the dalit youth was cut short.

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Later that night, under pressure from the dalits who had gathered, the police allowed an FIR to be filed, in which they named the main attackers. The attack had taken place in broad daylight, in the presence of the police, using police lathis. This is as close as 'state sponsored violence' as possible. This is not an unusual event. A few weeks earlier, seven dalits were flogged in Rajula for the same reason. Both Dalits and Muslims were being harassed by vigilante gau rakshaks in such villages. It was not reported in the police station. One reason why these other incidents are not taken up is that the dalits in these areas are not as politically aware as those of the Una region.

The next day, several organisations called for a Una bandh. They wanted the police to bring the culprits before them. The fact finding committee pushed to move the criminal investigative process along, invoking not only the newly amended SC/ST Atrocities Act but also sections of IPC, identifying loopholes in the FIR and sections which had not been covered. This pressure came at the behest of dalits in the Mota Samadhiyala village, panchayat elected members, social justice committee (social justice committees are responsible for removing carcasses under Gujarat Panchayat act, 1993), Patels, and the local police. The FIR was filed and so far about 37 arrests have been made owing to pressure put by dalit activists and the growing dalit agitation. Manjula Pradeep (Director, Navsarjan) went to the Rajkot Civil Hospital to visit the four dalits. They had been admitted to the general ward. The doctors said that they were being discharged. The superintendent of the hospital accused Pradeep of making a politically motivated visit to the hospital. This was the reason why he discharged the four. Their injuries had not been healed, and their trauma remained intact.

Martin Macwan, a dalit leader in Gujarat, offers a broader context for the upsurge after the Una atrocity. He points to the day-to-day discrimination and to structural deprivation. Gujarat has 2.33 percent of India's dalit population, but yet ranks highest in terms of atrocities. The impunity for anti-dalit atrocities is shocking. Then there is the lack of educational and employment opportunities as well as the lack of upward mobility. Privatisation of education – fees at Rs. 2 lakhs – keep dalits away from higher education. In Gujarat, 64,000 vacancies for Scheduled Castes have not been filled. There is something cruel about this. Agricultural labourers in Gujarat earn a minimum wage of Rs. 175 per day. But dalit labourers only earn Rs. 50-60 per day.

Abuse of the dignity of dalits is a major issue in Gujarat. Navsarjan's Untouchability study found that dalits were denied entry into 90% of temples in Gujarat. In more than half of the government schools, dalit children had to sit separately. In 2010, 1500 dalit children in Saurashtra were forced to clean urinals and toilets in their schools. There have been even cases of suicides by dalit children owing to such discrimination. The post independence 'land to the tillers' slogan for land reforms remains on paper. Nathubhai, a Navsarjan activist from the Rohit caste involved in skinning dead cattle, called these reforms *paper ka ghoda*, a paper horse. According to the Navsarjan study, between 1996 and 2000, about 6000 acres of land was given to dalits under land distribution. This was merely on paper. In reality, they did not get legal possession of the land.

Nathubhai and Hirabhai – both social activists who are from the Rohit community, initiated the protest against the Collectorate. They threw twenty-five or thirty dead cattle before the building. They said that the Una attack video created a massive uproar and anger among dalits all over Gujarat and indeed across India. Hirabhai, who is involved in skinning dead cows, said that these attacks were not new. He was once driving a pick-up van (a Bolero) to collect some dead cattle. He got a puncture, so stopped at Limdi to get it repaired. His car was attacked, the window panes broken. He has been stopped many times – even by the police – who asked for his ID card and other information. The so-called gaurakshaks, Hirabhai said, are involved in extortion. Those who give dead cattle for skinning also take money, which they call *dharmadaan*. According to Nathubhai, cattle skinning and other related work is now big business bringing in crores of income for the state.

After the creation of Gujarat in the 1960s, land reform laws exempted large tracts of land – 234 *panjarapole* – for cattle care – from land ceiling acts: thousands of acres of land, large tracts, are owned by temples, and trusts held by Jain and other dominant castes. According to Nathubhai, the state government gives subsidies to *panajrapoles*, who in turn float tenders for large sums (Rs. 8 lakhs, for example, in Limdi). Even few Khadi Gram Udyog units (run mainly by Brahmins and Patels), which receive state government subsidies, are also involved in this business. Hence, it has turned into a lucrative business involving other communities, be it Brahmins, Patels, Jains, Rabaris, etc. However, the caste work of skinning dead cattle is subcontracted to the Rohit caste for small amounts – Rs.15 to Rs.50 at the most and a bag of grains such as *Bajra* (a bag of Bajra was lying at the site of the Una attack). After skinning, the bones are separated and crushed into a powder – costing Rs.20 per kilo. This is used for bone china, for example. Huge pressure cookers are used by upper castes, as in Vidyanagar, which can take up to 3 cows. The remaining meat is prepared as chicken feed at Rs.7 per kilo. Animal fat – Rs.40 per kilo – is used in the staple biscuit consumed by Gujaratis – *khari* biscuit, according to Martin Macwan and Nathubhai. Many of these items are export oriented – leather, bones fat (gall bladder-*gor munch*) used by pharmaceuticals, Ayurveda medicines, and edible items. The tail hair used for hair-brushes

and for boot polish brushes, bring in crores worth of business for the state. Hence, the attacks are also for grabbing the economic niche, and *remind one of the 2002 communal violence that swept Gujarat when sections of Muslims lost not only land but also their economic niche such as transport industry and small hotels and restaurants*. Seeing young dalits from Rohit caste involved in the business going about in good clothes, on motorbikes is also an eye sore for the dominant castes.

According to Manjula Pradeep (Director, Navsarjan), the ongoing dalit upsurge – *dalit manav adhikar jhumbesh* – is not sudden, as years of hard work of mobilization, on issues ranging from land, atrocities, forced migration, untouchability, sexual assaults, kidnapping, issues of manual scavenging have been going on. Activities included para-legal training, barefoot lawyers, awareness camps, campaigns against violence on women, panchayat trainings, leadership trainings, women's leadership, and the more recent campaigns to observe the 125th birth anniversary of Babsaheb Ambedkar, involving not only dalits but also Adivasis, Muslims and other marginalized sections. This prepared the ground for the current upsurge.

The Una atrocity, so blatant and brutal, has energized dalits and other sections in a right wing ruled state. The dalit youth in Gujarat in particular, more educated, with higher aspirations are taking the place of the older generation of dalit activists, who though they faced severe deprivations and atrocities, are wary of state and dominant caste retaliation to dalit assertions. The youth are questioning unemployment, the caste system, everything – a movement going beyond the issue of reservations. It is about *annihilation of caste*. Hence, there is a new energy and also unity among different dalit organizations and dalits of all 32 sub castes including Valmikis, weavers, those who clean toilets. The mobilization on local issues involving dalits, adivasis and Muslims are creating the ground for larger unity and common opposition to the efforts of the Hindutva forces and organizations and the state to create communal polarization. Although the huge rally at Ahmedabad was called by Una Dalit Atyachar Ladat Samiti led by a young dalit lawyer, Jignesh Mewani, a former state co-coordinator of AAP, and the Leftist Jan Sangharsh Manch, a labour organization, all dalit groups and dalit individuals spontaneously joined the rally and the ongoing march from Ahmedabad to Una, which culminated on 15th August in Una town.

Navsarjan and other organisations have decided to hold mahasabhas or regional conferences across the state – even in dominant caste strongholds – from Saurashtra to Anand, from Kheda to Surat. The sabhas are aimed at raising the awareness of the youth about the rights and about the amendments to the SC/ST Atrocities Act. A petition will also be filed with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to form a team and make a status report on Dalits in Gujarat. The point is to work at varied levels and keep the movement going. Even as the huge rally of dalits in Ahmedabad and the freedom march from Ahmedabad to Una has drawn dalits from all sub-castes, with Jignesh Mewani, a former AAP convener in Gujarat, a young lawyer and Jan Sangharsh Manch, a left trade union, among those in the leadership, many dalit organizations, with strong grassroots presence, such as Navsarjan, are behind the mobilization of dalits and women in particular and in carrying forward the movement.

According to Martin Macwan, the wider context of the dalit up surge, particularly youth and women, include the Kashmir violence, Rohit Vemula's death and other attacks on dalits, adivasis, and minorities and on fundamental freedoms, including intellectual freedom. The video prepared by the attackers and proudly posted online, particularly the abuses on mothers, the flogging in broad daylight, evoked wider response and revulsion. The Chief Minister was silent for eight days, the Prime Minister for 25 days. The posters of Chief Minister, Anandiben Patel listing her achievement were placed all over the state and online but not a word on dalits found a place in them, a point highlighted by dalit protestors.

The underbelly of the 'Gujarat Model' and rampant casteism form the background of the dalit youth protests and anger. Amitabh Bachchan calls on people to visit 'Vibrant Gujarat'. The call instead should be to come and see Una, said Martin Macwan. The present Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, came to power and gained political majority through both caste and communal mobilization. Since then, the RSS and other 'parivaar' organizations have attempted to own and reinterpret dalit radical histories and create a wedge between dalits and Muslims. Booklets were released by RSS blaming Muslims and 'Muslim Rule' for the plight of dalits. Both the beef attacks and cow slaughter were directed at dalits and Muslim communities. Prime Minister Modi also underplayed his own book where he held that manual scavenging was a 'spiritual' exercise! According to Martin Macwan, perhaps Modi had inside information to call 80-90% of gau rakshaks as anti- socials, a remark that Modi revoked the next day, replacing it with the word 'handful'. Instead of calling on so-called gau rakshaks to shoot him rather than the dalits, Prime Minister Modi should have spoken about the loss of 25 lakh acres of land meant for dalits and adivasis under land reforms in Gujarat, of the plight of 7 ½ lakhs of manual scavengers, the large number of vacancies under reservation. While Modi has a clear development policy for industry, there are no policies for the poor, and focus on cows is a diversion from the real issues, Martin Macwan stressed.

The demands listed in varied memorandums include the following:

Restore, re-open up leather Udyog Board, with special fund allocations for leather tanners, give necessary equipment and other support.

Land in rural and urban areas for removal of carcasses, walled at government cost, with water, electricity, road facilities.

Pick up vehicles through loans, with exemption from road tax

Provide ID cards and permits so as to avoid obstruction and extortion by police, 'gau rakshaks' and others.

Scholarship for students from Rohit caste, interest free loans for higher education.

Survey of families involved in cleaning carcasses and land as alternative for agricultural work, with economic support
Panjrapoles to be run by dalits/ Rohit caste

REPORTS

Report of the IAWS Southern Regional Workshop on 'Documenting Contributions of Women's Movements, Women's Organizations and Women'

This workshop was organized by the IAWS on 18th and 19th February at University of Madras in association with the departments/centre of Women's Studies of University of Madras, Ethiraj College, Stella Maris College, Bharathidasan University and RAWS (Regional Association of Women's Studies). The objective of the workshop was to make an 'interface' between Women Studies and Women's Movements.

Prof. Bharathi Harishankar, HoD of the Department of Women's Studies, University of Madras in the inaugural session emphasized the need to consciously document the experiences of activists on the field. In her Presidential Address, Dr. Ritu Dewan argued that it is important that academicians and activists come together to reintegrate the link between women issues or movements and women's studies, which was the need of the hour.

Dr. Indumathi Rao, UGC Standing Committee on Women Studies argued that there exists gap between paper and reality that needs to be addressed.

Dr. Yashoda Shanmugasundaram, Honorary President, RAWS argued that there is a requirement to conceptualize women's movements and address the issues of invisibility, marginalization and exclusion of women's studies departments.

R. Regina Papa underlines that women's studies syllabi needs to bring academic and action programmes and urged that there is a need to frame a national policy for saving our discipline and its scholars and students from the discrimination and ensuring that 'women's studies' continues to remain a rigorous discipline.

In the first session of the workshop on 'Organizing Women', Dr. R. Chandraspoken 'Women in Kisan Movement, Tamil Nadu' traced the history of women's involvement and participation in various pre-independence peasant revolts particularly women in the Kisan movement in Tamil Nadu. Gabriele Dietrich shared her experience of working with Pennurumaiyakkam which works among the underprivileged women in unorganised sector such as domestic and construction works. Aleyamma Vijayan of the Sakhi Women's Resource Centre spoke in detail about the participation of fisher women in the trade union activities and she narrated the struggle through which these women formed a trade union for themselves.

Ms. R. Parvathi Devi, from AIDWA outlined the ideological and political line of CPIM on the question of gender, by giving an account of the past interventions of party on gender issues and programmes of the Kerala government which are gender-sensitive. Ms. Sonia George of SEWA Kerala spoke about the larger issues of unorganised sector workers. She raised a serious question, "where the collective bargaining process can be started? in the context of the non-visibility of the employer for informal sector workers.

Ms. Celine, from Vimochana in her presentation emphasised that how there are two ways of interventions while fighting against violence: rational and intuitive, the rational way is patriarchal and the feminist way is intuitive.

The discussion at the end of the session covered women's role in various struggles, how gender always takes a back seat in the larger class and caste struggles, what are Indian values and indigenous traditions, the role of Dalit and tribal women in organised struggles and the need to critically review questions of leadership and participation.

The second session was around themes of body and sexuality; violence, queer identity, media and cyber-crimes. Ms. Vasuki from AIDWA while speaking on Women's Movements and the Media argued that media portrays women only as an object that derives its value from its ability to attract and tantalize, by taking examples from popular films.

S. Vijayalakshmi, Srivalli, Puthur, Civil Engineer, shared her experiences as an entrepreneur and a film producer and gender discrimination in the film industry. Tamil Selvi from Positive Network said that women with HIV are facing double discrimination as women, and as HIV patients.

Ms. Aruna, from the Society for Rights of All Women with Disability said that women with disabilities face multiple discriminations like access to education, employment, even in toilets and no special law to protect women with disability.

Dr Manimekalai, spoke on her experiences of trying to break the silences on menstrual hygiene issues. She emphasized the need to educate mothers and train adolescent girls on issues of menstrual hygiene.

Ms. Ajitha, an Advocate with the Madras High Court highlighted the importance of women's movements on legal reform and argued that women lawyers have to fight for women's rights from outside the judicial structure.

Ms. Gabriele Dietrich representing the NAPM spoke about Feminism and Religion: Building Peace and Gender Justice. She reviewed the debate around the uniform civil code and gender just laws. She argued that genuine religious reforms is the need of the hour, especially since many poor women are sustained by religion and therefore faith needs to be democratic and it is part of social justice for some people.

Ms. Rajeswari of the Nireeksha Women's Theatre, began her presentation by reiterating the importance of HER STORIES being told. She traced back the history of plays on women's issues and gave an account of the rise of women's theatre in Kerala.

Ms. Oviya, Activist and Writer, narrated in detail the history of Periyar movement and justice party in Tamil Nadu, and how it has been revolutionary in its thinking and practice around the gender question with reference to self-respect marriages.

Dr. R. V. Bindu, Institute of Technology, Mayyil, spoke in detail on the Peoples' Science Movement in Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu and gave detailed account on the beginning of science movement in India and of the formation of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad and then spoke about socio-political and economic improvements brought by 'Malar' Micro-credit program.

Ms. D. Sharifa, STEPS, Pudukottai, shared her experience in working with women's movement and expressed her anguish over the oppression she had faced as a Muslim woman and about wrong assumptions about Muslim women among civil society. She pointed out the problems of getting justice for women from the all-male Jamats and how this led to the setting up of an alternative dispute resolution system, an all women Jamat. She mentioned that this initiative had led to the situation where even male Jamats are now talking about women's issues.

Ms. Jesu Rathinam, SNEHA, spoke about her experience in organising fisher women in Tamil Nadu and raised concerns about the non-recognition of fisherwomen as workers. She also highlighted how dowry has come into the coastal region in the context of larger socio-economic changes.

Dr. R. Gayathri, Tamil Nadu Social Service Society explained about the anti-Arrack movement in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh, pointing out to the issues of shrinking space for the women movements and how state is curtailing space to raise their issues.

T. Radha Mani spoke about the journey of KSSP as a scientific movement and its engagements with women's questions and the need to engage with the women's question.

Lucy Xavier, Women's Coordination Committee spoke about the genesis of the dalit women's group and how they shared their own experiences in the beginning. She also suggested that a paper on the status of Dalit women should be included in Women's Studies curriculum.

K. Ajitha, Anweshi began her talk by narrating how she started her political life through her participation in the Naxalbari movement in Kerala and spoke about the activities of Anweshi and transformations in it.

Christina Samy, AREDS/SWATE explained that SWATE is a movement against illegal sand mining in the rivers of Kaveri and Amaravati in Tamil Nadu which started in 1980.

Ms. Olga Aaron, Founder – Bravoh movement began her speech by drawing attention to the difference between sexual minorities and gendered minorities and asserted that the subject of her speech is trans-women who are gendered minorities. She spoke of the discrimination faced by effeminate boys both within the space of families and in the larger society because of societal inability to understand the child's gender identity.

Ms. Suganthi, Secretary, AIDWA, speaking about caste and women in India, she argued that caste is one of the major reason for women's suppression and is still very entrenched in our society. She urged that it is important to inquire deeply into this.

The discussion raised the issue of how women's organizations and women's studies has to go beyond what is traditionally considered women's issues and engage with all social issues.

Dr.A.K.Jayasree, Dept. of Community Medicine, Pariyaram Medical College, Kerala, highlighted health issues and concerns of tribal women in Kerala, focussing on the increased maternal and child mortality among tribal populations.

Ms. A. Arul Mozhi, Advocate, Madras High Court presented on the topic 'Periarism and Women's Emancipation'. She emphasized Periyar's contributions in opposing the practises like *devadasi* system and the "Thali" which exploited women.

Ms. Fathima Burnard, SRED, spoke on the topic 'Combating Caste and Gender Issues in Tamil Nadu'. She narrated the case study of Ms. Subbamma, a *devadasi* and her fight for land rights, which included a collective struggle by Mathammas through the symbolic strategy of throwing the 'thali' that they wear in the name of the Goddess.

Dr. S.Anandhi, MIDS, Chennai presented the findings of her research study on 'Caste, Gender and Development'. She argued that her study revealed the burden on Dalit women in neoliberal times. She argued that there was an urgent need to initiate Anti-Caste Politics to eradicate caste discrimination.

Mrs. Abirami of Surakottai, Thanjavur district in Tamil Nadu shared her personal experience as a victim/survivor of honour killing. She underlined the harassment she as so called upper caste and her husband as so called lower caste faced and her husband's eventual murder by her natal family and then her legal battle to get justice for her deceased husband despite threats from her natal family.

For the closing remarks of the workshop, Dr. Ritu Dewan, emphasized that it is crucial to keep alive and nourish the link between women's movements and women's studies. She acknowledged that the southern region has contributed in terms of very strong academic extension of activism. She re-iterated the need to evaluate what has been done by women's movements and women's studies as a discipline in the last 20-30 years.

Dr. Indu Agnihotri noted that writing of Indian history continues to be a contested terrain, which needs to be captured the local voices from many different regions through such workshops as it makes us realize that the movement is vital, vibrant and it is still there. She urged the importance of analysing both past histories and contemporary debates. Women's Studies need to be perceived as an instrument for bridging the gap between institutes of higher education and the community and the need to be aware of inter-linkages and intersectionality. She noted that women's movements can and should hold space for multiple strands of thinking, multiple forms of practices and resistances. She concluded by emphasizing that in order to create a critical perspective, attempts should be made to draw conceptual frameworks that take cognizance of such intermeshing.

Report of the Annual Conference of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University: 'Women Speak Nation: Identities and Intersectionalities'

■■■ By Panchali Ray, Assistant Professor, School of Women's Studies

The theme of this year's annual conference of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University, April 2016 was floated over a cup of tea by some of the members of the School; however, it was a topic that was being discussed over the last couple of months. As researchers and scholars and members of the academic community, we were concerned about the growing attacks and repressions—repression of ideas, politics, movements, opinions; and as feminists we were concerned with the resurgence of the trope of 'Bharat Mata' and imaginations of the nation as a gendered icon, inevitably linked with a certain type of nationalism. And the question of identity within the frame work of intersectionalities did not lag too far behind. It was more or less understood that to talk of justice for women, one must now examine intersectionalities— caste, class, community, sexualities, disabilities—that constitute the experiences of gender, rather than each being an add-on category. The 'unmarked woman'— a modern and secular citizen with no markers of caste, class and sexualities — no longer obtains. This debate has become even more urgent in the current political environment, where we are witnessing an increasing presence of women challenging hegemonic femininity, along with caste, class and sexualities. There has been a tremendous visibility of women in politics – of all sorts. We have women in the forefront taking on the might of the state from Manipur, Chattisgarh, Kashmir to Naramda. As much as we see increasing or continuing violence in public sphere against women, Dalits, Muslims, differently abled and queer people, we are also witnessing resistances— organized and sporadic— agitating, protesting and challenging casteism, sexism and adhere to normativities of spaces, movements and institutions. These movements cannot be ignored, these movements demand we change; they demand critical questioning, plurality of thought and practice within institutions itself.

There are many battles on many fronts—feminist movements, queer movements, Dalit movements, student movements, ecological movements, anti-imperialist movements, anti-land grab movements, movements of right to self-determination. Because there are more and more women in every struggle, there is a foregrounding of feminists' issues, for example the student movement, PinjraTod, which throws open questions of sexualities, a hitherto taboo subject. In our conference we opened up these questions as papers were presented on various aspects of 'women and nationalism' rather than 'women in nationalism'. Dr. J Devika's paper on the 'kiss of love protest' examined feminist solidarities which argued for camaraderie amongst feminists, as well as 'unhoming' feminism. Professor Kalpana Kannabiran in her paper, 'Violence and Social Dis/Order: Making Sense of Histories, the Present and our Futures' argued that violence towards the 'other' was inherent in the maintenance of existing social order. Particularly of interest was the trope of 'Bharat Mata'. The political unrests that have gripped campuses and students movements interested us as feminists as concept of the 'bad woman' (the prostitute) as against the 'Bharat Mata' (the nation-mother land) have been bandied around to silence feminine voices active in politics. While Professor Ratnabali Chatterjee and Professor Anuradha Roy discussed the politics of iconization of the motherland as 'Bharat Mata', Professor Nivedita Menon in her paper, 'Bharat Mata and her unruly daughters' questioned hegemonic representations of motherhood. Women in politics, in movements is not new, but what is possibly new is that there is a blurring of these binaries within hegemonic femininity— young women today are more politically assertive and invested in a variety of politics— Dalit, LGBT, class, women's and student movements. ShriJawhar Sircar, in his paper, 'The hegemonic nation state versus assertive gender' looked at shifts in femininity vis-a-vis the nation state, while Professor Swapan Chakraborty in his paper, demonstrated the tensions between the rights promised by the Indian Constitution and the gendering of the nation. Dr. Nandini Saha in her paper, 'These women speak of a different nation: Dalit women writing in Bengali' presented on the interconnections between nation, gender and caste, while Smt. Kalyani Thakur Charal, a Dalit poetess discussed the politics of publications, translations and Dalit women's writings. Tying together the politics of performance and the performance of the nation Professor Lakshmi Subramanian revisited the musical tradition of India in 'Song sung true: Performing the Nation'. Dr. Aishika Chakraborty in her paper, 'Out-staging nationalism? Politics of Performance in Tagore' posits the kinesthetic ventures of Rabindranath Tagore within the larger discourse of anti-colonial nationalism. The inscriptions of gender, caste, class, communities and sexualities appear to have new resonances for mainstream politics today. This conference reopened these questions— of the 'nation and its women', of the 'women and their nation', and where both are equally inscribed by class, caste, community and sexualities. Where women and nation are conflated, it is women who must speak out: we need to speak—to the nation, about the nation. And a variety of papers did just that.

Report of the Northern Regional Workshop on Documenting Women's Experiences in the Movement: Issues, Experiences and Struggles

A two day Regional workshop was organised by IAWS at Visvesvarayya Sanitation and Water Academy (VISWA) in Ranchi on the 29th and 30th of September 2016. The workshop was jointly coordinated by Indu Agnihotri (ex-officio EC member, IAWS and coordinator for the northern region) and Kiran Moghe (Vice President, IAWS).

The first session was an Overview of Women's Movements and was chaired by Prof. Ritu Dewan, (President, IAWS) who welcomed the participants and pointed out that IAWS has always linked academics, advocacy and action which reflects in the conferences having a mixed participation. She stressed the need to come together on economic and cultural aspects and to make IAWS a much stronger entity. The first speaker, Jagmati Sangwan (AIDWA) spoke about the women's movements in North India with special focus on Haryana where the main source of livelihood of people was agriculture. She pointed out that in Haryana women's movements rose in the background of the right to equality debate in the 1970s and '80s. This was reflected in the protests by women mill workers regarding unequal payments and long hours of work and those of young women participating in student level discussions on equality. These protests were taken forward by AIDWA and others in Punjab and Rajasthan as well, starting with issues like civic amenities and gradually bringing in dowry and sex ratio into the discussion. While the focus of the struggles changed from time to time, old issues were never lost sight of. She emphasised that women's movement has tremendous challenges ahead as women continue to be caught within a feudal set up where any attempt to freedom, choice marriages for instance, meets with severe repression by the state and casteist/communal forces.

Satnam Kaur and Vani Subramaniam (Saheli) highlighted the experience of Saheli in dealing with cases of domestic violence, dowry and state violence through legal interventions along with other women's organisations. They have actively protested against state violence in terms of health and population control policies which put the burden of population control on women to deal with the pressure from international organisations. Saheli has also been active against AFSPA and tries to reach out to people on various issues through plays and other innovative methods. Indu Agnihotri explained that the context of the Emergency is important to understand the women's movement as it gave it an ideological, political energy to be able to politicise women's issues at a time when their concerns were counted among narrow social evils. Women of that generation came from different political backgrounds but uniting them was the anti-emergency and anti-authoritarian perspective which even rural women shared. But today the so called feminists have taken over the women's movement which caters to a very narrow social group. Women's movement is not a universal homogenous category and therefore it must incorporate diverse views, perspectives and forms of organisations. The discussion was summed up by Ritu Dewan by emphasising the fact that women are not a single category and that research should strengthen women's movements and they need to broaden the parameters of women's studies and continue to build alliances with the most marginalised sections.

The second session focussed on issues specifically from Jharkhand and it was chaired by Prof. Ramesh Sharan (Ranchi University). Prof. Sharan pointed out that Jharkhand has become an oppressive police state after the year 2000 and the gun of the state was never so visible. State has given a lot of land to the armed forces enabling capitalists to exploit and control the rich mineral resources with the help of the army. For this purpose, the state does not respect its own laws especially the mining laws. Mining is part of common property resources on which survival of the rural poor depends, the withdrawal of which causes displacement of these people. The worst hit in this new liberal regime are the women, who do not figure in rehabilitation programmes, and have a precarious existence caught between the gun of the state and the gun of the naxals. Gamilina Soren (AIDWA) highlighted the problem of education of women in Jharkhand. Pakur in Jharkhand is the most backward district in terms of literacy. Due to this, women who have been elected to panchayats are not able to fulfil their responsibilities properly. In many cases, spouses of the women candidates take over their jobs and do not encourage them to do more than just sign. As the Institutions of higher learning are not located within short distances, women do not travel often due to fear of the naxals. This results in their economic dependence. AIDWA has approached the governor regarding livelihood allowance for women comparable to MNREGA but was not successful. Human trafficking and witchcraft are other major problems in Jharkhand.

Vasavi Kiro added that Panchayat (Extension to Scheduled Areas) or PESA which is meant to protect customary rights and forest produce etc is not implemented because the Chief Minister issued ordinance seeking an amendment in customary rights. An administrative report carrying the information regarding land and forest rights and development of the tribal people states that there are several violations in this area on which livelihood of 72% of tribals depend. Kathinka Sinha Kerkhoff (IISG) added that

women are not the part of policy making and research. There was hardly anything written on women of this region as a separate entity, from a gender perspective. Women residing in Jharkhand are not homogenous. The diversity among women based on their caste and class and other parameters by and large are the reasons why there was no united women's movement in Jharkhand. The study on recent struggle and its impact as well as study of state policy under neoliberal agenda are important to understand the Jharkhand state. Dr. Ranjana Srivastava (Ranchi University) concluded from a study on the impact of education on tribal women, that tribal women's work participation is higher than non tribals, and that education will gradually open new doors for their employment.

The third session on 'Issues and Sections: Diverse Dimensions' was chaired by Ranjana Srivastava. The first speaker, **Debolina Hembrom (AIDWA)** spoke about the problems in the tribal society such as the lack of education, health issues and dominance of superstitions. She has been actively involved in building consciousness among them of their rights and working to change the mindset of the people. Rajni Tilak (Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Andolan) argued that the source material for women's movement is available in English and thus, the story of dalit women is remained unheard. In the decade of the '90s sincere efforts in this direction were made and organisations such as the National Federation of Dalit Women and All India Dalit Women's Forum came into being as the mainstream movement neglects dalit voices and issues. Dalit women's movement believes that sex work is a tool for exploitation; family and society should be democratic; and proportionate reservation for women should be there in parliament. Madhubala (Jagori) focussed on domestic violence and said that ever since the Domestic Violence Act came into being, the internal dynamics of households has changed as instead of physical violence there is an increase in emotional violence from husbands. In many cases educated women also have an attitude of subservience to men which needs to change.

Noorjahan (Bhartiya Muslim Mahila Andolan) talked about issues like education, security, livelihood, health and law reform as the focus of BMMA. The BMMA works towards vocational training of women and sensitises both young men and women about the constitution, gender and Islam. They have started women's sharia adalat where cases of domestic violence are taken. Recently the BMMA got a codified draft of the muslim family law which bans oral divorce, polygamy and halala and submitted a petition against triple talaq in the supreme court. They also train women to be qazis. According to Noorjahan, a separate Muslim women's organisation was needed as Muslim women face suppression from middle class men and ignorance of the state; and differs in the understanding of secularism from other women's organisations. Sushmita Goswami (SEWA Bharat) shared her experience of working among informal workers in Bihar and Jharkhand and the lack of sufficient data or source material on these kinds of workers. She pointed out that 80 % of women in rural areas are uneducated but they travel to cities for work and become construction workers. In the cities, their settlements are often razed to the ground in the name of beautification and they are left to fend for themselves without relief or rehabilitation. The state needs to step in, in a big way to protect these workers.

The fourth session was a continuation of the previous session, chaired by Prof. Ilina Sen (TISS). **Kavita Srivastava (PUCL, Rajasthan)** focussed on the 30 years of women's movement in Rajasthan. She recounted how the broad front was formed consisting of members of civil society, political parties and NGOs on various issues like Sati Andolan (1987), citizens' rights through PUCL, and the Rup Kanwar case in Daurala. Violence on women was an important issue in the 90s whether it is the Bhamri Devi case of 1992, the Jodhpur city riots, in all these cases women's movement proved its strength and thus the Mahila Atyachar Virodhi Manch was formed. Therefore, Violence against Women and the Right to Information were the two movements which were running parallel to and feeding into each other. She also pointed out that abolition of alcoholism will not make our society violence free and more research is needed in this area. Renu Mishra (AALI, UP) talked about issues emerging from violence. She said that AALI wanted to politicise women's personal issues as otherwise they will always take a backseat. Laws do not always have all the answers but sometimes the mere implementation of the existing ones makes a lot of difference. She emphasised that women need the right to make decisions whether it is related to her own body, her own money or life and to enable them, AALI tries capacity building programs where women are given knowledge about the law, in the Hindi belt at least. Shashi Yadav (AIPWA, Bihar) explained that Bihar has always been caught up in a feudal set up. Women in the 80s have fought against this and unequal wages as well as issues of violence. These struggles were suppressed ruthlessly by the state in the 90s which quietened the situation for some time to come. But in recent times the atrocities on dalits have increased and there have been several cases of rapes and killings of pregnant women who were accused of carrying naxal children. AIPWA has worked hard to get the guilty punished in speedy trials. She stressed that as the character of the villages is changing, women want jobs but the government and the corporate houses only absorb them as cheap labour who can be hired through contractors and given the name "swayam sevikas".

The fifth session on literacy and health movements was chaired by Dr. Madhumita Chowdhary (Ranchi University) who stressed the need for the promotion of education among girls referring to the data from the Report of the Annual Survey of Education

2013. The first speaker, Smita Gupta (Mahila Samakhya, Jharkhand) talked about empowering women through education. She explained that education does not mean just literacy, therefore Mahila Samakhya enables women to question and take initiatives on issues of discrimination and inequality to mobilise other women. Mahila samakhya has its own curriculum which provides issue based education to women for instance on violence, and how to get access to justice. Also, rehabilitation centre for women who were rescued from trafficking have been started where these women are counselled on skill training and their children are provided education too. Additionally, Mahila Samakhya leads campaigns against child marriages, domestic violence, witch craft and promotes education of women before marriage. Reena Singh Tanwar (BGVS, Himachal) focussed on the literacy movement in Himachal Pradesh after the National literacy mission was started in 1988. The definition of literacy was widened to include Issues related to development, economic upliftment, women's equality, and environment which brought in people from different social groups and within this broad framework BGVS was formed to focus on education on a national level. The tremendous participation of women converted this movement into a successful women's movement which took up issues like health, agriculture, alcohol, sex ratio, violence etc. 'Kala jatthas' played an important role in communicating these issues with people through plays and songs. Some women associated with this movement were elected at panchayat levels leading to political empowerment as well. Pushpa (Vanangana, Chitrakoot) said that Vanangana was formed in 1993, in the backward portion of Bundelkhand in UP. The background for this was the women's movements of the 90s which highlighted issues of education and literacy for independence, empowerment and self-confidence of women. Technical education was also included and efforts were made to establish women in their fields. Vanangana works among dalit women who face violence at multiple levels and takes up their issues and creates awareness among people through street plays.

In the last session on the issues and experiences of the North, Padmalata Thakur (Patna University) was the chair and she stressed that women's studies constantly needs to learn from the experiences of the movement. Ilina Sen (TISS) spoke about women's movement, the state and patriarchy in the present times. She pointed to the changing nature of the state from one which responded to women's movements in the 80s and 90s, and made women a development constituency to a corporate friendly one especially in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. This is because Central India is extremely rich in resources which have not been tapped enough. As a result, the rights of adivasis are being violated by corporates for development and they are displacing them on the pretext of left extremism. The body of women has become a site of contestation as sexual violence is very common with no access to legal aid. She questioned the possibility of collaboration with the state on women's issues under these circumstances. Sushila Sahay (Vice President of NFIW and President of Bihar Mahila Samaj) traced the engagement of Bihar Mahila Samaj with social, economic and political issues of women from the post -independence period onwards. After 1990 when the new economic policy came and the state promoted non - government organisations interested in their own welfare, and countered peoples movements, women's movements stood together to fight back and should strive to make itself stronger. Chinta (agricultural worker from Mirzapur associated with AIDWA) talked about the land struggles of the adivasis in the forest areas of UP and ways in which the forest officials and zamindars try to displace them, wanting to use adivasi labour on their own lands. In many villages religious groups and corporate houses claim ownership of land held by adivasis for generations as adivasis do not possess any documental evidence of ownership. Today adivasis in Mirzapur lead a precarious life fighting goons, official forces, as well as wild animals and try to survive on forest produce. Chinta elaborated on the struggle for essential needs such as ration cards, the procedure for which is too complicated for illiterate people to understand and they end up spending a lot from their pockets. She ended with the slogan "the land that belongs to the government belongs to us! The one who tills the land is the owner! We want forest, water and land! We want the right to live!"

The last speaker, Priti Oza (Prayas) highlighted the problems of the migrants coming to Gujarat to work as construction workers, cotton seeds farmers and sugarcane cutters. The main issues are that the migrants are not considered as workers since they are informally employed through contractors for a short period. The way these contractors manage the workers is a kind of trafficking and leads to bonded labour as migrants are paid at the end of the season to maintain a steady labour force. Women migrants do the most menial work in construction and are paid much less than male workers. Health and safety of women are important issues which need urgent attention. Prayas tries to include women into trade unions and basti committees to raise these issues and take them forward. Prayas also tries to connect with workers from both the source and destination states to organise them.

A special session for open discussion was chaired by Indrani Mazumdar (Senior Fellow, CWDS and General Secretary, IAWS). She pointed out that the aim of this workshop was to document women's movement and stressed the need to document the growing work participation of women in both the organised and the unorganised sector. Kiran Moghe then wrapped up the rich discussion by summarising the important issues that have come up, for instance the changing role of the state as casteist, communal and representing hegemonic forces and the complexities of the women's issues. She stressed the need to talk more about the backlash and repression from the state, and the stresses and strains within the women's movement itself. Lastly,

Prof. Manimekalai (Treasurer, IAWS) invited the participants to the forthcoming national conference of the IAWS in Chennai in January 2017. Even though it was difficult to bring together all the issues in one workshop, which covers such a vast area, progress was definitely made in that direction.

BOOK INTRODUCTIONS

Chakavarti, U. (ed.) .2016. Thinking Gender, Doing Gender. Orient Blackswan: Hyderabad.

This new volume titled <Thinking Gender, Doing Gender> edited by Uma Chakravarti and published by Orient Blackswan in a welcome addition to the new knowledge produced in the field of Women's Studies. The book dedicated to Sharmila Rege tries to move beyond the thinking of gender to focus on the various sites of <doing> gender and attempts to show what insights doing gender can offer for the thinking about gender. The introduction by Uma Chakravarti focuses on reviewing the journey of <gender> as a useful category of analysis in the Indian context. The book is divided into three sections.

The first section focuses on pedagogies, the different sites of education-curriculum, pedagogy, classroom practices, etc. to underline the complex processes at work and also the ways in which the tensions of modernity/tradition are represented here.

The second section focuses on the feminist attempts to interrogate the historical archive and the recourse to oral history, focussing on the methodological and ethical challenges that emerge in this context. The essays in this section focus on how oral narratives are produced through inter subjectivity, between private recollections and public discourse, and the narrator and her audience.

The third and the longest section in the book has seven essays broadly on the theme of women's relationship with culture. Essays in this section look at representation of women in regional language writing, in this case Hindi; mapping the complexities of sex work, gender, caste and religious dedication on the site of Marathi novels; connections between nation/region, culture and gender on the sites of cinema and advertising, Essays include the journey of a feminist theatre practitioner and theatre practices from the nineteenth century onwards and its complex handling of actresses. The last essay looks at the question of gender and space. The essays in this volume point to the rich diversity of themes and methodologies in the field of gender in India today.

Puri, Jyoti. 2016. Sexual States: Governance and the Struggle to Decriminalize Homosexuality in India. Orient Blackswan: Hyderabad.

This book by Jyoti Puri focusses published by Orient Blackswan on tracking the efforts made to decriminalize homosexuality and understand how Section 377 is governed. It is a useful addition to the growing body of work around sexuality, but also for a study of the state. Through ethnographic, detailed field study of the state institutions as well as the efforts to organizations to decriminalize homosexuality The book argues that regulation of sexuality is tied to the continued existence and legitimacy of the state. She uses the concept of <sexual states> to argue that governing sexuality accounts for the idea and the continued inevitability of states, especially in a neoliberal context where they are in flux. It is through regulating sexuality that states are generated and expansions and modifications in governance are justified. This approach that the book takes to the question of states and sexuality, allows therefore to see not only how the nitty-gritties of governing produce state-effect but also the quests for sexual reform that pivot around the state. Methodologically this book makes a plea to generate ethnographically grounded appraisals of the state.

In the introduction, the author takes up the ban on dance bars to illustrate how her conceptual framework can be usefully used to analyse efforts beyond those to decriminalize sexuality. The second chapter looks at statistics, comparing crimes under section 377 with reporting of heterosexual violence against women to argue that the seemingly objective measures like statistics and the State's definition of social problems are deeply subjective sexualized practices. In the second section of the book, the author focuses on the state interims of law and law enforcement, especially looking at the various uses that Article 377 is put to, to argue that to read the homosexual as the beleaguered, subject of this law is to risk strengthening the state by assuming that it is the primary site of injustice and the final arbiter of justice. Through field work in Delhi, the author shows how the homosexual is not the primary target of policing; it is racialized minorities and other vulnerable groups which are. Both these chapters break the idea of the rational monolithic state to foreground the subjectivity involved in law making and enforcement.

The third section of the book focuses on documentation of the legal campaign to decriminalize homosexuality, where the author critiques the initial phase of the movement for its pivoting around the state. In the next chapter the author reads the 2009 Delhi High Court judgement and the 2013 Supreme court judgement alongside to argue that they present two divergent views of the

relationship between state and sexuality. The book ends by looking at the relevance of the concept of sexual state for an analysis of agitations against sexual violence and migration from Bangladesh.

Bandopadhyay, A. 2016. Desire and Defiance: A Study of Bengali Women in Love, 1850-1930. Orient Blackswan: Hyderabad

The book *Desire and Defiance* written by Aparna Bandopadhyay and published by Orient Blackswan attempts to understand the experiences of intimacy and love for high-caste Hindu/Bramho women in Colonial Bengal. It attempts to contribute to the quantum of writings on social history, by writing a history of women in love. The focus of this work is on the social implications of women's love, their struggles amidst harassment, pressure and punishment; the ways these transgressions were handled by the bureaucracy and the judiciary as well as the betrayal and inequality that they faced within their transgressive relationships. The author uses official archives, periodicals, tracts and fiction from this period for the study.

The first chapter outlines the diverse initiatives of upper-caste Hindu/Bramho women towards marriage based on choice, including remarriage and conversion. The author argues that such a marriage was considered transgressive in the ethical code of Hindu society and was not particularly welcome in the Brahmo ethos. This second chapter examines the adverse reactions of the Bengali intelligentsia to the portrayal of women's transgressive love in the genre of novels. The focus here is on anxieties about the immoral impact of novel and the vociferous reaffirmation of the ideology of indissoluble matrimony.

The third chapter focuses on the fact that many women did not seek marriage out of the transgressive love and centres the diverse experiences of Hindu upper-caste women with regard to such clandestine, extra-marital relationships, including fear of discovery and punishments like physical violence, ex-communication, disinheritance etc. The fourth chapter similarly explores experiences of elopement and non-marital cohabitation. The fifth chapter brings attention to the various efforts taken to 'rehabilitate' women who had been socially outcast due to their transgressive relationships and deserted by their lovers. The sixth and final chapter examines how the perceived 'hysteria' and subsequent suicidal tendencies of women became the focus of deliberations in Bengal. It looks at the discourse which was produced, which blamed women's unrequited transgressive desires, produced by modern education and exposure to novels as the root cause.

35 years of IAWS

National Conferences since 1981



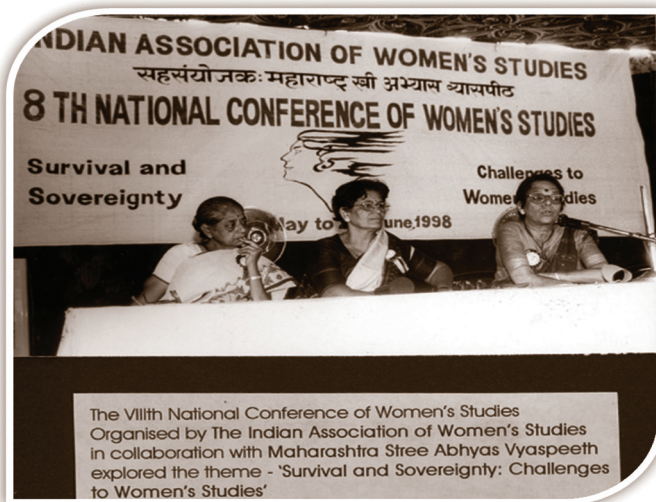
1981 Mumbai:
First National Conference

1988 Vishakapatnam:
IV National Conference
Rural Women: Poverty, Survival,
Struggle And Change



1993: Mysore
VI National Conference
The New Economic Policy and Women





The VIIIth National Conference of Women's Studies Organised by The Indian Association of Women's Studies in collaboration with Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth explored the theme - 'Survival and Sovereignty: Challenges to Women's Studies'

1998: Pune:
VIII National Conference
Survival And Sovereignty: Challenges
To Women's Studies

2008: Lucknow:
XII National Conference
Feminism, Education and The
Transformation Of Knowledges:
Processes And Institutions



XII: Wardha:
XIII National Conference:
Resisting Marginalizations, Challenging
Hegemonies: Re-Visioning Gender
Politics





2014 Guwahati:
XIV National Conference
Equality, Pluralism And The State:
Perspectives From The Women's
Movement

Cultural Programmes held at
Guwahati Conference

