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# NEWSLETTER

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## Editor's Note

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The past three years have seen not only the maturing of a platform, a definite step ahead in IAWS' role, but more significantly, in its ability in sensing the key contemporary challenges and pointing to the need for dialogues within, so as to facilitate informed responses from the women's movement. It was hence not a co-incidence that the emphasis on pluralism at the IAWS national conference in February 2014 has emerged as a key concern now, in the context of a perceived shift in our polity. The IAWS national conference also saw other shifts- the pre-dominance of young women-students, teachers, researchers, including women with disabilities- from diverse disciplines and from women's studies centers, from different regions, North East in particular. The holding of a pre-conference of and on young women, in a way, underlined this shift. The pre-conference on Disability paves the way for its entry in mainstream feminist discourse even as it holds a significance of its own. The debate is now no longer about being issue based or about the gap between women's studies and the women's movement. Conceptually, a bridge has been built and intersectionalities evident. For example, we now know that gender based violence is as much about state responsibility and culpability, the law, as it is about the violence of development, or constitutional morality versus prevailing social moral codes, about exclusions based on caste, ethnicity, region, sexual orientation, sexual minorities, about disability, poverty, communal and sectarian conflict. The intersectionalities of key categories be it caste, class, gender, ethnicity, region, are being mapped. Despite the diverse perspectives from which these are being studied, debated, there is no doubt a shift, with newer methods in feminist research making a mark and enabling this shift, however small. Successive IAWS ECs since Lucknow national conference, have pushed to move in that direction. While it is a beginning, the challenge would be to carry this forward under difficult and different circumstances.

It is with joy and confidence that I hand over the editorship to Anagha Tambe, the newly elected IAWS EC member from the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre, Pune University which under the late Prof. Sharmila Rege, a feminist Phule Ambedkarite, transformed into a dynamic intellectual hub and alternate ways of institutionalizing gender studies. It also reflects the persistence of IAWS to bring borderland histories, centre stage.

Meera Velayudhan

**Editor:**

Meera Velayudhan

email:

meera\_velayudhan@hotmail.com

IAWS Secretariat,  
Centre For Women's  
Development Studies  
25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg  
Gole Market  
New Delhi - 110 001

Email: [iaws.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:iaws.secretariat@gmail.com)

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## INAUGURATION

## Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement

Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS successfully organized XIV National Conference on Women's Studies in collaboration with the Gauhati University, Cotton College State University, Guwahati, Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Guwahati and North East Network from 4th to 7th February, 2014

The Conference began with a welcome and felicitation of Dr. Syeda Hameed, Hon'ble Member, Planning Commission, the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Gauhati University, Dr. Mridul Hazarika, Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, Cotton College State University, Professor Dhruba J. Saikia, Dr. Monisha Behal of Northeast Network, Dr. Udayan Misra, Prof. Tilottama Misra, all members of the Patrons' Committee, along with Ms. Samhita Barooah on behalf of TISS, Guwahati in view of the inability of Prof. Virginius Xaxa to be present.

Welcoming the dignitaries and the delegates, Prof. Meeta Deka, History Dept, Gauhati University and Convenor of the Local Conference Secretariat, noted that it was an honour to welcome all present on behalf of the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) and members of the Local Conference Secretariat (LCS),

comprising members from Gauhati University, Cotton College State University, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Guwahati Campus and the North East Network. The LCS had worked hard and contributed immensely by both, shouldering specific responsibilities as well as in generating support for and interest in the Conference in Assam and in other states of the region. She noted that while Gauhati University had hosted several conferences, the XIV National Conference on Women's Studies marked a difference. Firstly five institutions were working together. Also, the participants, numbering over 850 from all over India and abroad, were themselves drawn from diverse backgrounds. These included not merely the academia but also vastly different sections of society and organizations, cutting across regions, social classes and communities. Social activists and grassroots level entrepreneurs, from the region, had put up their arts, crafts and local cuisine on display in the stalls. The conference would host cultural troupes from the NER. This interaction between people drawn from all the states of India would, in itself, be a whole new experience for everyone and would provide the context for a healthy and rich exchange of ideas. The theme of the conference, itself very apt for women in the northeast, where societies are an interesting mix of patriarchy located within patriliney as well as matriliney, would allow for a more informed debate on women's lives in this region and the development of Women's Studies in the universities of Northeast India.

Prof. Hazarika welcomed the conference participants and looked forward to enriching debates while Prof. Saikia outlined some of the aspects of patriarchy prevalent in society, including in the NER, which deny to women the equality that is their due. Prof. Tilottama Misra, referring to the long history of the women's movement in the NER, hoped that the conference would provide an opportunity to strengthen linkages within the women's movement as well as between the women's movement and society in the region.

Prof. Ilina Sen, began her Presidential Address as a remembrance to the pioneers in Women's Studies, many of whom we had lost in the recent years, and to whom IAWS owed a special debt. These include Prof. Neera Desai, Prof. Lotika Sarkar, Prof. Vina Mazumdar, Prof. Hemlata Swarup, and Dr. Ila Pathak who was a regular at IAWS. She specially remembered Prof. Sharmila Rege who was with us at the previous IAWS Conference in Wardha. Addressing the young participants in the Conference, she observed that the world



that our founder members encountered and the world that our young friends would have to deal with was very different, and the challenges facing women in the twenty first century were both, extreme as well as serious. Sen referred to a sense of disillusionment and also a disconnect due to the falling apart of many of the painstakingly built structures, state led protective measures through policy-related interventions. Although Women's Studies scholars had engaged on a long term basis with the possibilities that existed within the state guaranteed systems, yet, the legal structures in place did not always work in practice. As could be seen in the case of laws for the protection of contract labour, women workers and child labour- despite continuing to exist in the statute books- they were negated every day in the actual functioning and practice of the labour courts. At the same time, the immiseration of women- rural, urban, under-privileged, minority, adivasi, and dalit – documented by data sources like the NSSO, had not been sufficiently addressed by Women's Studies scholars or activists.

She drew attention to attempts to impose a monolithic definition of national interest, national identity as well as national security and how this arose from the same myopic understanding that saw only one side of reality and refuses to acknowledge any nuanced version of the 'truth.' In the North East, this myopia had led to years of conflict and unrest, and imposition of legal instruments like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) which had ensured that an entire generation in societies like Manipur had grown up without knowing their basic democratic rights. The stresses and strains of the political economy had also perhaps been responsible for another feature of the new millennium-- an extreme misogyny towards women's rights to basic dignity, equality being a far cry. Sexual assault and violation of women's bodies was not unknown before the present day. In fact generations of Dalit women, as well as women from conflict areas, will testify that rape and sexual domination of women's bodies had been an accepted tool of domination for years. Yet it was the brutality of many of the cases that had come to light in recent times that has been shocking. The women's movement had always dreamt of a society free from discrimination and injustices of all kinds, for women to be really free. The following lines from the 1911 song of the Lawrence Textile Mill strikers came to her mind: Iina sang the song, moving the entire audience.

*As we come marching, marching, we bring the greater days,  
The rising of the women means the rising of the race.  
No more the drudge and idler -- ten that toil where one reposes,  
But a sharing of life's glories: Bread and roses! Bread and roses!*

Dr. Syeda Hameed, Member Planning Commission congratulated the IAWS for its decision to hold the Conference in the NER. She emphasized the need to build bridges between the people of the North east and the rest of the country in present times. The women's movement, she noted, had a special role to play in the peace building process since women in the region and elsewhere, such as in Kashmir, had specially been victims of the prolonged years of conflict and the absence of peace. The government, she said, was committed to facilitating the process of advancing women's rights. One of the concrete ways this was being attempted was through allocation of resources in and through the planning process so as to strengthen the economic base for women to be able to effectively enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Constitution. She spoke at length about the processes of gender budgeting and the strategy worked out at the policy level in the Approach paper for the Twelfth Plan on the basis of which it was proposed to take forward the issue of women's equality through the period of the 12th Plan.

#### MADHURI SHAH MEMORIAL LECTURE

## Exploring Pluralities: From Women's Studies to Northeast Studies

By Nandita Haksar, Human Rights Lawyer and Woman Activist

Nandita Haksar approached the theme of Exploring Pluralities: From Women's Studies to Northeast Studies from her location as a socialist feminist engaged with political movements in the Northeast which are patriarchal and based on nationality, ethnicity or region. She wished to share her experience of working within the human rights movement, most of the time with issues relating to the peoples of the Northeast and the problems she faced as a socialist and feminist who did not feel comfortable with identity politics and yet felt compelled to take positions which seemed to be supporting just that. Haksar observed that neither the Women's movement nor Women's Studies on the one hand and the North East Studies are concerned with the problem of pluralism; their focus has been largely within the discourse of development for "national integration" and in that the nation has been largely defined within the concept of "unity in diversity"



falling far short of the concept of pluralism. The terms “equality” and “pluralism” are neither objective nor without their own histories, she argued, with pluralism being a more conceptual category developed in reaction to the increasing cultural diversity of the Western societies, largely due to immigration. As a human rights lawyer she felt she did not need to grapple with the problems with definitions of equality or pluralism; however, when it came to discussing the violation of women’s rights within the family, community or religion then the human rights discourse proved to be inadequate for defining those rights.

The UNESCO which looks upon cultural pluralism as a policy offshoot of cultural diversity has postulated seven cultural conventions which form a solid basis for an alternative framework to the human rights standards based on individual rights. Referring to the women’s movement in its plurality, Haksar traced the lineages from Towards Equality, the report of the CSWI. She recalled that the women who wrote Towards Equality were not feminists but products of the Indian national movement against British colonial rule which also defined their vision for the women’s movement. Thus Towards Equality did not use the vocabulary of either the human rights discourse or the feminist discourse. The Report did not question the patriarchal basis of the Constitution, the reference point being the rights incorporated under Articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Constitution which define lack of equality as being the presence of discrimination. Though pluralism was not a concept in currency at that time, Towards Equality did make an exception from the overwhelming vision of bringing women into the mainstream of Indian social, political, and economic life, by recognizing the rights of religious minorities. She maintained that the reason that Women’s Studies had a dynamic aspect in the beginning was that it was inextricably linked to the women’s movement, at the regional and international level, and this was reflected in IAWS conferences. However, with the depoliticization of the women’s movement and the inroads by funded NGOs, the movement’s ability to challenge policies and articulate demands was severely undermined, becoming issue-based without theoretical or political moorings. Women’s Studies too had begun to grow in new direction, with no links to any movement. At the same time it is interesting that in the objectives of Northeast Studies in several Universities also there is no concern with pluralism. This, despite the fact that in the context of the Northeast region of India, pluralism is definitely an issue given that there are eight states with very different histories lumped together. Also there is a need to focus attention on the dynamics of the relationship between more than 400 communities, as also the problem of power sharing between the tribal communities living amidst caste based societies. Some of these aspects, Haksar stated had been explored in her book Across the Chicken Neck.

In some universities the Northeast Studies seem to be conceptualized as a more sophisticated version of Tribal Studies. The Anthropological Survey and Tribal Research Institutes, set up after Independence, generated lots of ethnographic data on tribes in India. Much of this material reflects the researchers’ condescending and patronizing attitude towards the tribal peoples. Tribal Studies was concerned with national integration while Northeast Studies is concerned with countering insurgencies in the region. Northeast Studies serves to help the aims and objectives of the counter-insurgency policies, which are not concerned with addressing the genuine grievances of the peoples or the reasons for the growing alienation. Pointing to the tension between approaches signifying EQUALITY VERSUS PATRIARCHY, Haksar argued that there is no society or community in the Northeast (as in the rest of India) which is not based on patriarchy. However, often women activists have undermined the struggles of the peoples of the Northeast by advocating the rights of individual tribal women’s rights against the rights of the community as a whole. There is a need to understand that the law which denied the right to women to own land also protected tribal lands from outsiders. But by challenging the law which was enacted to protect tribal people’s land from contractors and other outsiders, feminists put the whole question of protection of tribal lands into jeopardy. This problem of conflict between individual women within their community, especially when that community itself belongs to an oppressed minority, is a persistent one and also came up in the case of Shah Bano.

At the same time some of the demands, such as in-camera trials, anonymous witnesses and shifting the burden of proof were principles incorporated into the anti-terrorist laws and allow for precedents to lower human rights standards on the whole. Today the rage and anger in the aftermath of the rapes in the region has ensured that there is almost no discussion or political awareness of the reasons for the growth in violence against women. And the only remedies on offer are stricter laws and greater state power. Added to this is the discussion in the context of a countrywide war on terror, in which members of the Muslim community find themselves as the main target. Neither the women’s movement nor have the human rights movement in India developed a critique of the framework of the human rights discourse itself. The fact that the human rights discourse was based on a liberal-democratic world view which did not see patriarchy as problematic did not seem to disturb the women’s movement, which supported the Western feminist slogan “women’s rights are human rights.” To sum up, the question facing those who wish to intervene in the Northeast remains that of balancing the rights of women, the rights of tribals and the rights of corporations, who are also treated as persons under the law.



## PLENARIES

## Women's Movement in North East

Coordinator: Monisha Behal (NEN)

Monisha Behal gave an overview of women's movements in North East. Each movement of NE women had varied trajectories and faced different situations. For instance, in Manipur, women were agitating against the state way back in 1904 - against forced labour and then against rice tax in the 1930s. They held collective actions against alcoholism in the 1970s, campaigning around the streets with lit torches, identifying those houses where alcohol was being consumed. This was successful, although the problem of brewing in magnitude remained, owing to the lack of livelihood opportunities in the state. The torch bearers, better known as Meira Paibi women, soon turned into human rights defenders agitating against the security forces who were held responsible for detaining young men unawares and torturing them without reason. The movement soon turned into struggles for repealing the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and remains so till date. The movements of women in the hill states relates to their histories that are woven through conflict –militarism and state apathy.

In Nagaland where village feuds were of significance, men in war were ruthless. It was on events of extreme violence that women would intervene and call on such men to stop the war. All this was in the early part of 20th century. In later years, the Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) addressed the issues of conflict and militarism. Their oft spoken appeal "Shed No More Blood", was spread all over the state and because of the NMA's decentralized functioning, messages such as the above bore remarkable impact on the women. Women in the north east have worked tirelessly as collectives with no transportation but using ingenious ways of conveying messages through bus drivers, truckers etc. Irom Sharmila is an example of determination appealing for the dismissal of the AFSPA since 2001. In 2004, after the death of T Manorama, NGOs took up possibilities to work together. One such example is that of NEN opening dialogue between the government and us. It is ironical that many Civil Society Organisations do not consider the Meira as useful, especially middle aged women who are a central part of the movement. They are often considered as old, emotional, uneducated and so on. In Assam, the women became active in the national movement. Encouraged by intellectuals and their husbands, women went into activism without much resistance. They had the legitimacy to fight in 1920s, at least amongst those in villages and towns. There are about 7000 informal women's groups which federated under the influence on Assam Pradeshik Mahila Samiti and backed by the AIWC. Many women's organizations were registered around 1954-as part of Nehru's Community Development Programme of 1952. By the 1980s more women's groups got registered because of political party obligations but also because of newer ideologies. However, they somehow maintained the status quo and never quite questioned issues of inequalities, violence and so on. They were not inclusive and did not really work with other tribal groups in the 70s-80s. Homogenization of larger Assamese women's struggles remained exclusively Assamese. The 21st century has larger issues being addressed by women's groups and this is because of new legislations, feminist ideologies being disseminated through social media and addressing issues of violence.

## PLENARIES

## Building Women's Studies in the North East

Coordinator: Prof. Archana Sharma

The plenary attempted to draw together persons/organisations from various fields and from different parts of North East to share their experiences in building women's studies, both within and outside the institutions of higher education.

Initiating the discussions, the coordinator Prof. Archana Sharma provided a brief account of the beginning and spread of the UGC Women's Studies programme in the North East as these centres have provided a formal space for Women's Studies. However, she observed that the process of building Women's Studies in the region started much earlier. A vibrant tradition of research on women's issues prevailed in these universities since their inception. Even beyond the university, different individuals and organisations worked on women's issues. To document the process of building Women's Studies in the region, therefore, one will have to delve into the past, to explore and collate the materials strewn over.

She also stated that the process of building Women's Studies in Gauhati University can be divided into two broad strands- one within different disciplines, second at the Women's Studies Research Centre, GU. To this, a third dimension can be added, i.e., the development that took place in the colleges.

Prof. N. Promodini Devi of Manipur University and Dr.Chungkham Sheelaramani, Associate Professor of D.M.College of Arts, Imphal narrated the Manipur experience. Dr. Promodini spoke about the establishment of the UGC sponsored Women's Studies

Centre in Manipur University during the eleventh plan period with appointment of the research staff and carrying out activities as per the UGC Guidelines but that they had to stop the activities halfway due to the non receipt of funds from the UGC.

Dr.Chungkham Sheelaramani's presentation covered a wide variety of issues like how she herself developed interest in Women's Studies, the women's movement in Manipur.She talked about Macha Leima, a journal publishing articles on women's issues. She identified the women's day observed by this organisation to commemorate the women's movement in Manipur as the beginning of the process of building Women's Studies in Manipur. She observed that minor research projects on Women's Studies have now become popular among both men and women but women's representation in different bodies like curriculum development committees is so low that renders the women's voice ineffective.

Dr. Paramita Saha from Tripura University observed that while trying to trace the genesis Women's Studies in Tripura, it would be convenient to start by locating the agencies which might have influenced the process and discuss their role, wherever possible. In this respect, the long history of women movement in the state cannot be overemphasized. However, due to the availability of ready information and due to the constraint, this aspect could not be discussed and she confined her speech to Women's Studies in the formal higher educational institutions. She spoke about the first women's college in Tripura, the women's cell in Tripura University and the change in the approach after Tripura University, which was earlier a State University, became a Central University. She fondly remembered the guidance and support of the State Commission for Women in the activities of the Women's Cell, her own involvement with the UGC programme for Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education- of having understood the necessity of the Women's Studies programme in the University, the problems faced due to having very few women teachers in the university in the early years. Despite all this, the UGC ultimately approved a WSCentre at the university during the eleventh plan and she expects that now the new centre will provide a space for developing Women's Studies.

Dr. Madhumita Purkayastha, Convenor, Cell for Women's Studies and Development of D.H.S.K. College discussed the issue (s) from the perspective of the colleges. She observed that building Women's Studies in the colleges of Assam has been a challenge owing to the dichotomy inherent in the Higher Education system. On the one hand, undergraduate teaching institutions have no scope of formulating syllabi autonomously, which deprives them from making strategic curricular interventions that could be greatly effective in classes of impressionable age groups. On the other hand, they have no technically feasible options or funding sources for students' research projects. In this context, a proactive role could be and should be adopted by centres in universities in networking with motivating and sponsoring projects on women's issues, albeit on a small scale. Most importantly, documentation of such work needs to be promoted and syllabi in Core and Major courses be lobbied for.

The initiatives already taken have resulted in the present functioning women's cells in colleges. However, there is a general lack of understanding regarding the scope, role and functions of such cells. In most cases they remain as desultory committees which undertake development activities for underprivileged women of the neighbourhood and act like NGOs and even get registered as such.

Sensitisation workshops under the UGC Scheme of Capacity Building of Women Managers in Higher Education have brought about some attitudinal and perspective changes regarding the role, scope and functions of the Women's Studies Cells but a lot remains to be done in terms of linking the Women's Studies Cells in the colleges and Higher Education institutions of the North East with the National network. In this context, a survey and review of the activities of already existing centres (in universities and colleges) is necessary. Meaningful and synergistic linkages of the Centres and the Cells would go a long way in mapping covered ground and charting the future course of action in terms of academic interchange, research collaborations, issue based proactive advocacy, pressure lobbying, collaborative documentation and publication. It would be up to the initiatives of Women's Studies Centres and Cells to foster a sensitized women's community in the Higher Education system, which could then reinforce its efforts by working in tandem with social agencies that work towards transformation.

There was not much time for open discussion as it was a one hour session, but from the presentations, it could be gleaned that the UGC Women's Studies programmes are essential for institutionalising Women's Studies. However, documentation and consolidation of the work done by different individuals from all walks of life can alone provide a complete picture of the process of building Women's Studies in the Region.

## PLENARIES

# Women in South Asia

Co-ordinator: Dr. Uma Chakravarti

A plenary on South Asia has been an important feature of the IAWS conferences in the past few decades. Speakers at the plenary have included women's studies scholars, activists and creative artists. These sessions have provided for the forging and revitalizing

of bonds of solidarities between women from South Asia. The 2014 conference initially hoped to have a plenary with scholars from South Asia but for a variety of reasons, including visa procedures, the format of the plenary had to be changed at the last minute as the original plenary speakers could not make it to the conference. An alternative plenary was put in place at short notice and the IAWS decided to have a series of films produced by feminists or about the work that feminists have done in the region. Three films were chosen by the anchor: Yasmine Kabir's *A Certain Liberation* from Bangladesh, Shirkatgah's *Two Steps Forward* from Pakistan and *No More Tears Sister*, a film on the life and work of Rajini Thiragamana from Sri Lanka. The films were preceded by an introduction to the context of the films, by Uma Chakravarti who has taught at a women's studies Institute for South Asian students in Lahore. It was followed by a highlighting of the issues raised by the film after each screening. The session opened and closed with a reading of poetry and the singing of songs created by women at a workshop for South Asian activists in the 1980s.

The session began with student participants from JNU reading out the famous poem *Hum Gunehgar Auratein* by Kishwar Naheed from Pakistan which has become something of a signature for the women's movement in Pakistan. Written as a challenge to the introduction of the Hudood Ordinance by the military dictator Zia ul Haque in 1981, the opening lines of the poem met with a resounding wave of appreciation from the audience:

*It is we sinful women  
Who are not awed by the grandeur of those who wear gowns  
Who don't sell our bodies  
Who don't bow our heads  
Who don't fold our hands together...*

The poem was read in its original Urdu composition and in an English translation. Two other poems by Fahmida Riaz also from Pakistan were read. The first poem was titled the *Interrogator/Kotwal*. One of its verses beginning with the words 'the time is coming for accountability', resonated well with the large number of people from the North East who have been struggling for the need to have the basics of a rule of law to be put in place, for accountability from the administrative system. The second poem was by Fahmida Riaz 'Search Warrant' and its last verse too were striking:

*All these tribulations over a book  
hidden in my past?  
Look beyond the curtains instead  
At my dreams of the future.*

A striking challenge in what may look like a moment of defeat!

The first film, '*A Certain Liberation*' a sensitively made film about sexual violence in 1971 but also of everyday relations among the ordinary people living off the streets whose humanity mediates the disasters wreaked by political considerations was then screened. After the film a connecting segment was provided by the anchor who recounted a South Asian feminist conference in Lahore at which the participants demanded acknowledgment of the violence wreaked upon the women of Bangladesh in 1971 from the Pakistan government. A moving song written by Faiz Ahmad Faiz and sung by Nayyara Noor was then played about relationships forged and then breached amongst erstwhile friends from different locations and linguistic communities was played, to recreate the atmosphere of the conference in Lahore.

The next film was *Two Steps Forward* on the struggles of tenants against the military owners primarily in the Okara region of Pakistan. The huge participation by women in this struggle to retain their tenuous hold on the land they and their families had been tilling for decades was a powerful portrayal of women in Pakistan that was vastly different from the stereotypes that abound about 'Pakistani' women. Ironically while the struggle succeeded and the tenants could hold their lands for the moment, finally the land was just given over to multinational companies and the discussion that followed made comparisons with similar trends in India under neo-liberal policies.

The last film, *No More Tears Sister*, which could not be fully screened because of shortage of time, dwelt on a Tamil human rights activist in Sri Lanka whose political journey spanned the critical decades of Sri Lankan history. The central protagonist Rajani attempts to retain her early idealism and stand for the human rights of all communities in Sri Lanka by documenting human rights violations in Jaffna, where she teaches at a medical college. Participants recalled the way feminists from across South Asia went to attend her funeral when Rajani was killed by unknown gunmen, a killing that has not been owned by anyone in Sri Lanka to date. What it achieved was to make known to audiences across the world the existence of a powerful voice for the rights of all persons in Sri Lanka, voiced by a Tamil woman at the height of the conflict in Sri Lanka.



The plenary ended with a song sung by Iina Sen and joined in by others in the room which included the words:

*Awaze kar buland ...  
Tere mathe pe yeh anchal bahut hi khub hai lekin  
Is anchal ka tu ek parchham bana leti to achcha tha  
Raise your voices!  
This anchal on your forehead is splendid  
But if it is made into a flag it would be much better!*

This was a good note for the South Asian plenary to end on.

## SPECIAL LECTURE

# Sexual Violence Against Women: State Responsibility and Culpability

By Vrinda Grover, Lawyer and Women's Rights Activist

Vrinda Grover located the theme of her talk within three scenarios with multiple intersections and yet, each had its own factual matrix and role of the state. She spoke about how law shapes itself and develops tools across the social, political, economic spectrum. There were also multiple responses to the three scenarios with the state as brutal perpetrator, collaborator or remaining silent. Sexual violence in conflict areas- Kashmir and North east- is impacted by special legal regimes while in communal violence, women's bodies are targeted as in the case of Muzaffarnagar,(UP) where the gang rape of women has taken place but not received any attention.

Central to the violence perpetrated against women is the changing public discourse, a critical and necessary debate, even though parts of the debate do get hijacked by high profile cases. There was a need to highlight the amendments to certain laws which have taken place and to bring them into focus. At the same time, systemic and pervasive violence against dalit women needs to be looked at and brought into the debate.

In conflict zones, Vrinda observed, there is both the improbability and impossibility of securing justice where the state is directly implicated. Here the violence against women is embedded in special laws as also in regular laws, such as the AFPSA, which carries a colonial legacy. The CO of a unit in the Armed forces - has the prerogative of going by any law against an alleged culprit. How the law operates is highlighted by the rape and murder of two women in the Shopian - headquarters of varied security units- in the Kashmir case in 29/30 May, 2009. Their bodies were found and the Forensic lab report found it to be a case of brutal rapes and murder, with both bodies carrying injuries. This was also confirmed by the High Court Bar Association. A Commission of enquiry held that some men in uniform were involved. The bodies were exhumed and doctors brought from Delhi who certified that the 'vagina was intact' as was 'izzat' (honour) A 48 day peaceful hartal was organized. The CBI came in, the bodies were exhumed and CBI declared it to be a case of drowning, the forensic doctors were suspended, while the brother and husband of the women, detained. There were witnesses who saw two women being taken in an army truck and some from the security forces were either witness to the crime or knew about the same.

Earlier, in February 1991, there was the case of the mass rape of women by members of an army unit conducting search operations in Kunan Poshpora village in Kupwara district in Kashmir. The enquiry by the Divisional Commissioner, Wajahat Habibullah- concluded that allegations of mass rape could not be sustained while the Press Council of India team led by B.G. Varghese appointed to look into the case - also ended up calling the case a hoax by militant groups, even though medical examination showed rape of many women, including unmarried girls. The Kupwara trial court called for closure of the case. The State Human Rights Commission in Oct.2011 termed it as mass rape by the armed forces. A petition was filed for reopening of the case.

The case of Manorama's rape and murder by the Assam Rifles unit in July 2004 showed that under AFPSA, the army was trying to widen the scope of its impunity. The case shifted from the Guwahati High Court to the Supreme Court in December 2010. An RTI was filed in 2011 to know how many applications for sanction of prosecution were filed in Kashmir on human rights violations. During 1989-2011, about 44 such requests were made of which 33 were rejected, while 11 were pending with the Ministry of Defence. No permission was granted for prosecution. There was a need to bring the armed forces under the purview of ordinary law and review the AFPSA with reference to such incidents.

Meanwhile Grover observed the gains made by the women's movement with regard to amendments in various laws in 2013 are significant. There is a breakthrough into the absolute impunity for men in uniform- an explanation in the Cr.PC states that any form of sexual violence by public person did not need sanction for prosecution. The sanction clause was removed. Sec.376, part 2-custodial rape by men in armed forces was termed as 'power rape'.

The 1984 anti - Sikh violence witnessed sexual violence against women, although there was no formal acknowledgement of it. There were whispers. Now there is news of an SIT being set up. During the Nanavati Commission hearings in 2005, there were 5 affidavits by women on sexual violence. There was no formal record of any case being registered. But there is a big shift due to the activism by women and pressure built the movement along with descriptions of a 'mob' and reference to a 'mob' which wanted to teach a lesson to Sikhs and came together for that purpose and hence could not be termed 'genocidal mob', as in the case of Gujarat in the 2002 violence against Muslims.

In the Naroda Patia case in Gujarat in 2002, sexual violence was central to communal violence and every member of the mob was named/blamed by the trial court. In the Bilkis Bano case, the NHRC, a statutory body, rose to the occasion and the police officials involved were convicted for not working according to the law. In this case, medical evidence, and absence of injury did not take away from her statement and constructing what had happened which was the basis for conviction. In the Naroda Patia case, the judicial proceedings took a huge step forward, a BJP MLA, Mayaben Kodnani was given a life sentence-it was termed as a case of criminal conspiracy- (racial crime) and unlawful assembly. In the Kausar Bano case - a pregnant woman, found half burnt and killed, her stomach slit open. The Tehelka sting operation where the perpetrator boasted about this brutal killing was used by the Court to convict the persons involved. It acknowledged that rape did take place and women given compensation, although the names of the persons involved in the mob may not be known.

In the recent communal violence in Muzzafarnagar, leaders from the BJP and Khap panchayats said that they would not allow any arrests from the village, while there is no victim protection here. Changes in the Evidence Act - custodial as power rape - in communal/sectarian violence, was not brought in into the FIRs in Muzzafarnagar nor was the criminal liability of the officials invoked. Though public accountability and command responsibility were brought into the law.

Post December 2012, it was acknowledged that power and prejudice intersect and an understanding that in a coercive context- there is need for a recognition of 'power'. Clearly there were inter-connections from the police station to the court rooms, including judges and there was a need for gender sensitization.

Vrinda Grover concluded by stressing on the need for the women's movement to link with other movements and to bring gender sensitivity into these movements and for the women's movement itself to imbibe a human rights approach. The session was chaired by Prof. Anita Ghai, Prof. of Psychology, University of Delhi, and IAWS EC member.

## SPECIAL SESSIONS

# Looking to the Future: Women's Status, Sex Ratio and Contemporary Challenges

This session was planned with a view to addressing the challenge of both understanding and addressing issues arising out of current trends with regard to sex ratios, in view of data generated by the last Census round of 2011 in India. It is widely recognized that the need to analyze the data and examine the larger socio-economic context which accounts for this situation as well as understand the social ramifications of emerging trends is an urgent necessity. The IAWS XIV National Conference provided a platform to initiate a fresh round of discussion on some of these issues to delineate more specific trends as well as open up for debate the contextual role of socio cultural practices, the impact of policies and the implications of prejudices which are sustained by legislative sanction.

This was the first IAWS conference being held after the release of recent Census data and also the first time the conference was being held in the North eastern Region. It is interesting that while the north eastern region has largely shown different patterns from the rest of India, there is a visible shift in this if we examine the latest Census data. As pointed out at the time of the writing of Towards Equality, sex ratios are a critical indicator of both social attitudes towards women as well as changing dimensions of social denominators with regard to Gender and Development. This was an opportunity to discuss the 2011 census data which is before us so to look ahead before the next decadal Census, to also identify policies and issues for follow up action to guide concrete interventions in and from the field. The session was thus planned with 6 speakers over two sessions to address (a) data issues and (b) social contexts and research based findings. The session involved social science practitioners, researchers, activists and policy makers.

The challenge of understanding, analyzing and confronting the issues linked to the trend of adverse sex ratios and of declining child sex ratios has emerged as a major concern for both, the women's movement as well as for Women's Studies scholars in India starting from the 1970s. The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, (CSWI), Towards Equality, first drew attention to this startling reality. It compelled scholars, such as Prof. Vina Mazumdar and other pioneers of Women's Studies in India, to grapple with this phenomenon along with its social, intellectual and ideological ramifications. Since some of these pioneers were also founders of the IAWS, its platform has always been seen to be addressing issues arising from emerging trends with regard to sex ratios as a significant field of social enquiry. It has also enabled women activists, scholars and policy makers to engage with the wider linkages of these emerging social trends from their various locations..

However, it is now well recognized that despite this process of long term engagement, the problem of declining sex ratios become worse as well as more complex over the years and, in fact, reached alarming proportions in certain states. Concern with regard to this has been voiced on international platforms and through UN agencies. Studies have highlighted the multiple dimensions of the problem: such as the socio-cultural aspects of what has been variously referred to as son preference, daughter abhorrence / dis-preference, leading to the pre-birth elimination and post birth neglect of girl children. Equally significantly it has been pointed out that there are significant linkages between prevalent laws and the continued trend of neglect of the girl child, which provide sustenance to the criminal practice of pre-birth elimination, as well as sex selection. Studies point to the enormous and growing scope for such sex selection given the advance in technologies which facilitate pre-birth selection through assisted reproductive practices, which find favour in the midst of abiding patriarchal norms and mindsets. Activists have continuously pointed to the total lack of political will displayed with regard to the implementation of the PCPNDT Act and its provisions, delay in the issue of notifications and guidelines. All these allow for complicity between retrogressive social beliefs and modern day practices. These find complacent allies in the large and diverse community of medical as well as pre-natal diagnostic practitioners. There continue to be divergent patterns with regard to sex ratios and related trends at the regional level, even as there is a tendency for more and more districts and states to draw closer to an all India pattern which is becoming more universal along and across certain regional divides. Interestingly, the North Eastern region still offers some contrasts or divergences to and with the rest of India. However, whether these may be sustained with regard to age cohorts and across community groups may be a matter of investigation. It may also be worth exploring whether there are specific practices which discriminate with regard to girl children, within the context of the matrilineal communities that exist in parts of the North East.

Dr. Kumud Sharma (Chairperson CWDS, New Delhi) who chaired the first session drew attention to the fact that it was the CSWI's Report Towards Equality which first drew attention to the phenomenon of an adverse and declining sex ratio. The Committee's findings had in fact pointed to two extremely significant trends –of declining work participation rate and declining sex-ratio, both of which were critical indicators to assess women's status. The Committee members then approached demographers to explain and understand the phenomenon. What is clear is that this issue of adverse sex ratios, which subsequently was spelt out in more clear terms with respect to child sex ratios (CSR) has emerged as a major concern for the women's movement as well as practitioners of Women's Studies.

The discussion started with Varsha Joshi, IAS, Director in the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner India, making a presentation on Gender Data from the Census of India 2011. Through a rich presentation on the decline in sex ratios and Child Sex Ratios across 2001 and 2011 from the Census Data, through a series of Maps, Joshi showed how :

- over the decades, the Sex Ratio (number of females to every 1000 males) had first decreased sharply, starting from 972 in 1901 to a low of 927 in 1991, and since then has shown a steady increase, reaching 948 in 2011.
- However, the more granular picture of sex ratio from 2011, seen at the district level, shows sharp variations, with the southern and eastern areas having much higher ratios than northern and western states.
- This could be due to social factors as well as due to male migration towards economically better-developed states.
- More distressingly, the comparison of Sex Ratio with the Child Sex Ratio (number of girl children age 0-6 to every 1000 boy children 0-6) shows a sharp and steady fall in the latter, from 976 in 1961 to a low of 919 in 2011. Evidently the problem of sex selection is only growing despite all attempts on the part of the Government to control it. Examination of the data points to the following trends:
- The state-wise comparison of Child Sex Ratio from 1991 to 2011 shows that the phenomenon has widened and deepened, spreading over the entire northern and western belt in 2011 compared to only Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and parts of Gujarat having very bad ratios in 2001.
- North East India has some of the best CSRs in the country. However, maps for each state showing the difference between 2001 and 2011 bring out that things are not so good in Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- The statistics also show the difference in boy and girl children as well as for all ages in the five-year age data of 2011.
- One slide showed another issue highlighted by the 2011 House-listing Data- the worrying increase in the proportion of households having the source of drinking water "away" from the premises in rural areas, in several small and large states.
- This was an example of how other aspects of Census data can also throw up gender issues, since fetching water is a traditionally female task.

The Maps presented the changing picture, in various states and within states, across districts. They drove home the point that the decline, far from being arrested, is spreading fast and that there is a need to also look at regional specificities in terms of economic participation of women, cultural issues etc. in different areas to understand why and how the decline is manifesting itself. Questions were also raised about the huge gender gap at birth (0 years) and how to explain the slight upturn in the overall sex ratio with the declining CSR.

### **Regional Variations: The case of the North East?**

This was followed by a more specific focus on the situation in the North-East by Prof. Rosemary Dzuvichu (Nagaland). She drew attention to the discrimination within societies which are on the face of it matrilineal and not seen to be hostile or discriminatory to women. She narrated how the birth of a girl child is described as the birth of “their” child, i.e. the birth of a woman who will eventually go to the household of her marital family. (“the other family”). Women had no control over their reproductive decisions, and female foeticide was a rampant phenomenon. The issue needed to be located within the larger social reality of poverty and insecurity with special reference to both livelihood and food security. In Nagaland, as well as in Assam and other North-Eastern states, there was an abysmal lack of health and nutritional care and educational facilities. The Naga Mothers’ Association had presented a memorandum to the Chief Minister with regard to the functioning of even the flagship programmes of the central government and pointed to the high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Huge amounts of funds meant for the NRHM were being siphoned off by the corrupt system. Discrimination against the girl child within the family, such as, reserving the choicest pieces of meat for the boys had been described in a novel by a Naga woman writer. She described how a delivery bed in a Kohima hospital had broken down and the baby warmer looked like a decrepit oven. Despite the fact that Naga women contributed to the economy, there were traditional practices and prejudices which found reflection in the neglect of pregnant women as well as a sense of shame involved with women asking or wanting to see a doctor. All these went into the making of a definite trend towards sex selection with a mushrooming of private clinics in the Kohima-Dimapur area along the urban belt. Clearly there was a neglect - neglect in structures to implement the law.

Prof. Mary E. John (CWDS, New Delhi) presented the findings of a study in different states which addressed the basic question of why families are agreeing/ choosing to go for sex selection which manifests itself as son preference and daughter aversion. She drew attention to the need to look at concrete factors which influence decision making rather than accepted notions of cultural stereotypes which frame cultural values, mindsets and the attitude of mothers/ families in particular ways which are broadly seen to be traditional. This requires recognition of both, phenomenon such as accepted notions of compulsory marriage for girls even as we need to appreciate the peculiar logic of ‘modern development’ with skewed social attitudes. It also needs looking at the emerging trends in more specific ways in the different locations, be it Kangra which has plummeted, or Fatehgarh Sahib which has shown some improvement, Rohtak which remains somewhere in the middle and Morena, Dholpur which have seen some significant interventions. Dr. John drew attention to the fact that:

- In households that had crossed the level of absolute poverty and had experienced some upward mobility and intergenerational transfer of resources, there was a clear trend towards hiring modern technology for the purposes of sex selection.
- More disturbing was the fact that otherwise apparently modern and progressive decisions, such as of educating the girl child, advancing age of marriage etc. were being taken alongside an underlying purpose which was to give away the girl in a “good” marriage” which also necessitated allocating resources for a dowry and the accompanying marriage expenses.
- Hence, it was clear that even when overt forms of discrimination may not be there, sex selection was being practiced.
- The small family norm translated into “at least one boy and at the most one girl”. As a result the new small family hardly had any girls!
- Attention needed to be paid to the phenomenon of ‘bought’ wives whereby girls who came from very poor families such as Assam, West Bengal, Bangladesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, were bought in “benign” ways, in apparently dowry-less marriages.
- There was a growing number of cross region marriages, where the brides thus brought in essentially remained cultural misfits in these families.

Dr. John posited that there appears to be a connection between neo-liberalism and falling workforce participation rates of women and the declining sex ratios. She concluded that it was still early days with regard to optimism for some of the districts which are now being seen to have achieved a ‘turn around.’

Prof. Malini Bhattacharya (former MP and Member, National Commission for Women) chaired the second panel. She initiated the discussion on the long process of public campaign and lobbying for passage of amendments to what is now known as the PNDT Act. She pointed to the continued failure in terms of implementation of the law. This was a trend which she personally saw in her capacity as a parliamentarian, as a member of the National Commission for Women and as part of the Central Monitoring Authority. New Reproductive Technologies and ways of Assisted Reproduction, she said, brought new challenges by opening up new possibilities and avenues of sex selection and pre-selection. This was a matter discussed in a consultation held with activists and experts in the field of Social Medicine and Community Health to draw up issues which should be addressed by the Guidelines issued by the Indian



Council for Medical Research (ICMR) as well as the proposed draft legislation to deal with Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs).

Dr. Sabu George( Consultant) pointed to the rapidly changing situation in the North-East, where earlier there had been little penetration of the Ultra Sound technology. Now there was a burgeoning of clinics, coupled with a lack of implementation of the law. He recalled that the 2001 Census had revealed declines in urban parts of Assam and in Nagaland. The 2011 Census showed continued declines in Assam, Nagaland and Manipur at District level and the emergence of similar trends at the sub-District level in Tripura. Practice of sex selection information has come from a few other States. What is disturbing is that some doctors in Sikkim were worried about what their families do when they go down to the plains in Bengal for medical care. Clearly, they felt that the possibility of foetal sex selection happening could not be ruled out!

Notably, for several decades, the North East was not part of the trends seen in mainland India as far as the causal factors identified as being responsible for declining sex ratios at birth. These included trends such as the privatization of medical education, lack of regulation of obstetric ultrasound and increasing dominance of private sector in medical care. However, exacerbating conflict among social groups (tribe, religion, migrants, caste, etc) within this region was also making it vulnerable to the rapid acceptance of sex selection, he argued. The fragility of peace in this sensitive region is also affected by the fluid political situation across international borders of Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma and China. The intimate relationships between the 'militants and ruling political parties' in a few of the states may also necessitate direct engagement with political parties on sex selection. In the absence of this, the likelihood of meaningful public dialogue which alone could lead to effective action may be difficult, he observed.

Given that most of the North Eastern tribes are better educated and highly medicalised, as compared to tribes elsewhere, he anticipated that therefore the extent of decline in the coming years was likely to be sharp if the promotion of sex selection was not effectively restrained. In the past decades, limited access to ultrasound had saved the North Eastern girls from discrimination before birth. As in other parts of India, the denial of the existence of the practice of sex selection continues to be an obstacle in dealing with the issue, particularly in Assam and Manipur, with Nagaland, so far, fortunately being a notable exception. The positive part of this was that over the last few years there was a greater willingness among government doctors, officials and women's groups in the state to accept that sex selection was and is an issue. This dramatic change needs to be appreciated, though it has come about after child sex ratios have dropped below 900 at the district level. Fifteen years ago, he recalled, Nagaland would submit affidavits on PNDT implementation to the Supreme Court most reluctantly, the constant refrain being that sex selection was not taking place among the Nagas. The declines observed in 2001 were attributed to outsiders like Marwaris!

A particularity of several parts of North East is their tiny District level populations, resulting in fluctuation even in child sex ratios fluctuate between Censuses, because of huge sampling variability. Similarly, random variations could mask true changes in the incidence of sex selection. Therefore indicators and methods of ascertaining sex selection have to keep in mind this context while analyzing statistical data.

He contended that the challenge in the North East today was the rapid pace with which it was catching up with mainland with regard to privatization of medical care and medical education, accompanied by a failure to learn from the mainland about the implementation of the PNDT Act. The reality of the emergence of large private sector hubs in the major cities within and adjacent to the cities of Guwahati, Agartala, Shillong, Siliguri, Silchar, Imphal etc. implies and gives an indication to an unprecedented level of promotion of sex selection in the history of North East. The relatively more egalitarian gender and socio-economic conditions, as compared to the mainland, would most likely not be able to resist the onslaught of popularity of foetal sexing. The fact that there is already a demand from privileged Nepalis, Bengalis etc for sex selection in these medical hubs, cannot be ignored. The sad reality that in the adjacent areas of West Bengal, child sex ratios have dropped over the 2001-2011 inter-census decade cannot be ignored. The massive influx of lakhs of people last year between Assam and West Bengal during the riots involving the Bodos is worrisome and points to the complex factors which give rise to established practices like sex selection spreading to newer areas. Consequently, he argued, we are looking towards a scenario where there is likely to be a huge drop in child sex ratios by 2021 in this region.

Further, given the growing medicalization of the community and privatization of medical education, one could predict increasing commercialization and sex selection by doctors who displayed no ethical standards in this regard. The setting up of such corporate hospitals elsewhere in India has resulted in not just making sex selection as routine but also inculcating practices among undergraduate and post graduate medical students to have contempt for medical ethics. He referred to the example of Andhra Pradesh, where the largest increase in private medical colleges was accompanied by the sharpest decline in child sex ratios in South India. This however, did not imply that this was a practice confined to the private sector in health. For, it was notable that sex selection was equally uncontrolled in government hospitals. There is also a need to take into account the consequences of conflict in areas such as Kashmir, the North-East etc. on declining sex ratios. While social issues and practices within the family were important it was equally necessary to understand how technology was being used for the purpose and identify the lobbies working behind the spread of this technology. Adequate attention needed to be paid to the stringent implementation of the Act, which had paid dividends in a state like Maharashtra.



Prof. Ilina Sen ( TISS and President IAWS), in her paper looked at time series data of the sex ratio over the decadal years. She emphasized the need to look at territories and their socio-economic and cultural specificities rather than states defined by artificial borders. While there were various types of discrimination, such as in breastfeeding, access to health care, food intake, these along with male selective migration were some of the causes for the decline. There was a need to plot the period and the highest rates of attrition with other issues related to political economy, just as there was a need to historicize and contextualize the issues that emerged over different periods of time. Poverty, Development processes, the advent of new technologies, alongside income inequalities needed to be identified as factors contributing to the trend of decline in sex ratios. These needed to be pinpointed as critical variables while decisions were being taken to counter the trends with regard to adverse child sex ratios for girl children.

Kiran Moghe, (All India Democratic Women's Association-AIDWA) drew upon her vast experience of intervening on issues of declining sex ratios in one of the worst states, Maharashtra. She pointed out that while the movement often pressed for legislation, its subsequent implementation was somewhat neglected. The effort to have the PNDT Act in Maharashtra implemented threw up many challenges and uncovered the myriad ways in which the bureaucracy and elected governments combined to directly and indirectly protect those indulging in the criminal acts of sex selection, and what huge efforts were required to reign them in. On the other hand, the very act of charging some doctors had a positive effect in drawing public attention to the problem, and had drawn many groups and individuals outside the pale of the movement to campaign against declining sex ratios as a general problem of society, not just one raised by the progressive women's movement. She felt there is an urgent need to take up the campaign in a similar concerted manner in other states for it to have a national impact and arrest the adverse trend.

The presentations were followed by a lively discussion on the persisting as well as emerging issues, in which experienced scholars shared their experiences with the younger participants. These included Prof. Nirmala Banerjee who drew upon her earlier work to once again emphasise the links between women's unequal status and their location in the contemporary context of economic policies and trends with regard to women's employment. Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi, former Chairperson of the West Bengal State women's Commission referred to the regional variations in both contemporary trends as well as cultural practices. Several of the interventions pointed to the linkages between poverty, sex ratio, extreme neglect and the marketing of new technologies. These sought to establish links between social deprivations which made certain groups more prone to discriminatory practices. There was reference to the pincer effect, with a potent combination of consumerism, technological influx and social prejudices/ conservatism. Urban India was leading this march towards declining child sex ratios. It was felt that 2021 would be a further eye-opener; that the North-East should not be neglected due to some false notion that all is well in that region. A young participant from Haryana drew upon her on-going research and field work to point to family based practices which enhance discrimination against women and girl children.

The session was co-ordinated by Dr. Indu Agnihotri, Director, CWDS, and General Secretary, IAWS, who pointed to the long years of struggle that the women's movement had waged on this issue, consequent upon its being highlighted by the CSWI. Undoubtedly, there was a need for movements to take up the issue in a more concerted manner. Laws which perpetuate son preference, as has been documented in the recent publication by the UNFPA, need to be amended. However, it was clear that activist interventions needed to be backed by a display of will on the part of the state and governments to implement the law in order to effectively check the spread of sex selection across regions. It should also be recognized that the links between processes of neo-liberal development and cultures of patriarchy needed to be further explored. Clearly, a standard critique of patriarchy with reference to the continued prevalence of traditional practices alone was not sufficient to deal with the enormity of the problem in the context of contemporary India.

## PRE-CONFERENCES

### Introduction

The XIV National Conference of the IAWS was preceded by two pre-conference events which focussed on issues of Women With Disabilities (WWD), as well as the concerns of Young Women. Owing to the pre-conferences, the conference saw a significant increase in the participation of women with disabilities, particularly from the North East. It will hopefully create more space for discussion on the rights of the disabled within the 'mainstream' discourse. Secondly, the hosting of the young women's pre-conference event ensured greater participation of young women scholars in the main conference and contributed to bringing in a range of perspectives from their specific location.

## PRE-CONFERENCES

## Engaging with the Voices of Women with Disabilities

Co-ordinator: Dr. Anita Ghai

(Organized in collaboration with Foundation for Social Transformation (FST) and Shishu Sarothi, Feb 3rd 2014)

In her introductory statement, Dr. Ghai said that the aim of the conference was to focus on the concerns of women with disabilities within the larger conference on Women's Studies. This was critical as such an attempt was long overdue within the women's movement. The fact that there were 19 participants hailing from six different states of the North East (excluding Sikkim) was highly appreciated by her.

Armaan Ali, Director of Shishu Sarothi, Gayatri Buragohain, Executive Director of FST, Prof. Ilina Sen, President, IAWS addressed the gathering.

Four papers were presented in the first session which was Chaired by Dr. Sumi Krishna, Former President, IAWS.



The first paper was on 'Livelihood' by Ms. Suchismita Majumdar, Director, Swalambi, Assam. Majumdar started by describing the work her organization had done in the field of disability. She said that the organization did community based work including promoting health, education and livelihood for the development of disabled women. She presented various facts and figures to support her stand that the condition of women with disabilities in Assam was better than in any other state. However, she said, there was still a lot more to be done to improve facilities for the disabled. Majumdar also added that there was a sharp contrast between the rural and urban areas. In relation to livelihood, she brought to light the fact that women with disabilities in Assam are neither encouraged to study nor to go for jobs. Hence, self-employment in small enterprises is the only option left. Her organization has tried to empower these women by forming Self Help Groups who take up various income-generating activities.

The next paper was on 'Discrimination against women with disabilities' by Sangita Adhikari, Assistant teacher, Ashadeep (Assam). She began by sharing that she was not born with any disability. Her mental health started deteriorating only a few years back when she was diagnosed with Bipolar disorder. Because of the lack of awareness about the condition, she faced a lot of discrimination and even ended up in the streets from where she was rescued by Ashadeep. She said that it is due to and with their support that she stands today as a qualified teacher. In spite of this traumatic experience, she very poignantly raised questions on the mindset of the society towards disabled women. She asked as to why without any fault of hers, she was discriminated against? Why all doors leading to success were closed for her. Through her paper, she exposed the stigma that mental health patients face on a day-to-day basis.

The third paper, focussing on 'Education' was by Smriti Rani Biswas, student, Tripura. Smriti Biswas related her story of how she lost her eyesight at the age of one and how she never found support from the federal state. Being a hilly area, there was always a problem in making frequent and repeated trips to Agartala, the capital city where at least some infrastructure could be found. The local schools were not equipped with disabled-friendly means. Additionally, purchasing Braille paper was a difficult task as its availability was restricted only to the Government schools, that too in the capital region.

Another presentation on the 'Scenario of education for women with disabilities in Mizoram: issues and challenges,' by Lalchhuansangi, student, Mizoram. She began by giving a statistical description of the number of persons with disabilities in India and then in Mizoram according to Census 2001. Then she went on to describe the provisions for the disabled under the Right to Education and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to present the contrast between the provisions mentioned in the official policy and what happens in reality. She highlighted that women with disabilities in Mizoram are not encouraged to study and are most often kept within the house to tend to the household chores. She also suggested that for such women home-based education should be provided and that schools should make every effort to provide barrier-free environment for them.

Summing up the morning discussion, the Chair, Dr. Sumi Krishna stressed the urgency of intervening right from early childhood in terms of health care which has been missing. She also stated that documentation of such stories as were shared that day and the sharing of these across states will help in mainstreaming the issue.

Prof. Ilina Sen added that there was a great need to take cognizance of the infrastructural challenges facing women with disabilities. Yet another burning issue was that of how structural violence and armed conflict, especially in the context of the North East, aggravates problems for the disabled and also how we need to address these.

A session chaired by Ms. Gayatri Buragohain, Executive Director, FST brought in experiences from different States in the North eastern region. The first paper was on 'Challenges faced by disabled women in Manipur' by Ms. Sunita Devi, teacher, Manipur. Sunita Devi, shared that she was a special teacher in an upper primary school in Manipur. She had not been totally visually impaired since birth and for a long time she was not aware of her condition to the point that she lost her vision entirely and it spoiled her career. She argued that a girl child who is also disabled is discriminated against and further, the interventions made in the case of a disabled male child and a disabled girl child differ. Usually the parents do not even wish to disclose the disability of the girl child for fear of not finding a suitable match for her and so, since early childhood there is an additional stigma faced by the girl child and narrated her own experience.

By presenting the case study of a woman with mental retardation who was raped by three men and became pregnant and whose voice was given no consideration, she hoped to bring to the fore the plight of women with disabilities in terms of the judicial proceedings. She strongly advocated amendment of the PWD Act, which currently gives only a petty amount as unemployment allowance to the disabled. She also felt that there was an urgent need for providing lifetime shelters for women with disabilities.

Battihun Mary Khongmawloh, from Meghalaya presented her paper on 'Challenges faced by disabled women at the grassroots level in Meghalaya.' Mary has been a grass root level worker who has worked with the Disability Programme of the state.. She highlighted the fact that Meghalaya, with a significant population being drawn from the Khasis and Garos, which are matrilineal tribes, is popularly thought to be pro-women. However, for disabled women, in Meghalaya too, the reality is no different from other societies. Being adult but yet treated as a child, she said "You are willing to do things for us which we can, but what about that which we cannot?" She also talked of discrimination in the sphere of love, emotions and sexual life. On the one hand, the disabled women find that their sexual rights are denied, on the other they are easy targets of sexual assault. The health scenario in rural areas is also averse to their needs.

The third paper on 'Women with disabilities – issues and sensitization of police' by Rajan Singh, Assam Police Service (APS), Assam was about including a gender and disabled sensitive curriculum in police training itself. He made an honest admission that such sensitivity was lacking and was courageous enough to outright accept that many of the allegations against the police force had a basis. In his paper he suggested various measures to sensitize the policemen.

The session on the need for policy interventions at different levels chaired by Prof. Sandhya Limaye, from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. Harpriti and Nandini Rao who spoke about how 'A little Swabhimaan goes a long way – Empowering deaf women in North India.' Harpriti, who was a deaf woman herself, communicated with the audience with the help of an interpreter, with inputs from Nandini from time to time. Their paper was about the functioning of the Deaf Way Foundation and how it has been empowering deaf women since 1992. Their modus operandi was to 'train the trainers' to conduct workshops with deaf women on topics like sexual abuse, violence, sexuality, their rights and dignity, which eventually turned out to be a platform for them to express themselves. Nandini explained in detail how the workshops were conducted. They maintained that their model was open for review, even as it could be replicated elsewhere.

The next paper by Celine Lawai, titled focused on the need to empower women with disability- a reflection. Lawai was a student and a member of the Association of Challenged People in Meghalaya. Through a power-point presentation filled with powerful pictures showing women being discriminated against in numerous ways, she covered topics such as gender discrimination in general and went on to focus on issues faced by disabled women in the matrilineal societies of Meghalaya, which are presumed to be quite progressive.

The third paper focussed Delhi. Deboshree, the student who presented, was a blind girl who had lost her eyesight only two years back. She related her experience of not finding facilities for the blind in Nagaland and hence being forced to migrate to IVHL, Dehradun to study. She narrated her account of how this experience instilled immense confidence in her. She mentioned that through narration of her struggle she wanted to appeal to others also to follow their dreams, because, according to her, 'disability was just a state of mind'. She herself wanted to be a lawyer. The last paper in this session was on Education by Monika Das, a student from Assam who narrated her story of how she was treated badly after falling off the stairs which had made her disabled when she was 13 years old. This had hampered her studies and she had to struggle a lot in her village where there was no accessibility for people like her. She focused mainly on the fact that there was a gap between the rural and urban areas in terms of the facilities available.



The last session in the workshop had been planned with a focus on the potential ways to move forward to fight for the rights of disabled women. All the speakers in this session emphasized the need to create a network of organizations and people who were working in the field of disability across India.

The highlight of the day was a play organized to demonstrate the experiences of mothers of daughters with disabilities, sexual abuse in family, issues of marriage and its positive and negative representations, domestic violence and hysterectomy sterilization.

## PRE-CONFERENCES

# Young Women: Resisting Violence and Exploring Legacies

Co-ordinators: Akhila Singh, Research Coordinator, Indian School of Women's Studies and Development, New Delhi and Geeta Thatra, M.Phil Student, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata.

Abstracts were received from 24 women for the pre-conference workshop. However of the 19 who had agreed to present there were 5 dropouts. Overall, 14 speakers presented their full papers, which gave ample time for discussion.

The day began with a welcome by Dr. Mahfuza Rehman (faculty at the Cotton College State University) and remarks by Dr. Indu Agnihotri (General Secretary, IAWS) for the young participants. She referred to the significance of the participation of the youth in movements for social change and the manner in which events after December 2012 had once again highlighted the tremendous need as well as scope for the women's movements to push for a discussion on the issues coming up.

The first session on 'Resisting Violence in Conflict Situations,' chaired by Dr. Rakhee Kalita, explored the diversity of women's experiences within the North East region, with a particular focus on Assam, Meghalaya and Manipur, which necessitated moving beyond generalized presumptions. The moot point of this session was the perceived higher status of women in the North Eastern states, but the papers highlighted the low participation of women in local political institutions and increase in the levels of gender and sexual violence perpetuated in conflict areas. There was also a focus on women's agency and role in resisting state violence and also on how they have redefined violence itself.

The first presentation, by Rukshana Rahman, focused on the high intensity conflict areas of Dotma and Titaguri of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in Assam to examine the nature and prevalence of gendered violence in areas of political turmoil. In areas where political and social insecurity prevail, violence against women becomes more severe. The incidence of human trafficking in women and forced prostitution is the highest amongst all forms of gendered violence in these areas. There has also been a sharp rise in domestic violence in the post-conflict situation. The paper reiterated that justice is denied to the victims/survivors of gendered violence in these conflict areas.

The second paper, by Risha Borooh, analysed data related to representation of women from the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council across the last four tenures, i.e., from 1994-99 to the present tenure of 2009-14, to argue that women have remained largely unrepresented in the Dorbars (traditional system of village administration). Explaining the structure and operation of the Dorbars, Borooh suggested that the matrilineal society in Meghalaya is steadily disintegrating. She substantiated this with an example of unscrupulous conversion of communitarian land into private land by Syiems (men who are heads of the Dorbars), with the implementation of the Succession Act in 1980. The male Syiems have tended to leave inheritance to their sons, and Khasi women are merely relegated to being custodians of their ancestral property. Finally, the paper challenged the popular perceptions of a matrilineal society and emphasised the need to study women's participation in traditional political institutions.

The third presentation by Kaberi Das focused on the data produced by National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and the incidence of violence against women in the NER, and particularly in Assam which records the highest number of cases. The table below, taken from the paper, is illustrative:



S. No.	State	Rape (Sec.376 IPC)	Kidnapping & Abduction (Sec. 363-369, 371-373 IPC)	Dowry Deaths (Sec. 304B IPC)	Cruelty by husband or his relatives (Sec. 498A IPC)
1	Arunachal Pradesh	46	58	1	26
2	Assam	1716	3360	140	6407
3	Manipur	63	133	0	43
4	Meghalaya	164	24	1	16
5	Mizoram	103	3	0	8
6	Nagaland	21	10	0	0
7	Sikkim	34	10	1	4
8	Tripura	229	114	37	858

Source: Table 5.2: Incidences of crime committed against women during 2012, NCRB Report, p.215.

Through her performance Manola Gayatri suggested that violence against women needs to be understood as a ‘crisis in masculinity’, which cannot be solved only through legal and punitive measures. Bhavneet Kaur wished to traverse another region of conflict to reflect on women’s narratives of resistance in Kashmir and to also explore how memories are shaped, particularly those of loss and violence.

Dr. Kalita problematized the binary conceptualization of women either as victims of violence or as agents of resistance. The challenge is to understand such a repositioning of women in combat vis-à-vis the conflict. She suggested that there was a need to think about ‘transitional justice,’ and that women’s role could be envisaged not only in peace building (since peace is a discredited word in the North East, where the absence of war does not necessarily mean peace) but also through participatory politics.

The second session ‘Representation, Performance and Political Action’ was chaired by Dr. Trina Nileena Banerjee. In this the attempt was to think through each of the terms – performance, representation and political action, and their interplay, particularly in the context of increased violence faced by young women in contemporary times. Banerjee began the session with an anecdote about P.C. Joshi, who is considered to have taken the initiative to set up the cultural front of the Left in the 1940s. This was also the beginning of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA). The cultural squads of IPTA, she said, performed as ‘speaking newspapers’ in third class railway compartments, where they narrated stories about the situation in the world, in the here and now. Two papers in this session looked at the powerful role of street theatre in staging feminist protests. Another thought through the space provided by digital technology for feminist activism.

Two of the presentations analyzed theatre and performance as resistance, in the context of the December 2012 protests against rape and sexual violence against women. Diksha Lamba analysed four performances, Walk by Maya Rao, Cleansing by Pandies, Mudda ye hai ki mudda kya hai a street play by Hindu College (Delhi University) and Sarkari Feminism by Pandies, which came up as a response to Delhi 2012, to register protest against the violence faced by women. Diksha chose performances that could not be traditionally defined within the paradigm of the political theatre of the Left, and suggested different ways for documenting ‘feminist theatres of protest’. She underscored the need to probe the question of how we should understand feminist theatre as resistance and strengthen it in the face of violence unleashed by the state and market forces in contemporary times

Komita Danda explored protest through culture and the multifarious forms it took during December 2012 in the space of the capital city. She wrote as a political theatre activist and illustrated the interactions between performance and protest. Several artists felt the need to respond to the incidence of violence against women as well as the rising tide of protests on the streets of Delhi. Komita suggested that we need to revisit the conception of an artist, since it was not the hitherto cultural, performing or performance artists who conceived of performances as resistance. Komita focused on two performances and cultural interventions that were performed as part of the mass protest on the streets of Delhi. Nau tees (9:30) ki aakhri bus, a performance, protest, flash mob or cultural intervention by Jana Natya Manch, Jan Sanskriti, Janwadi Lekhak Sangh and other organizations, mainly to reclaim public transport and the city for women, especially at night. Through these performances, there were attempts to reclaim public spaces for women to assert the need for measures to provide security for women.

The second set of papers included in this session reflected on the changing nature of ‘younger’ women’s presence in the mainstream newsroom and their activism on social media. Nithila Kanagasabai, based on in-depth interviews, participant observation and her lived experience as a young woman journalist in the mainstream media, argued that over the past decade, women broadcast journalists have been dubbed as ‘Pretty Young Things’ (PYTs) by the media, and even senior women journalists in print sometimes



employ this term to refer to their younger colleagues in broadcast news. One of the central questions of her exploration has been the relational difference between 'older' and 'younger' women journalists and their negotiation with feminism. She also reflected on whether the newsroom has become a site of mythical celebration of post-feminist narratives, with the representation of socially, economically and sexually 'empowered' women, who do not need the concessions of feminism.

Sujata Subramanian explored the potential of the social media and other online spaces for feminist politics. She suggested that the latter had 'redefined what it means to be a feminist' and had a unique democratizing potential. Sujata maintained that the existing legal framework was inadequate to cover the wide range of gendered and sexualized forms of violence against women. She argued that there is a need to understand such forms of violence and their implications, if digital technology is to become truly a space for feminist activism.

Sabrina Iqbal Sircar analysed the work of Islamic feminists, who have been at the forefront of contemporary reformist movements to challenge the monopoly of traditional interpreters of the Quran and Hadith. Based on the scholarly works of Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Fatima Mernissi, she suggested that Islamic sources need to be examined through an interpretative methodology that enables a (re)interpretation of foundational Quranic principles to ensure equal rights for women. Sabrina located her analysis within Islamic feminism and sought to ensure the rights of Muslim women within the framework of religion.

The third session on 'Gendered Violence in Intimate Spaces/Relations' was chaired by Dr. Anagha Tambe, who suggested that violence outside intimacies and intimacies without violence have been important areas of engagement for Women's Studies scholars. This session had three presentations, which discussed the contentious binary of choice and force, consent and control that are central to the question of violence faced by women in intimate spaces and relationships. There was an emphasis on widespread prevalence of violence and hostility against inter-caste and inter-religious marriages across the length and breadth of the country, countering the notion of it being a phenomenon restricted to some North Indian states. The voices of young women for autonomy and equal rights to public spaces have led to a conservative and patriarchal backlash which blames women themselves for the violence inflicted on them. The personal choices that they make are conceived of as being the cause of violence and rising sexual crimes. One paper elaborated on violence faced by young couples inflicted by families and the community in the name of 'honour'.

In a paper titled 'Migration, marriage, trafficking: analyzing women's vulnerability to violence in contemporary Northern Haryana,' Garima Srivastava discussed the implications of the adverse sex ratio in Haryana and the various forms of vulnerabilities faced by women as part of their movement across different regions and cultures for marriage. In Haryana men who have reached the age of thirty-five, and remain single are unable to find a local bride. Given these circumstances the society has developed a number of 'coping' mechanisms. One such way devised being that of importing brides from amongst the poor from faraway states in the Eastern and Southern regions of India, namely, Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. In some cases these women are also brought from Bangladesh. Garima sought to analyse the migrant woman's negotiations with various institutions like state, family and community, how they impinge on her everyday life in the 'new' society, and the way these structures re-construct and define her identity in different ways.

The second paper, "Violence against choice marriages: Locating the patterns and exploring the way ahead" by Rani Rohini Rahman, dealt with the issue of 'honour' crimes, particularly the forms of 'honour' oriented violence which were mostly inflicted against choice asserted in marriages. Rohini argued that while the crimes in the name of 'honour' were associated with only a few states like Haryana, Rajasthan and western U.P., their prevalence is not limited to these areas. Rohini argued that whereas in most cases where family members or relatives of the couple were involved it was the sense of 'honour' that led to the crimes, in instances where the larger community or khap panchayats were involved, it was mainly socio-economic reasons such as maintaining caste boundaries and control over land, which were crucial factors.

Vaishali Singh spoke on "Consent and control within intimate relationships" based on information and the experience of a campaign called 'Must Bol', among young people placed in different institutions and communities. The paper tried to explore the complex relations between gender and sexuality and how it determines aspects of young people's lives in the context of their intimate relationships. The situation is made more complex as most often young people do not have social legitimacy to have romantic or sexual relationships, which often leads to their keeping it hidden, thereby also limiting their ability or right to make choices, both in the personal and public spaces, and to have access to any institutional or societal support to fall back on. The violence that young women face within romantic relationships remains largely unexplored and unquestioned.

The last paper, on "Impact of intimate partner violence victimization in the antenatal period (pregnancy)" by Prema Janardan and Buelah Shekhar, was a study of 100 pregnant women, who were in their third trimester, from Purasavakkam area of Chennai, Tamil Nadu. The study of intimate partner violence and obstetrical health showed a positive correlation between the type of abuse and the state of obstetrical risk. The study suggested various steps that could be taken towards institutionalising the routine screening and treatment for violence related injuries and trauma.

The last session, 'Gendered Labour and Concerns of Health and Violence', was chaired by Aardra Surendran. The first presentation was on Vulnerabilities in Girls: was presented by Nischint Hora, on behalf of Medhavinee Namjoshi. It examined the issue through the work of Vacha, an organization that works with adolescent girls.

The second paper in this session, by Rajeshwari, was a study on the Health and nutritional status of adolescent girls and women in rural Haryana: 2009-10. With the help of primary data, collected from 16 villages spread over eight districts in Haryana, the paper examined health and nutritional status of adolescent girls and women vis-à-vis the socio-economic characteristics of the households. Rajeshwari argued that the primary responsibility of the state was to provide health care services to all its citizens which requires a comprehensive health care system to also ensure women's right to health.. Women's lives are governed by multifaceted and nuanced realities where caste, class and patriarchy intersect with each other in complex ways to intensify women's subordination. Thus, it becomes imperative to tease out the issues involved with access, particularly systematic exclusions and denials that hinder realization of women's health rights. Finally, contesting the celebrated green revolution of Haryana, Rajeshwari argued that there has been a lack of attention paid to diversity of food consumption by women, with excessive investment into production of wheat and rice. In this manner, the nutritional requirements of girls and women have been compromised to a great extent.

The last paper of this session, "महिला अपराध" - नारीवादी संदर्भ व दुवधिएँ" (roughly translated as Women's Crimes: Feminist Context and Dilemmas) by Mamta Singh, drew on the life histories of eight women criminals convicted for murder presently in a jail in Patna, with a more detailed focus on two of the cases. A pattern that was evident through all these cases, was that the women were convicted for crimes committed against some intimate or family members: husband, ex-boy friend, father-in-law or brother-in-law. A similar pattern was observed amongst 10 women criminals convicted for murder in Wardha jail, where women had committed crimes against their family members. An important point raised by one of the convicts was that it would be wrong to assume that the sentence that they were serving is actually for the crime that they had committed. Cases showed that some of these women were trying to avenge violence committed against them through crime/violence.

Two papers that were selected for this session, but could not be presented were on Declining Women Workers and Increased Violence against Women in India: Is there a Pattern? by Sona Mitra and Women, Labour and Technology: A Case study of South Eastern Coalfields Limited in Korba district, by Sujata Soy. Both these papers dealt with women's work in the context of neo-liberal development and issues around labour.

The presentations highlighted the gender blind nature of policies of the state, which requires active engagement of the women's movement with the state while remaining critical of the various atrocities and discriminations perpetuated by the state.

The success of the workshop lay in its being able to open up issues and foreground the crucial challenges that lie ahead.  
Report Prepared by: Geeta Thatra and Akhila Singh

*Note: Full Reports on Pre-Conference events available on IAWS website <http://www.iaws.org>*

## SUB THEMES

# Women's Rights and entitlements to land and land based resources

Coordinators: Preeti Oza and Shilpa Vasavada

The paper writers were from both academic field-students, researchers and teachers from the disciplines of social work, economics political science, history and sociology and from varied peoples' movements, women's organizations, NGOs and individuals. The latter spoke passionately about women's participation and role in individual and collective land struggles that have changed their lives and perspectives, even when they may or may not have always got them tangible benefits. Situation of women of specific communities and regions from across India – the North East, Andhra, Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, M.P., U.P., Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, W.B., and Rajasthan added new dimensions to both the political debate and scholarship.

The key issues that emerged from the papers from states like West Bengal, Gujarat, Orissa, Meghalaya, Andhra, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala concerned the situation of adivasi, dalit and other marginalized sections of women. Access to land is critical yet not in itself enough to enhance empowerment. The changing land use in some parts of Northeast due to migration and commercial agricultural practices pushing out men, burdening women, and bringing in wage labour, was noted. Matrilineality without substantial control over the decisions on the use and management of land for women of Nagaland revealed that land ownership for women did not do away with patriarchal controls, and neither did it give them more leverage in playing stronger societal and public roles. Women

can own land but are controlled by the agencies of men, in family, communities and societies, as the papers on Khasi Women and Sonbhadra tribal women suggested.

In the discussion on individual and collective struggles related to acquiring land and land based resources, there was unanimous agreement that if at the end women do not acquire tangible benefits such as share and control in the land entitlements, and effective use of and produce from the commons, and decisions on land use as well as effective market participation does not accrue, then achieving self-awareness, empowerment and identity status is of only limited value

Several papers raised the issue of customary laws as pitted against the state laws, specially but not only for the tribal women, and it emerged that activists working for land rights as well as women acquiring land rights need to use different levels of legitimization to ensure that they are able to control the land they own and empower themselves. Neither the adoption of state nor the customary laws can be discarded, but rather both will have to be used creatively to enable women's ownership and control over land for the specific tribal women, as a paper on Dang area of Gujarat revealed. Again, land in itself without development resources may not necessarily enable women to enhance their economic and social status for different communities as the studies from Andhra Pradesh indicated.

Land holding on its own is not an indication of economic status enhancement and of the well-being of women. When states policy priorities undermine agriculture and land development, or are gender blind and insensitive, a plot of land may not bring real change for women owners. Several studies show that the conventional binary like men's control vs women's control or state vs customary laws, rural vs urban may not define the issue of land ownership completely for women. Intersectionality of identity and sub categories of the community of women needs to be considered, and studies and strategies would need to reflect that. Better still, if these can guide policy, legal and programmatic formulations.

Some papers raised the issue of channels for inheritance of land and property that could bring critical change like natal, marital, state distribution etc., which would vary according to the situation of women. And yet research papers and action programs in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh found that daughters, married, widowed or single were reluctant to demand rights in natal property, even as the amended HSA, allows them this right. "How can we show our face at the mayka (natal home), after we have demanded for our share?" Many of these women embodied the title of the book "Good Women Do Not Inherit Land." But there were cases of sisters, many time goaded by marital families or widowhood, who sought their share, of course facing struggles. This was true in fast developing semi-urban areas where land prices were shooting up. In such areas, land grabbing by the developers and systematically by the state, were transforming the social relations rapidly and with adverse impacts and eroding existing support systems for women. On the other hand, in cases of the sale of family property or land in semi-urban areas, family heads could deny the rights of wives, daughters and mothers, whose consent may not be taken for such transactions. A paper from Maharashtra cited this case.

Ownership of land for women brings a certain recognition and identification that can further help to access other kinds of resources which include material and social visibility and status. Therefore working towards women's ownership, access and control for land needs to continue for her empowerment. In order to overcome the social and legal obstacles to women's land ownership, it is important to sensitize the land revenue officials, social leaders, women and youth, and even the men in the family. Many papers noted strategies for the same.

Papers on Uttaranchal, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Arunachal, and Assam showed that a wide range of concerns of women were in the forefront of several land based movements from the time of Koel Karo Netarhaat in Jharkhand in 1980s, to Mithi Viridi (Bhavnagar, Gujarat). Papers also focused on land rights of tribal and dalit women as they struggled for their collective rights on commons, and all categories of women as they worked on the family land with imposing patriarchy, thereby denied them real status as co-owners, being wives, mothers and daughters, or even single women.

Where women have taken very active part to stall the so-called development projects and entry of private industrial corporations that directly and adversely affected their livelihood, it was found that from their initial inclusion, participation and into leadership roles, they faced opposition from within the movement, their families and as well as the society and the government at large. Yet slowly but surely they found their way into decision making bodies. Yet, many a times after the movement ended, they either moved to a different level of leadership away from the masses of women, or became less visible. Men grudgingly acknowledged the role of such women but their perception of who actually own these resources after the movement, remain patriarchal. Of course many now had stronger 'wife partners', as in Sonbhadra. It was pointed out that the real time outcomes of such movements must be analyzed on the basis of gender concerns to ensure that women equally share the gains of the movement. In Gujarat, several movements were thus analyzed, revealing critical strategic interventions, both empowering as well as the gendered nature of the transformative processes of popular movements..

Women's concerns with land and land based assets also feature critically when internal conflicts and disasters devastate and displace communities all together. Although relief, and short term rehabilitation include women to attain only primary needs like food, water,

and temporary shelter etc., in the long term, very few of the policies and programs look at assets creation inclusively and effectively for women as a domain through which the rehabilitation schemes and policies should be drawn.

On behalf of the state, when government bodies design and implement schemes, the traditional mindset of the government bureaucracy while transferring and enriching assets for women is obstructive and does not accrue real benefits for women. Of course the community and society is also not supportive expect in cases where families and communities can access resources on behalf of women. Women are nominal or missing from forest protection or water distribution committees.

Some research papers and action programs in Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh found that daughters, married, widowed or single were reluctant to demand rights in natal property, even as the amended Hindu Succession Act (HSA), allows them this right. On the other hand, in cases of sale of family property or land in semi urban areas, family heads can deny the rights of wives, daughters and mothers, and whose consent may not be taken during such transactions. This was pointed out in a paper from Maharashtra. When activists creatively use the legal and administrative systems they are aware of the nuances of bureaucratic language that can go against them, as was interpreted in a paper from Maharashtra analyzing Government circulars.

Papers from Nagaland, Assam, Rajasthan, Goa, Madhya Pradesh on women, land and livelihoods showed that in the case of women's collective farming through Jhum cultivation and community agriculture of Naga women in the hills, brought out women's close relationship with nature, food security and control of land and agriculture. Yet, their role in public life and social empowerment had not been promoted, and this very symbiotic relationship somehow bound them to hard labour as the men in their families were dead in revolution or away for work, and the second generation, leaving for a different life away in towns. In the char lands in the Brahmaputra at Darrang, Muslim women worked very hard in agriculture and land conservation of fast eroding lands, yet their ownership on land and support for livelihood was always undermined. Men and society did not recognize their work or ownership.

The simple yet substantial scheme by the M.P. Government to allot 2.5 bigha land to landless families has resulted in women's enhanced role in family decision, participation in markets and even economic stability. However the traditional perception of roles or patriarchy had not changed very much. However a base had been created for the road to empowerment, as was enough to encourage a dalit woman from Shivpuri in M.P., to ask her husband to leave the house and go and stay with the other wife- a woman he married without her consent, as she felt capable of managing her children working on the land that belonged to her!

The forest commons and their access for the tribal women in Sirohi, Rajasthan, was obstructed by the mind set and processes of the regressive forest bureaucracy. There was no real perception of women oriented approaches, and their inclusion if at all was nominal, and even considered problematic. For the Velip tribal community of Goa, their common agriculture lands were being taken away by the forest department for the cashew cultivation, fast displacing them.

Based on the above discussions, the Subtheme proposed 2 resolutions to be adopted by the IAWS, and more so as action points for the several persons and women's organizations promoting women's effective access and control to land and land based resources.

- 1- The 2005 HSA amendment giving women coparcenary rights in ancestral and other property, lies lost without rules and clear guidelines. We demand that the states frame women friendly procedures and rules to enable women to easily enter in their entitlements. It must be done simultaneously with the marriage registration as far as possible at the Panchayat level, and must be linked with disincentives for disinheritance, as well as incentives for timely inclusion
- 2- Clear guidelines to include and work towards real asset creation that effectively allows for control and ownership of women for all program and schemes of the government whether under NRLM, NREGA, MKSY, and any land and land based resource development and distribution under the Government.

## SUB THEMES

# Encountering globalization: women in social security

Coordinators: Sanjay (Xonzoi) Barбора and Dolly Kikon

The sessions contextualized land rights, entitlements, access, loss of land within a macro context and from a social security focus. A presentation on Nagaland held that with the increasing commodification of land, state sponsored policies to increase cash crop production, increasing efforts to change the practice of shifting cultivation to settle agricultural practices are the pitfalls that denies women their right over land. Individual property rights over community rights in Naga society, which in governmental terminology is understood as modernity does not conceal the fact that this new process of commodification of land and crop productions



undermines women's right over property and production. However, Dr Jamir argued that the customary laws of Nagaland are gender biased and primarily address the interest of patriarchal norms, but still there are certain ways through which women could find certain rights over land and other resources. In fact communication networks have increased in a last couple of years in Nagaland, rather than creating any opportunity it only undermines the rights of 75.5% of total labour force in Nagaland that is constituted of women. Another paper argued how development induced displacement undermines women's right over land and resources. In three North Eastern States, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur, tribal women are the worst sufferers of this development induced displacement as the community resources are particularly important for sustainable livelihood of these women groups.

Another paper stated that over the years, with the strengthening of patriarchal marriages and the increasing want of each individual to possess one's own share of property, has fetishised the houses. These fetishised houses which also represent status, wealth and comfort along with house improvement has threatened women's right to property. The credit culture further enhances such insecurities. A paper argued that the neo-liberal natural resource policy actually undermined people's rights to land and resources. Pointing at the fact that 78% percent of the collectors of Common Property Resources are women and that the amount of time given for the collection of them has increased because the CPRs have now moved away to places away from them. This was the main reason for the decrease in people's dependency on CPRs. Various legislations like the Land Acquisition Act, Forest Constitution Act etc have annexed resources of the people overnight into their own folds. The working of global market forces like the IMF and World Bank along with it has made matters worse for people. Although they claim that their policies are decentralised and they practice extreme localism but the local bodies are deprived of all powers of decision making regarding their own resources. Another paper reflected on the feminization of labour in the garment industries. Women who work as labourers in the garment industry in Bangalore are mostly migrants from rural Karnataka. Although they migrate for their livelihood yet they seem to migrate from only one kind of poverty to another as they experience alienations. The overtime labour she gives is not at her own will. Moreover the hierarchies that work in the industries are exploitative in nature.

A paper on the informal sector, on the second hand markets held that women stick to work that are lower in hierarchy. It was argued that although, otherwise women's mobility is always restricted by various structures yet when it comes to the second hand market they are allowed to be there at three in the morning. Ironically, although they take active part in the trade they operate within a very restricted space on the argument that it is for their safety and security. A paper looked into the various kind of insecurities and the lack of social protection meted out by domestic workers. It showed that there exists no adequate rules and regulations formulated by the state for securing the life and worth of domestic workers. The vulnerabilities of workers in these sector stems from two factors; one, the lack of proper legislation in the host counties to protect their workers and two, in India, the lack of legislations do not cover domestic workers within social security measures. The last paper sought to understand the various implications of trafficking on women emphasising particularly on commercial sexual industry. Globalisation is one important reason that has led to the accelerating pace of the phenomenon having its implications on the practice of sex slavery as well. Women who are economically backward and fall under marginalised categories in terms of their caste, class, race, religion are more vulnerable to be trafficked. There is an intrinsic link between the politics of immigration and anti- trafficking policies. Solutions cannot be imposed from the top.

#### SUB THEMES

## Women in Urban India: Debating Labour/ Employment, Poverty and Violence

Coordinator: Indrani Mazumdar

The overwhelming response to the subtheme reflected what appeared to be a resurgence of interest in women's work and labour. Most of the presenters (17) were young scholars/students. One third (9) of the papers were on women workers in the northeast. The papers presented a mosaic of occupation oriented as well as area based micro-studies. Their entry points (sometimes overlapping) ranged from migration to informality, from urban residential settlements to caste/community, from industry/sector to disability and education.

Of the specific occupations covered, 6 were on domestic workers, 2 on vendors, and 2 on policewomen. Others included clay artisans, nursing care work, sex work, tourism, textile factory work, and waste pickers. The questions addressed included the impact of women's employment on patriarchy based gender roles at the familial as well as work spheres, women's choices and cultural aspects of experience in employment and non-employment, related 'empowerment' questions, discrimination/disadvantage based on gender, caste/community/disability, hierarchies and differentiation among women workers, experiences of women in masculine work environments, harassment, violence. A couple of papers included questions of exploitation in employment, one addressed entrenched power of employers in their 'home', and one - experiences of collective organisation.



Of critical concern was the extremely low work participation rates among women in urban areas and the first session was to begin with 3 papers on analysis of labour force participation rates. Unfortunately, these macro-data based paper presenters were unable to come for the conference. However, Prof. Nirmala Banerjee, a pioneer in women's employment and labour studies, in the chair, brought in a macro-perspective into the discussion.

Presentation began with an ethnographic exploration of three migrant worker settlements in and around Waluj Industrial Estate (Aurangabad) sparked off by newspaper reports about 100 runaway women, 'seduced' by city life, revealed a contrary reality of isolation, deprivation and physical hardship, differentiated access to basic civic facilities, and more importantly, that most women of all communities did not have employment, even as home based workers.

Drawing on research among domestic workers migrating daily from rural areas to Kolkata, the 2nd paper concluded that these mostly married women migrate because of economic distress, but their experiences are also informed by the ideological dimensions of work and gender stereotyping of domestic work. Despite some renegotiations of gender norms, their migration serves to instate new hierarchies of class, caste and gender.

A study of women workers with disabilities in a Mumbai slum stressed that the nature of the problems varied based on the types of disability and argued that a lack of recognition of women with disabilities as individuals with a capacity to work and be independent also leads to reduction in the kinds of livelihoods that are accessible to them.

Four Assam based papers included one on women working in Oil India in Duliajan, which held that family expectations leading to stress appeared to be more evident in the case of married women. Another paper gave a statistical analysis of a sample of 60 post-graduate women in Guwahati using a self-constructed 'Empowerment Attitude Scale'. Conversations with 6 migrant women workers in the Guwahati's informal sector and their accounts of harassment and violence, concluded that reactions were differentiated, but most women are unaware of laws and policies regarding women's rights. A paper on small tea plantations in Assam's Sonitpur District outlined the heavy load of work and unequal wages for women labourers and argued that instead of enhancing well being, this sector is 'marginalizing women' for profit.

Day 2 began with a paper attempted to link globalization linked prosperity among men of the OBC Nhavi (barber) caste in Maharashtra with 'diminishing chances' for Nhavi women's entering employment. Based on interviews and observations of self presentations of girls and boys in 'Vadhu-Var Melawas' (marriage alliance conferences) organized by the apex body of the Nhavi caste in Maharashtra – it was argued that new principles of individualism were being stitched to endogamy and Brahmanical patriarchy. The following paper described the largely unpaid forms of women's labour as clay artisans in Kolkata, their poor economic and social conditions, and the social competition between the traditional kumhars and newer entrants into clay work by other communities. A third paper discussed a Maharashtra Govt. scheme for free airhostess training for tribal girls, whose aspirations were negated by their negative experience of the job selection process, and argued that the perception that these girls were 'lacking in merit' was because of 'normalization' of the 'colour, English accent and cultural capital' that comes from 'an upper caste middle class background'.

A study of migrant 'lodge based' sex workers in Goa, suggested that they are more independent and have 'greater power to negotiate' their working conditions than those in red light areas. Based on their statements, it was argued that they had 'consciously decided' to practice sex work despite 'risks', 'instability' and 'unreliability' - because other options before them did not pay enough for survival, and that legalization of sex work 'was not on their minds' but they wanted to be free of police harassment.

One survey of 3 categories of policewomen - (1) the new all women Veerangana police commando unit in Assam, (2) women traffic police, (3) and the All Women Police Station in Guwahati, pointed to greater public respect for Veeranganas and least to women traffic police, within a broader argument that all of them enjoy 'more autonomy, liberty and equality than before' despite lack of adequate support structures for their 'natural needs'. Another study on women traffic police constables in Delhi, inducted as part of the strategy to project Delhi as a 'Global' city, held that although lack of public utilities and facilities, difficulties in coping with job and familial responsibilities, and the impact of working in a 'masculine job' on notions of womanhood, chastity and domesticity are significant, with the entry of women into the "forbidden" domain, even men's homosocial interactions acquire new dynamics in presence of women colleagues.

A study of 8 food processing units in Manipur provided detailed evidence of gender inequalities in division of labour, skills and use of technology, and highlighted the absence of women at the supervisor and CEO levels despite their constituting more than half of the workforce, with the solitary female supervisor earning the least among all supervisors. Another study focused on tribal women vendors in Imphal who came there from the hills, appeared as 'outsiders' to women vendors of the city's 'mainstream society'. Although lacking basic rights to vending space, clean drinking water, storage, sanitation, loans, health, etc., it was argued that the work space became a place for companionable socialization for the women.

A study of the overwhelmingly female vegetable market vendors of Lall Market, Gangtok, found that it was dominated by migrant but urban women vendors with very few coming directly from rural areas managing to find space for themselves. The study argued that the lack of licenses in the vegetable section of the market is responsible for power politics among vendors over working space as well as for the inhospitable conditions, lack of facilities, and targeting by civic bodies and govt. representatives.

Drawing on a study of the tourist industry in Karnataka, one paper critiqued the claims of empowerment of women through promotion of tourism as merely tokenistic and lacking in awareness of the several barriers faced by women in tourism destinations, whether as street vendors, artisans or sex workers. Another investigated of 5 Muslim women working as family breadwinners in Delhi, and concluded that as women household heads, they were triply disadvantaged by poverty, gender discrimination and absence of support, and that their informal sector employment was underpaid, without any protection, precautions, or control over working hours described the harsh conditions of construction and brick kiln migrants from Orissa in Hyderabad under neo-liberalism, there was further casualisation of women's work in the informal sector.

Five papers on domestic workers included a survey in Tiruchirapalli which showed poverty and husband's alcoholism to be overwhelming reasons for taking to domestic work, the survey gave a BC + SC profile of domestic workers, and showed most tasks has being done by all, but cleaning drains/toilets and ironing done only by SCs; prohibitions on using toilets in their workplaces, lack of paid leave, general physical stress and emotional unhappiness were prominent findings (74% reporting crying alone). Two participants presented their thoughts on domestic worker migrants from the northeast. Drawing on narratives of 19 domestic workers in Delhi, one paper argued that their vulnerability is not contingent on their employers being *especially* 'oppressive' since power and privilege are inherently entrenched in the space of the 'home' of the employer. Missing or unattended 'valuables' are thus 'a source of worry and fear for workers' on whom the burden of proof that they are not thieves weighs heavily - even if no explicit accusation is made - and is heightened by the discourse that portrays domestic workers as criminals.

Another paper focused on singleness at the point of migration among domestic workers commuting from rural Bengal to Kolkata, the worker's construction as a 'good woman' for supporting her family in need, but also 'transgressive' when unable to fulfill her family's daily care needs.

One paper drew on a study of adolescents recruited under 'Sumangali or Subhomangala scheme' and 'Thrimagal Thirumana Thittam', (collectively called the 'Camp Labour Scheme') to work at factories in the textile belt of Tamilnadu and camped in hostels - on the promise of a lumpsum after three years for 'marriage assistance'. It was argued that here patriarchy and capitalism combine to reinforce regressive customs related to marriage - targeting girls of marginalized communities to exploit them through low wages and poor conditions of work.

From a perspective that women's work - (even when commodified as 'exchange value labour') - is culturally and economically devalued, one paper argued that 'informalisation and export of *care workers*' have led to a 'pyramidal structure' - with an elite of protected registered trained nurses working with technology ('constructed as masculine') and managerial/administrative functions at the top, and a casualised base of attendants and private nurses doing the menial work and servicing body needs of patients (considered 'dirty' and 'distasteful') that makes for differentiation within the existing female labour force in a hierarchical labour market rather than a change in the gender composition of nursing labour.

The last paper was based on a qualitative study of 3 active members of a wastepickers' trade union in Pune. It was argued that activism in a labour organization translates into changes in gender divisions in the home and domestic violence through the interplay of material, cognitive and relational pathways. Improved material resources and changes in identity and sense of self due in the women were creating conditions under which their husbands seemed more open to change with improved standard of living, more facilities for their children and 'a sense of pride' in their wives becoming 'smart'.

## SUB THEMES

# Women in Urban India: Poverty and Violence

Coordinator: Nilanjana Sengupta

Issues discussed ranged from urban poverty including health, education, displacement, migration, resistance to issues of sex work, trafficking and rehabilitation to the meanings, experiences, portrayals of violence as well as its redressal in urban spaces. The papers explored experiences in various parts of the country from Delhi, Faridabad and other cities in Haryana in the North, to cities in Tamil Nadu in the South, to Kolkata, Durgapur and a few cities of Orissa in the East, to Dibrugarh and Guwahati in the North East as well as some macro studies on pan urban experiences.

Gendered urban poverty manifests itself in many ways ranging from problems of basic amenities, health and education for the poor to multiple cycles of displacement to issues of intermittent and poorly paid employment opportunities. A paper drawn from doctoral research at a rehabilitation site in Kolkata, raised two important issues: the heterogeneity of the poor urban populace based not only on their residence and its legal status but also on the kind of negotiations with the state in terms of compensation and rehabilitation. A differentiated approach to the question of urban poor in terms of compensation and legal recognition fractures the possibility of collective resistance. The paper suggested the spatial metaphor of poverty such as the city of poor as against the city of development. A paper on Dibrugarh also pointed to the uneven compensation policy where a large number of households displaced first due to river erosion and then construction of embankments were denied any compensation because they were found to be occupying Government owned land. Many of these households were also female headed owing to the phenomenon of male migration. Women from such displaced families doubled up as construction workers or paid domestic workers during the day and sex workers at night. After trying to rebuild homes despite Government orders and facing demolition time and again, these households have taken a different path of resistance. Working in different parts of the city during the day, they come back to their old site of residence along the river bank and stay in rooms rented for the night. The author termed this as 'surreptitious settlement'.

The issue of resistance came up in yet another paper in the context of Durgapur, an industrial town in West Bengal. Research on women workers in the informal sector, showed that central trade unions often subsumed specific issues of women workers into token forms of resistance and instead focused on garnering women's support for the larger 'party' or a masculinist union agenda that consciously avoided any gendered reading of the situation or struggles. This severely curtailed the radical potential of struggle by women workers. Another paper explored the ways in which feminist voices have been depoliticized and women have been rendered invisible or treated as mere appendages of their communities in electoral politics. While up to the 1990s, there was a collective conscience of women's issues, these were framed as social and not overt political projects either by the State or sometimes the actors in these movements. On other occasions, specific gender questions were subsumed by other categories of identity and class politics. However, with the onset of liberalization and the emergent imagination of the individual as a free agent, the discourse on gender and especially on women's rights has been marked by a lack of collective strength as each individual is seen to be acting in her own interest. Therefore, whereas the momentum of feminist interventions in the early years of post independent India was coloured by the imposition of the 'social', the 'individual' has increasingly hijacked that space, devoid of historicity but complete with meritocracy and libertarian emancipation. Questions were raised on whether such 'urban' imagining and practice of feminist politics can incorporate Dalit and minority community women. The collective identity based politics that these groups represent may be unable to engage with an individualistic politics at the center of which is an ahistorical self.

A paper focusing on state facilities for the urban poor in Girgaon, a textile district in Mumbai, held that with de-industrialization of the region and the closing down of textile mills, the health and the education sectors in the region have undergone a paradigm shift. There has been a consistent manufacturing of public consent for downplaying the role of state in welfare, in favour of privatization of health and education. For example, municipal schools are being demolished or being rented out to private players in education. NGOs funded by international agencies are also playing an important role in monitoring. The manufacturing of public consent on the shift away from Government to the private based on the logic of increased efficiency applies to the health sector as well. ESI hospitals are increasingly focused on profit generation that is being invested in setting up teaching institutes. Public-private partnership is emerging as a popular model. Thus instead of struggling for entitlements and demanding better standards in Government institutions, the urban poor are being co-opted into the model of privatization on the logic of inherent efficiency of market led institutions.

The abolitionist versus the legalization debate on sex work/commercial sex was revisited in a paper. In the background of her research on trafficking in Guwahati in 2012-13, it was observed that the Immoral Sex Trafficking Act frames the woman as the naïve victim in the mould of patriarchy and the trafficker as the monster, obliterating any nuances of voluntary sex work. While sex work may be forced or may derive from pressing economic conditions, there is also a possibility of voluntary sex work or an agency that emerges over a period of time. A related issue is the multiple occupational identities that sex workers may assume. Several presentations pointed to the phenomenon of women working simultaneously as sex workers and workers in low end informal sector jobs. An important question was raised about the primacy of sex work as an identity for a woman who had multiple occupations including sex work. Another paper focused on the market for sex work, the reasons for entry and the conditions of work including violence, how with advances in the life cycle of these workers, new strategies and options had to be explored in order to survive in the market. Health was another concern driving this research and it was found that an NGO working with the community had conducted HIV-AIDS tests without the consent of the workers on the pretext of conducting basic blood tests. This is a legal violation of the right to an informed consent. It is debatable whether such violations stem out of a concern to protect the health of the workers or out of a need to fulfill the agenda of the funding organization associated with the NGO. While protected sex is important both for the worker and her client, it is not always the prerogative of the worker to ensure protected sex and in such conditions a worker who is marked as a carrier of HIV-AIDS may find it difficult to survive in the labour market. In such conditions, informed consent to such tests and counseling both personally and as part of the community are essential.

A final theme was that of rehabilitation site/shelter home for trafficked women in Guwahati. Though interviews did not include the inmates of the shelter home, discussions with officials and staff of the home gave an insight into the process of rehabilitation

through an organized disciplined routine including vocational and literary training and psychological counseling that might facilitate the integration of the victims into the mainstream. Despite provision of basic facilities, it was found that victims who had enjoyed a measure of freedom and luxury in their previous situation resented the sparse and sanitized lifestyle of the shelter home and ran away. However, those who had faced violence and poverty in the trafficked situation adjusted much more easily to the new way of life. An important issue in this context was whether the process of rehabilitation was premised on a boarding school model or a disciplinary regime depriving them of any recreational space and repressing their need and desire for sexual intimacy and male companionship.

Some presentations focused on violence faced by migrant women and poor workers in informal sectors. While one paper discussed the politics of space and violence in the context of North Eastern students in the city of Delhi, another talked about the relation between work and violence in the context of migrant workers in the city of Guwahati. There was surveillance in the name of protection in University Hostels as well as the sexual harassment on the streets faced by North-Eastern women students. Among women domestic workers and construction workers, work and earnings did not necessarily lead to increased status or diminished domestic violence. Moreover, many of the workers had to face sexual harassment at the workplace because of their vulnerable status as poor migrant workers. A paper also discussed the issue of violence and sexual harassment of women workers residing in urban slums, both at home as well as the workplace. A study of a slum area in Ballabgarh in Faridabad, pointed to the difficult situation in which women find themselves first because of the double burden of work and second because of the double experience of violence. Women faced violence as vulnerable workers in unorganized sectors and also as working women whose earnings were important for economic survival of the families but whose financial independence threatened the masculinity of their husbands. The study showed the insensitivity of the police in registering cases of domestic violence or sexual harassment owing to their general apathy towards the slum dwelling population and especially slum dwelling women. Another study based on the city of Guwahati observed that married women and older women reported less violence in the public domain than younger unmarried women. The cultural construction of the potential victim as a young and unmarried were forcing many women including women from non Hindu communities to adopt visible signs of Hindu marriage such as the Sindur or Mangalsutra in their attempt to avoid violence.

The implementation of various laws on violence against women was another important theme that was discussed. The findings of a study on the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005, conducted in four states- Maharashtra, Haryana, Orissa Tamil Nadu looked at the implementation of the law as well as profiling the women who filed cases under the Act. The study found that most of the applicants were in the age group of 18-30 years. There was gross dissatisfaction with the implementation of the Act because the types of orders passed by the Court had little bearing on the continuous and multiple forms of violence faced by women. An important question on law was raised by a presentation on acid attacks on women. The Supreme Court ruling on monetary compensation for victims of acid attack was both inadequate to cover costs and difficult to implement. The physical disability produced by such attacks and the lack of rehabilitation facilities and other opportunities for such victims needs to be considered. Victims of acid attacks are neither included under gender violence in NCRB Records, nor covered by the Disability Act. It was proposed that victims of acid attacks should be included under the Disability Act and provided the opportunities and rights that the Act enshrines.

The Delhi Rape Case of December 2013 was central to two presentations, one which explored the construction of the victim woman and the second, which explored the media construction of a new masculinity. One questioned whether the public rage over the rape case centred on metaphors of violating honour and outraging modesty at all veered towards a feminist politics. The paper brought forth feminist notions of restorative justice to critique the construction of the 'good victim' a Braveheart, who fights back and demands severe punishment vis a vis the 'bad victim' who focuses more on personal healing and survival. Another paper, discussed the post rape media construction of the pan Indian man who is 'modern', 'sensitive' and 'liberated' but does not overstep the boundaries of 'Indian tradition' This particular construction of man hinges on a pan Indian identity base, subsuming the specificities of class, caste, community and language. Soft masculinity facilitates and protects the new woman's (also 'modern' and 'liberated' but within the bounds of 'tradition') agency up to the point where it does not transgress notions of 'honour'.

Finally, the tension between fighting harassment and preventing surveillance or moral policing came up in a presentation. In the process of making the public space such as the workplace safe for women, one needs to guard against rendering it asexual and devoid of romantic and sexual possibilities. Hinging on notions of mutual consent, the paper talked about upholding such possibilities and fighting as much against surveillance and attempts at sanitisation as against violence and sexual harassment.



## SUB THEMES

## Pluralities: ethnicity, language and gender

Coordinator: Tiplut Nongbri

The discussion centered around eight papers spread over two sessions. The session began with a brief introduction by the coordinator on the significance and relevance of the theme on India in general and the Northeast in particular. Except for one paper by a faculty member in a university, all the papers were by young research scholars located in different institutions in the country: Universities of Delhi, Hyderabad, Jadavpur, Pune, JNU, Vacha Trust and Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi Vishwavidyalay(Wardha) .

Subject-wise, the papers can be grouped into three broad categories. The first group dealt with the poor access of the socially marginalized, notably women, dalits and ethnic minorities, to language and the knowledge it generates. Given that language is not only a means of communication, but also a source of identity and livelihood, the denial of access to language pose serious obstacles to the empowerment of women and vulnerable segments of society. This fact comes out clearly in the paper on the access to language by women and girls in the slums of Mumbai and another paper on the Anglo-Indians of Kolkata. Interestingly, while lack of proficiency in English was a major hindrance for the slum dwellers of Mumbai to access the vast opportunities brought in by the process of globalization and the IT revolution in the country, for the Anglo-Indians, who view and use English as their mother tongue, knowledge of English by itself offers them no real advantage. Denied access to elite institutions because of their poor economic condition, they are forced to learn and interact in Bengali the dominant language in the state. As a result, most young Anglo-Indians fared badly in studies seriously damaging their job prospects. The Anglo-Indians' poor proficiency in Bengali is particularly disadvantageous for the women of the community, who unable to communicate with their numerically dominant Hindi and Bengali-speaking neighbours and are reduced to a life of double marginality. The last paper in this group takes on the marginalization of women and dalits from Sanskrit, language of Brahmanism. The paper questions the use of Sanskrit as a 'language of God' and its monopoly by Brahmins, she calls to the marginalized to resist this hegemony. In a distinctly combative note and apparent reversal of MN Srinivas' 'Sanskritisation' model of social mobility, the author turns to popular history to cull out several examples of women who used the knowledge of Sanskrit to challenge the very structure of hegemony that made the language a tool for the perpetuation of hierarchy.

In the second category were papers largely based on materials drawn from literary texts. Using novels as a prism to explore the complex and varied lives of women, the papers take the audience to different ethnographic contexts and locales. The first paper deals with the representation of Indian women in the former colonies and western locations. Critiquing the representation of Indian diasporic women as a monolithic, passive and mysterious 'other' meekly submitting to the dictates of patriarchy in western writings, the works of contemporary Indian diasporic writers highlight the diversity of women's lives characterized as they are by multiple identities, sexual choices, gendered ideologies, and show of resistance to the same, thus calling for more nuanced interpretation of the situation. Moving from the distant and sanitized world of the diaspora, two papers focus on the heartland of Bengal and Jharkhand and the checkered lives of women and girls in these locales. Drawing on the works of Prabha Khaitan, Maheshweta Devi and Nirmala Putul, the papers reveal, irrespective of locale middle-class Kolkata or tribal-concentrated Jharkhand, sexual violence and abuse of women and girls is endemic. Even the home is no longer a safe place for women, with fathers, brothers and husbands increasingly turning from protectors into predators of women's sexuality, a point forcefully illustrated by the rape of Priya and apathy of the family to her plight in Khaitan's novel. The same is true of tribal women, who despite the professed egalitarianism of their society are primarily viewed as sex objects by men. However, the chair was quick to note the slight variation in the views of Maheshweta Devi and Nirmala Putul with respect to the position of women in tribal societies, which took the discussion to the methodological debate on the 'insider'/'outsider' (emic/etic) perspective, and a note of caution from the chair against the colonial tendency to romanticize tribes. Similar danger was expressed about the 'western gaze' in the context of another paper.

The third group of papers takes the discussion to conflict-ridden Northeast, with one paper each on Nagaland and Assam. In the Nagaland paper, uses the policy of 33 per cent reservation for women in electoral politics and the state's staunch resistance to the same as a pivot to highlight the highly patriarchal structure of Naga society, which denies social and political rights to women. At the heart of the matter is the conflict between loyalty to tradition, that privileges men and democratic principles that guarantee social, political and economic right to women and other vulnerable segments of society. Complicating the issue is the special constitutional provision embodied in Article 371A designed to safeguard Naga culture and tradition, which has not only put women's demand for reservation at loggerheads with both the traditionalists and upholders of the constitution but also barred their access to the many progressive legislations introduced by the centre for the uplift of women, such as laws guaranteeing equal rights to property available to Hindu women. What is a matter of concern is that while women are increasingly raising their voice against the discriminatory practices, ethnic loyalty and hold of tradition make the struggle extremely difficult for them, a fact demonstrated by the ambivalence of civil society towards the policy.



Women are not only victims of tradition ethnic conflict has also accentuated the vulnerability of women worldwide. This fact vividly comes out in a paper on Assam. Delving into the peace process in Assam in the aftermath of the protracted conflict that rocked the state since Independence, the paper shows how ethnic conflict has not only seriously altered the perception of 'self' and 'other' but also given rise to new forms of violence against women both in symbolic and physical terms. The author is particularly concerned at the 'normalizing' of conflict-associated violence against women and the corresponding silencing of their voice and that of other marginal groups (notably the Bodos and Muslims) in the peace narratives of the state.

Collectively, 3 points emerged from the papers and discussions that followed.

1. The papers reveal the intersectionality of caste, class, ethnicity and gender in the subordination of women, which strongly suggests that solution to the gender question will have to be fought on multiple fronts not on the plank of patriarchy alone.
2. When women dare to defy the system, success is sure to come. The victory may not be in tangible and immediate terms in the sense of complete overthrow of oppression. The very act of resistance is empowering by equipping women with a voice, which together with other voices become powerful enough to shake the foundation of the oppressive regime.
3. Processes captured in the papers indicate that social and political crises act as impetus for movement/s to take place, be it in the domain of literature, law or social movement. This fact is illustrated by the surge of critical writings and changes in law in the wake of the Mathura and Vishakha rape cases. On the empirical plane, we see it in the mass movements led by young educated youth in India's metropolitan cities and smaller town post the December 16 rape of the 23 years old para medical student in 2012. Similar process is visible in the Northeast, which saw the phenomenal rise in women's movement in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram as a reaction to atrocities perpetrated by army personnel on hapless citizens.

#### SUB THEMES

## Equality, Conflict, Pluralism and Women's Studies

Coordinators: Swati Dyahadroy, Anagha Tambe, Mallarika Sinha Roy, Papori Bora

Two panels were organized under this subtheme: a) Gender, Conflict and the State and (b) Gender, Pluralism and Religion

A paper held that the women's movement in Manipur redefined the relationship between the home and the public whereby the activities of home shaped, nurtured and conditioned political discourse of public domain in Manipur. Another paper discussed the emergence of the women's movement in Nagaland, especially the role of the Naga Mothers Association and how it has redefined politics in the state and also emphasized the challenges faced by the women's movement in the state. A third paper examined discourses of shame by looking at a theatre performance in Manipur and linking it to the 2004 protests in Kangla while another looked at feminist critiques of the legal interpretations of rape.

The study on the contributions of women's movement in Manipur- especially Nupi Lal (women's war) and Meira Paibi Movement in bringing [ethnic] nationalism in Manipur, spoke about the idea of nationalism dominated by a discourse of patriarchal masculinity in India. Women are largely seen as 'moral and psychological' motivator of male counterparts in their struggles for national freedom. The activities of women during national movement have been reduced to private affairs within the home domain with no direct contribution in the movement. Such nationalist discourse which sources from the stereotypical construction of nationalist narratives to that of 'public' and 'private' will hold unreliable to study colonial and post colonial 'national' movement in Manipur. 'Ethnic nationalist' movement in Manipur has significant departures from Partha Chatterjee's nationalist framework of 'the inner' and 'outer domain' of nationalism in India. This paper argues that women's movement in Manipur redefined the relationship between the home and the public and how the activities of home shaped, nurtured and conditioned political discourse of public domain in Manipur. Therefore, a division between private and public sphere is attainable in Manipuri society, such a division cannot construe how 'private domain' determines and constitutes the structures and functions of public domain. The history of 'nationalist' movement in Manipur is predominantly 'womanised' and so, any attempt to derive the notion of nationalism from any dominant model of 'men centric masculine nationalism' will not only deny political subjectivity of women- 'women as conscious political being' but also it will erode the very meaning of 'nationalist movement' in Manipur. In other words, women's movement constitutes and redefines the meaning of 'political' in the political history of Manipur. However, marginalisation of women in the construction of 'ethnic nationality' further leads to deviate issues of equality and equity of women from the dominant agenda of national development.

Looking at the history of women's movement, the second paper stressed the importances of how Women's movement emerged in the region. The Women's movement in Nagaland emerged as Naga Mothers Association (NMA) as a response to political unrest

and militarization in the state. With the conflict and violence touching every life in the state, the women group felt the need to come together to address serious problems faced by the state as result of the political unrest. Thus the Naga Mothers Association (NMA) was formed on 14 February 1984 as a state-level voluntary organization mandated to fighting social evils and problems.

A paper looked at the women's movement in North East India, especially the Naga Mothers Association (NMA). NMA have battled serious social and law-and-order problems in the northeast. The NMA's identity of not just as women but as "Mothers" needs to critically articulated and interrogated. The social, economic, religious and political history needs to be theorized to understand the role they have played in different sphere of life in the state and also in the larger political struggle and peace process.

One of the questions which reading Talal Asad's essay 'Thinking about Agency and Pain' gives rise to is: what is the location of pain? Is it in the pained body? Is it in the people who observe or witness this pain? Is it in the space between? We could ask similar questions about the location of shame. Is shame located in the space in between the 'shamed body' and the 'shaming look'?

This paper sought to examine two instances of performance of shame in contemporary Manipur. During the climax of Manipuri director, H. Kanhailal's play "Draupadi" (2001), veteran actress Sabitri Heisnam appears in the nude on stage, having discarded all her clothes one by one, in protest against her rapists. We are, the paper argues, forced to witness a willing performance of shame by someone who can be called, after Asad, an 'agent of shame'. Three years later, in July 2004, a group of Manipuri women stripped naked in front of the Western Gate of Kangla fort in Imphal, in order to protest the brutal rape and death of Thangjam Manorama, a 34-year-old suspected insurgent, whom the Indian army had picked up from her house and shot dead a few days earlier. From the evidence gathered on the field so far, it is fairly certain that the individual activists at Kangla were not aware of the existence of "Draupadi", which was performed only twice in Imphal in 2000-2001 and nearly-banned by an enraged community that declared Sabitri a 'whore' for her shamelessness.

The paper sought to examine this apparent paradox: the differential configurations/receptions of nudity within these strangely reverberating theatrical and political events in contemporary Manipur (caught in what one may call, after Benjamin, a 'historical time-lapse camera'). What are the contours of the 'respectable' and the 'necessarily' political, as against that which is deemed mere 'aesthetics' and willy-nilly located in the domain of pleasure? What then is this basic antagonism in situations of political extremity between the regime of pleasure and aesthetics— the wasteful, so to say, and the domain of the properly political and revolutionary: the realm of pain undertaken of necessity?

The brutality of incidents involving rape, sexual violence and its various manifestations in women's lives are sometimes beyond the enactments of laws and legal frameworks. It requires us to have a more avid understanding of sexuality and its implications of sexual violence in society. The brutality of the gang rape of a twenty year old medical student to the rape of a five year old girl in Delhi, the incidents of rape itself demonstrate the reasons behind why sexual violence and rape are feminist issues. These issues are feminist issues which not only involve women but also transgendered and men, but the issues of sexual violence affect women very differently as a group.

There are differences within the legal discourse on the definition of rape but the idea predominantly present, consistent with all legal traditions is that the act of rape involves some form of penetration of a woman (and in some cases a man) and the second is that the act is forced without the consent of the woman or the man concerned. Rape is an expression of general male violence against women. There are other arguments that justify the need to track the legal system and how it functions to authorize and legitimize such violence against women. The rape trials explicitly demonstrate the nature of law and sexual violence and how they function to maintain the power and dominance of the men over women as a group.

In the above context, there is a need to discuss the feminist perspectives on rape and how this relates to the understanding of rape within the legal discourse. How the idea of consent and coercion which works to produce as well as disqualify the evidence of rape needs to be understood through the feminist perspective on the legal system. The legal reasoning of rape becomes limited when notions of consent and coercion are taken into account in rape trials as it does not account for the subjectivity of human experiences. The courtroom talk also reproduces certain biases on caste, class etc which impact judicial decision. The legal system obscures the experiences of women who experience rape and sexual assault by the extra legal considerations such as morality, virtuousness and appropriate sexual behavior. How the legal discourse also constructs and discriminates between what it considers to be a reasonable woman and unreasonable woman. The limited understanding of rape as a crime in the legal system discounts the subjectivity of experiences, ideas of consent and coercion by a predetermined yardstick of 'reasonable behaviour'. The understanding of sexuality within the legal discourse needs to be broadened along with transforming the judicial system by challenging the legal positivism in legal analysis. The legal analysis should not only encompass a broader theoretical base but also be made socially responsible for the crimes against women. How the patriarchal social and sexual assumptions can be challenged in the judicial discourse to prevent stereotyping of men and women's experiences in rape cases also needs to be understood from the feminist perspective.

A paper examined how the threat of communal violence haunts Bengali Muslims even though communal riots have been rare in Bengal after 1964. This threat perception and insecurity especially affects the collective lives of Muslim women. Two papers were feminist readings of epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana respectively while another focused on the socio-economic effects of marginalization of Muslims in a settlement in Delhi based on fieldwork experience. By drawing on her life-long experience, Gabrielle Dietrich focused on the importance of the issue of secularism today and related it to the larger history of the women's movement in India. Another paper focused on the politics of Muslim women's groups in India caught within the nation-state and their community, while a paper focused on the importance of self-reflexivity of researchers in dealing with survivors of sexual violence.

The first recorded communal outbreak in Bengal occurred in the industrial suburbs of Calcutta in May 1891. It was followed by the Bakr Id disturbance of 1896 & the Tala outbreak of 1897. During the twentieth century, the communal riots of 1918 and 1946, have been extensively documented in fiction, memoirs as well as serious academic research, drawing its data from police files and government reports.

Whereas pre-47 riots in West Bengal were mostly sparked off by the issues of cow-slaughter and 'music before mosques', post-47 riots in West Bengal were provoked more by news of atrocities perpetuated on the Hindus of East Pakistan. Although communal riots have been very rare in Bengal after 1964, riots with their macabre violence continue to haunt the individual and collective memories of Muslim women. More important than memories are anxious forebodings even when actual violence is extremely rare. The 'fear' of annihilation by the 'other' community becomes all the more urgent and inescapable after the Gujarat carnage of 2002. The eruption of communal violence elsewhere in the country shapes the lives and sensibilities of Bengali Muslims.

A paper chose to focus on the narratives of Bengali Muslim women, on the basis of my findings of an extensive fieldwork in Kolkata and Burdwan. It seeks to address how the possibility of attack haunts most women of the community. This sense of insecurity is articulated in spite of the growth of communal solidarity in ghettoized neighbourhoods. Not only individuals, but institutions like factories and hostels belonging to Muslims also search for security in Muslim majority areas.

Though there is a marked cultivation of Bengalinness among Bengali Muslims and they try to identify themselves with the mainstream culture in a variety of ways, there is a deep-seated insecurity working within the minority complex. Such anxieties are fed from past and present sources, personal perceptions as well as propaganda by religious fundamentalists.

A paper attempts to look at retellings of the Ramayana through a feminist perspective focusing on Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana*. Pattanaik's work is the latest retelling of Ramayana with the title of *Sita* and was published in the year 2013. There have been several studies on the Ramayana from several perspectives namely caste, class, feminist etc. Scholars have also studied the retellings of Ramayana in almost all genres including folk songs. Pattanaik's retelling as the title '*Sita*' held great promise. Instead, it was a celebration of the conventional and typical *Sita*. Pattanaik's treatment is dignified and magnanimous with *Sita* as a Goddess. His tone is formal and reverential and at the end of each chapter there are stories from various retellings with critical references. This paper proposes to address the following issues. Is *Sita* forced into captivity by society? What is the reason for her 'glorified domesticity and silence'? Is *Sita* not a model for Patriarchal control (wrong *Sita* taken as a right example)? Why does the burden of balance and welfare fall on *Sita*'s and eventually women's shoulders to this day? Why *Sita* and consequently women are seen as the body in need of discipline both mentally and sexually? Lastly why despite having a 'choice' does *Sita* choose to be *Gauri* (docile and domesticated) rather than *Kali* (wild and untamed)? The paper problematized the identity of women based on *Sita*.

The Sachar Committee Report (2006) had given more importance to the socio-economic backwardness eschewing the core issues pertaining to religion, culture and Muslim personal law. It is not only because these issues are sensitive in our politics but also because locating all these core issues within the Islamic discourse with the aim of either securing justice for women or comprehending the 'equality question' is an enormously difficult task. In Indian context, the questions of freedom and autonomy of Muslim women<sup>1</sup> have been trapped in binary of religion and secularism as well as community and the state. Therefore, the core argument of the paper is that Muslim women in India are always supposed to grapple with two very different discourses on equality and development: Islamic and state-sponsored version of rights and equality. Both these discourses have largely neglected women's quest for rights and justice. Therefore, there has been a need of an alternative discourse developed by Muslim women to address the gender question within the Islamic discourse.

In India, state-sponsored discourses have always treated Muslim women either as the wards of the minority community or as equal citizens of the country. In order to protect minority culture and identity and the promise of differentiated citizenship rights, Indian state has never intervened into the private domain of community to rescue Muslim women from several injustices relating to religious, cultural as well as legal practices. On the contrary, Islamic discourse on women's rights and gender justice has been

<sup>1</sup> Muslim women in India should not be considered as a homogenous entity. For the theoretical requirement in addressing the equality question of Muslim women, the category has been applied.

constructed, perceived and interpreted in such a manner that the relationship between gender and Islam seems to be incompatible. It revolves around the politics of misinterpretation and misappropriation of the Quranic verses on women's rights in this male dominated society. These interpretations relating to talaq, polygamy, burqa as well as inheritance rights revolve around the unholy nexus between religion and patriarchy. Apart from these two discourses, an alternative discourse on Muslim women's rights within the Islamic framework developed by Muslim women themselves has been emerging to deal with the women question in India. The emergence of Muslim women's groups like Awaaz-e – Niswaan, Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan in Mumbai, All India Muslim Women Personal Law Board in Lucknow highlights the shaping of an alternative discourse on women's rights within the Islamic framework. Papers attempted to highlight the construction of gender in Islam and several factors involved in this process.

The liberal ideal of an abstract, unmarked citizen has long been a point of criticism by feminist theory and practice for its exclusionary nature. Further, the public-private dichotomy in terms of citizenship in the postcolonial Indian nation state has also emphasised the modern, secular, unmarked citizen in the public sphere, pushing all ascriptive and associational identities into private sphere. This of course has been an unsuccessful attempt in the Indian context, with caste and religious identities weaving themselves through public contexts of citizenship whether through votebanks in electoral politics or eruptions such as protests, riots and pogroms. However, the conceptualisation and implementation of a system of 'marked' citizenship – for example through reservation of seats in the Parliament for women – faces challenges as well, as seen in the opposition to 'quota within quota' reservation for Muslim and OBC women. Another question asked of this example is whether marked citizenship can be understood and enabled only through structures of formal representation.

One paper sought to examine possibilities of marked citizenship as presented by Muslim women's groups in India which have been working towards Groups such as the Bharatiya Muslim Mahila Andolan, the All India Muslim Women's Personal Law Board, Awaaz-e-Niswan and STEPS have been working in different parts of the country in various spheres, from personal law reform to formulating gender just nikahnamas or marriage contracts, to opening separate mosques for women. Some of these groups foreground their interpretations of the Quran and shariah law as gender just. Others look to bring together the Quran and the Constitution, seeing the two documents as but can be seen as synergistic, as the object of both is assumed to be human dignity. These efforts are particularly interesting when seen in the formulation of nikahnamas that seek to redefine conjugal relations in the light of feminist interpretations of Quranic injunctions while at the same time incorporating the provisions of maintenance as given in the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act 1986 and redress against domestic violence as given in the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005.

The efforts of these women's groups represent a claim of ownership on space, political and social, discursive and material, that uses both the 'secular', 'public' space of the Constitution and 'private' religious texts in a strategic manner for the purpose of gender justice. This reveals possibilities of embodying and performing citizenship which do not segregate Muslim women into being abstract women in the public sphere and Muslim wives, daughters or widows in the private, governed by personal laws, thus pointing to possibilities of 'marked citizenship'.

A study explored perceptions, expectations, and aspirations of Muslim girl students (15-25 years), on their own schooling, and community's attitude towards girls' education in context of existing educational provisions by state and community's own initiatives to educate girls. The landscape for the study was a Muslim dominated habitation, New Kardam Puri, in North-East Delhi. Using ethnographic observations and triangulation approach, researcher also tried to understand the household dynamics of the inhabitants that play a crucial role in getting educational opportunities for girls. The study showed that *how general attitude, due to existing stereotypes, of non-Muslim community members<sup>2</sup> towards Muslim community contributes to the lack of understanding on the issue of the education and employment among Muslim girls.* Confirming to earlier studies (Quazi, 1999; Sachar Committee Report, 2005; Nayar, 2007; Hasan and Menon, 2006), the study also showed that the multifaceted nature of the problem, related to social and economic issues pose a big barrier in the access of educational opportunities for Muslim girls. It is observed that in midst of inadequate educational provisions in the form of a ill-structured Senior Secondary School, the State fails to address the very crucial issues of safety and security related to their religious identity of the population. It is not only the access but also the teaching-learning environment that further deprives the Muslim girls from accessing adequate educational opportunities. Some of the interesting findings of the study revealed the indifferent attitude of the school teachers towards the Muslim girl students, limited options of subjects, poor transition rate at secondary and higher secondary level of schooling and further leading to poor enrolment in higher education. Community's efforts in educating girls were visible only in the form of Urdu training centres, or elder women teaching Urdu and Arabic to young girls, though the community members desire to educate their daughters in mainstream education as well. The study also included 20 case studies of Muslim girl students, parents, teachers and other community members that revealed that how these Muslim girls, however, begins their primary schooling, with some aspirations of becoming something or the other in future like- fashion designer, teacher, lawyer, business women and so on, but as they move on to Secondary and Senior Secondary stage, these aspirations comes in conflict with the societal compulsions resulting in compromising with their dreams.

A paper explored the feminist interpretation of Draupadi in the epic Mahabharat as described in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's novel

2 Non-Muslim community members included, neighbors, teachers, Principal of the school surveyed.



The Palace of Illusions. Divakaruni's novel *The Palace of Illusions* is a text written from the perspective of Paanchali or Draupadi. Divakaruni narrates Mahabharat from Draupadi's point of view and gives characters of the epic a different dimension altogether. Seeing through the gendered lens of Draupadi, Divakaruni has raised pertinent questions of agency, sexuality, sexual desire, pleasure and power which are unheard or gets curtailed in the masculine epic Mahabharat.

A paper dealt with a longstanding debate in a new present day context. Recalling how Vibhuti Patel vociferously protested against the breaking of a coconut at the opening of the IAWS Conference in Trivandrum in the early 1980s, the writer remembered running a workshop on women exploring religion as a source of sustenance and hope in a liberating perspective at the autonomous women's conference in Mumbai in December 1986. Between these two events, the anti Sikh riots of 1984 had galvanized women's movements into decisive interventions. There were heated debates whether the women's movement could be a force against communalism. Flavia Agnes showed how there was a majoritarian bias in the Indian women's movement during the IAWS conference in Jadavpur University. Since the debates on the option of a uniform civil code, women's movement had to modify its secular aspirations and had to acknowledge that their ideas had been high jacked by communal forces and there was no other option than working out gender just solutions for each religious community separately. The destruction of Babri Masjid in November 1992 and 2002 communal violence in Gujarat made it clear that communalism and even fascism were real possibilities. In neighbouring Sri Lanka, genocidal policies against Tamils are paired with a militarized Buddhist chauvinism. In Pakistan, the struggle for women's education of which Malala Yousafzai and other young women of the Swat Province have become a symbol, has injected new energy into the women's movement and other democratic struggles

Meeting in the North Eastern region, the complexities of multi religious and ethnicities are evident. Assam and several other states have faced ethnic tensions due to migration and rising anti-Muslim sentiments. While Arunachal Pradesh is largely leaning towards the "Hindu Nation", other states, with Christian majorities, like Nagaland and Mizoram, live in a situation where Christianity is virtually a state religion. In this context, re-interpretation of scriptures and debate on position of women in customary laws are significant but problematic as well. The character of Hindutva in the shape of BJP or RSS is often not understood.

It is necessary to enter into the debate on individual rights vs. community rights and in defence of core democratic rights in a pluralistic society -a debate that goes back to the Constituent Assembly itself and some of its inconclusive aspects.

Another presentation shares an understanding of Reflexivity, its use as a research and pedagogic training tool, and its value / import to women's studies research, practice and pedagogy. Reflexivity is seen as 're-'looking at one's experience, with the aim of learning something 'new' from it. It often involves connecting one's past and present experience. It also involves drawing on and relating others' experience with one's own. It draws from Boud & Walker (1985) who talk of reflective learning, Klein (1983) who proposes 'conscious subjectivity' as an appropriate methodology for research, and (Hirway 1988) who proposes acknowledging and making explicit the 'situated view' of the knowledge producer, amongst others. Pedagogic tools that incorporate Reflexivity are effective. They are based on an understanding that draws on empathy. The curricula of Women's Studies, itself a multi-disciplinary project, must incorporate Reflexive theory and Practice to effectively imbibe and translate learnings from feminist movements and research.

#### SUB THEMES

## Education, Knowledge and Institutional Space(s)

Coordinators: Rekha Pappu, Nirmali Goswami

The subtheme enabled a focused discussion on the gender dimensions of education in institutional spaces. A range of topics and themes were addressed in relation to the theory and practice of education such as the curriculum, textbooks, policies, pedagogies, educational leadership, management, disciplinary domains, knowledge and identity formations, role of women's organizations in education, etc. About 60 abstracts were received and finally, through the three days of the conference, 24 papers were presented, of which two were invited presentations.

In the first session on "Institutional Spaces of Education", five papers were presented which examined processes not just in formal institutional space of school, college, university, but in interaction with family and labour-market in diverse social settings. A paper deliberated on girl students' experiences of schooling in a village in Andhra Pradesh by focusing on disciplining and gender differentiation processes within and outside the school space. Another examined mothering processes in relation to children's school activities in a village in Odisha, while a third presentation suggested that in contrast with other studies, a positive relationship existed between literacy and work participation rates of women in Uttarkhand. Coming to the studies located in the higher educational institutions, a study of linguistic acts, discussed processes of construction of moral-self among students of a University with

significant gender differentials. Two participants discussed under-representation of women in academic leadership positions and their perceptions about themselves and others in similar position.

The second session on “Engaging the Curriculum, Choice and School Space” included presentations on analysis of NCERT textbooks of science, human rights and gender studies, and SCERT textbooks of Assamese language. A paper analysed dominant ideologies of reproductive health and fertility of women in NCERT science textbooks from critical science literacy perspective. Similarly, one critiqued the representation of women as custodians of tradition in Assamese language text while another examined the curricula of English literature in Gauhati University and elaborated on the processes by which Human Rights and Gender studies syllabus and textbooks were developed at the NCERT. Two other paper writers deliberated on the hetero-normative cultures of the school space where expressions of all other forms of sexualities are policed and prohibited while another paper discussed the factors influencing choice of higher education among women students in Engineering and Liberal Arts streams.

In the session on “Feminist Pedagogies”, two papers were presented. One presentation was based on the author’s experience of teaching Gender Studies at two different levels in a Central University. She contrasted the experience of teaching courses to research scholars with teaching at the undergraduate level and sought to analyze and explain the differences in terms of institutional and structural realities of the University. Another presentation too was grounded in her personal experience and focused on the diverse nature of her experiences at three different undergraduate colleges and raised questions about the role of the management in constructing gendered identities.

The second session on sexual and other forms of harassment in campus had a panel of five speakers. The session attracted a large number of participants who responded to the presentation and joined the discussion by raising an array of issues thereby highlighting the complexities involved in the issue. Taking the recent developments in JNU as the starting point, a paper discussed the process of normalisation of violence in intimate heterosexual relationships within campus and on the responses to acts of violence as they emerged within the existing structures of hierarchy and power play. Two participants shared their findings from a gender audit that they had conducted in Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Their presentation highlighted the gendered division of forms of violence in the campus where different forms of grievance-redressal bodies existed such as the Cell for Gender Awareness and Action Against Sexual Harassment (CGAAASH) on the one hand and Anti-Ragging Cell on the other. The widespread belief that ragging happens to boys and sexual harassment to girls, affected the reporting of incidences of violence and mechanisms of handling the same.

A paper discussed institutional response to incidences of sexual violence that resorted to surveillance measures to control women’s behavior and movement. The presentation also probed the manner in which sexual harassment was dealt with in a technical-legal manner without recognizing its connections with everyday social life. Two participants presented findings from their study of mechanisms instituted by different colleges in Assam to respond to cases of sexual harassment. They found that a large number of cases were marked by the absence of any institutional mechanism for dealing with sexual harassment and in colleges that had attempted to set up redressal mechanisms, a great deal of confusion prevailed due to unavailability or lack of information about the norms for setting up of Cells in colleges.

One presentation was a reflection on the subject of sexual harassment based on her experience of leading the UGC Task Force set up to review the measures for ensuring safety of women on campuses and programs for gender sensitization. She drew attention to the inadequacy of feminist discussion on and understanding of punishment for the accused in sexual harassment cases, while also pointing to the fact that the introduction of the new Act on sexual harassment seemed to have introduced uncertainty into the status of the sexual harassment cells that had been set up in academic institutions.

A rich and useful discussion followed the presentations that were made. Audience response took the form of reporting and sharing of information and insights gathered from cases of sexual harassment that had been dealt with in different locations. There were reflections and comments from a variety of institutional and social contexts including protests about delays, about neglect of the right procedures to be followed by the complaints committees and of decisions being taken to further vested interests. The discussion also provided pointers for further deliberation and reflection. Among the issues highlighted were the need for ensuring representativeness in the committees, the need for adopting an approach that went beyond the punitive, of being sensitive to the subjectivity of the girl or woman who had filed a complaint in the first place and for developing independent procedures for cases in which the accused is the head of the institution.

Discussants also highlighted the need to broaden the scope of existing agencies to examine violence by moving beyond the term of sexual harassment in the context of the new forms of responses within and outside educational campuses from different agencies such as the police, popular media, disciplinary committee etc. The need to protect the autonomy of university and colleges committees and to rethink ways of dealing with sexual violence in campus was also emphasized. The session ended with the consensus that the issue of sexual harassment in educational spaces needed to be discussed a whole lot more to bring in a range of dimensions including the legal, ethical, social and the moral. These discussions need to be facilitated through consultations at the regional and the national levels.

The presentations on the last day of the conference were grouped under the theme “Identity Issues in Education.” There was a study of two villages in Gobindpur district of Assam which examined the educational choices made by Muslim families differentially for their sons and daughters depending on their socio-economic status. Another paper focused on the marine fishing community in Puducherry region explored the ways in which literate women in the community are at an advantage in comparison with the illiterate women as also the causes that impede some sections of women in the community from gaining literacy. A paper provided a critical analysis of the reform movement among the Muslim community in Kerala in the 19th century. The conclusion arrived at by paper presenters was that Muslim women were better off in relation to socio-cultural and educational terms in the pre-reform period.

The interventions made by the Mahila Samakhyas Programme of Assam in relation to the education of women from lower income groups of women was detailed by a paper which provided information about the structure of the federations established by the Programme and their role in ensuring educational opportunities for girls and women. Another paper analyzed the situation within an institutional space that is widely regarded as the bastion of modern education for Muslims. The paper focused specifically on the point of view of the Muslim women students who found problematic the extreme protectionist attitude of the institute towards its women students and highlighted the manner of their agentive negotiations by drawing on a framework of femininity and cultural rights. One paper foregrounded the impact of caste, community and gender on the primary education of children in Kamrup district of Assam. The institutional and educational barriers that impeded the education of children were also highlighted in her presentation as was the fact that the ascendance of communal ideologies posed a further threat to the education of children from minority communities.

## SUB THEMES

# Culture and Region

Co-ordinator: Priyam Goswami and Aparna Mahanta

47 abstracts were accepted. However, only 34 papers were presented. Culture and Region being a very broad canvas, a varied range of issues came up for discussion.

The first session a total of 10 papers were presented. Of these, four papers related to women and violence, (Dangerous Domains: New Nexus of Violence against Women in Jharkhand; Deconstructing Violence against Women in South Asian countries; Facets of Honour Killings in India and the Policy Measures to Curb it; Women and Violence in Western Uttar Pradesh), five papers to representation of women in folk songs and literary narratives (Women’s Voices in Male Genres: A Comparative Analysis of Bhojpuri Folksongs; Interrogation of Constructs about the North-East: A Reading of Literary Narratives from Assam and Nagaland; Retelling Myths and Retrieving Pluralities: Reading Women’s Alternative Narratives; ‘Najaayo Jomunaar paarey...’: A Study of Eros and the Folk Imagination in Goalporiya Loka Xangeet; Agency and Resistance in Abhiyatri) and one paper on women on performing arts. (Gender Performance of Kalaripayattu, A Martial Art of Kerala).

While all the papers were interesting when looked at in isolation, many presenters did not conceptualize their ideas in relation to the sub theme. Very few dealt with the pluralistic basis of the Indian state though some did try to analyse how an attempt is being made to negotiate the transition towards modernism and equality in different ways. The group of papers relating to representation of women in folk songs and literary narratives was interesting.

Of the ten papers, the Chairperson identified the following two papers as being the most interesting in terms of originality and research.

1. Dangerous Domains: New Nexus of Violence against Women in Jharkhand which examines the recent cases of violence against tribal and non-tribal women in the Santhal Parganas. The authors have been successful in conceptualising their ideas in relation to the sub theme by addressing multiple sites of violence and the varied disparities that persist.
2. Women’s Voices in Male Genres: A Comparative Analysis of Bhojpuri Folksongs which looks into the different genres of Bhojpuri songs and attempts a comparative analysis of the women’s voices that are reflected in them. It notes the similarities and explores the differences in the content, narrative style and attitude of the women’s voices in both the male and female genres although both have same historical, cultural and regional background.

In the second session, held on 5 February, thirteen papers were presented. Six of these related to issues of marriage, widowhood, symbolism and social practices (Women’s expression through the Symbol; A feminist Analysis of Marriage Symbol tradition; Widows of Vrindavan: Negotiating Restricted Spaces between their Spiritual and Sexual Lives; ‘Sacred’ Lives of Widows in Assam: Issues and Challenges in Gender Mainstreaming; Women Performance in Marriage Ceremony: Freedom, Knowledge Transfer and Resistance Special Reference: Marriage Ceremony in Rural Areas of North Bihar; Balancing Preachings, Practice and Science: Women and Menstruation in Goa; Women and Menstruation taboo (taking case of Assam) and seven dealt with issues relating to

gender and development. (Gross Gender Bias in a Skewed Development Paradigm; Cultural Politics of Hinduization & Indigenous Communitiess of Madhya Pradesh; Searching for the Dhentuli in Goa: Hidden Tribal Culture Sought by the Fashion Industry; Transhumance among Bhotias of Kumaon and its Gender Implication; Mukhyadhara Banam Deshaj Gyan Vyavastha: Adivasi Stree Ke Gyan Aur Sanskriti Ke Saath Antarsambandho Ki Partal; Can women create culture or just follow it in the North East Region?; The Culture of Women's Market in Manipur, a North-East Indian State).

The presenters were clearly investigating interesting and important subjects, although once again several failed to conceptualise their ideas within the parameters of the sub theme. The chairperson identified the following as the best papers.

1. *Women's Expression Through the Symbol; A Feminist Analysis of Marriage Symbol Tradition*

where the author attempts to investigate the different stages of a woman's life through symbol communication in the context of the marriage symbol tradition and tries to explore if there is any woman's voice beyond the symbol.

2. Transhumance among Bhotias of Kumaon and its Gender Implications which tries to explore the practice of seasonal movement called transhumance among Bhotias of Kumaon. Ecology has played a big role in deciding the economy and livelihood of the area. The paper looks into the differences in the changing worldview of Bhotia men and women through narratives, with respect to ecology, infrastructural development and availability of alternative livelihood options.

3. The Culture of Women's Market in Manipur, a North-East Indian State in which the authors dwell on the uniqueness of the women's market in Manipur. Women play the central role in this economic system which is based on an age-old concept of pluralism having socio-political-cultural-economic implications. An agrarian and egalitarian economy is the objective of this market and despite changes, the women of this market have still been playing significant political, cultural and social roles in contemporary Manipur.

In the third session, held on 6 February, eleven papers were presented. There were three papers covering issues of gender and power, (Women as knowers in contemporary labile communities; Recasting of Brahmanical Patriarchal system in contemporary Maharashtra; Cultural Challenges to Access Reproductive Health – A Gender Analysis among Youth of Srirangam – Temple City in Tamil Nadu) and eight papers on issues relating to the construction of femininity identity and contested social spaces. (Construction of femininity in Neo Vaishnavite Religion of Assam; Gender, Culture and Identity: Exploring the Interactions and Contestations of Group Rights and Gender Equality in North East India; Understanding gender in livelihood spaces: A study among Koli women in Mumbai; The two never shall meet? Childbirth as a Ritual Space: A study on the Dimasa community; Goa Re-lived in Mumbai Kudds through its Womenfolk; Reading the fit body: body work and identity formation in contemporary Bengal; Is Buddhism Emancipatory For Dalit Women? Focus On Contemporary Maharashtra).

The chair felt that although most of the presenters tried to conceptualise their ideas in relation to the sub theme, a few scholars took up broad issues affecting their focus adversely. He observed that on the whole the papers were interesting and dealt with new issues.

The following two papers have been identified as the best papers in this session.

4. Cultural Challenges to Access Reproductive Health – A Gender Analysis among Youth of Srirangam – Temple City in Tamil Nadu where the authors attempt to assess the cultural perspective of the youths, both male and female, and their knowledge about and attitude towards reproductive health issues and rights across class, caste, gender and culture at a micro level in the temple city of Srirangam.

5. Gender, Culture and Identity: Exploring the Interactions and Contestations of Group Rights and Gender Equality in North East India which tries to explore how group specific rights can actually bring about a serious contestation to the issue of gender equality. This paper seeks to locate the issue of cultural rights and recognition of culture in public sphere within the ethnic identity movements in Northeast India and particularly in Assam vis-à-vis the question of women's rights.

## SUB THEMES

# Women, Peace and Security in India

Coordinators: Rekha Chowdhary, Asha Hans

The papers took into account the disproportionate impact of conflict on women and girls and incorporated three major aspects, namely: State, Security, Laws from women's perspective. The presentation ranged from the critically evaluation of the existing legal



framework of the Indian security system from a feminist perspective to analyzing the real situation problems. It centered the debate around the AFSPA in both the North East and Jammu and Kashmir. The use of high level of force by both State and non-State actors remained a major concern confronting women in conflicts.

Referring to the relationship between the state, nationalism and religion, the concept of coercive security apparatus of the state was analyzed. It was argued that state security apparatus interacts with and legitimized the discourse of nationalism and religion. This, in turn, institutionalized the sites of violence against women.

Interrogating the very concept of 'security', attention was drawn to the state-centric traditional notions of 'masculine security'. Reference was also made to the gendered stereotypes that run along with this understanding of security. In this concept, women's experiences, their voices and their agency gets suppressed and rendered almost invisible. The masculine approach, it was further added, leads to the humiliation, dehumanization and marginalisation of women. It was emphasised that the security when defined in terms of 'national interest' has a very limited. Hence, it is important to deconstruct this concept.

One of the issues of concern however, was the role of women vis-à-vis the state security apparatus and security narrative. It was mentioned that women who are sufferers of the security discourse themselves endorse the nationalist ambitions of the state and the military gaze attached to it.

At the same time, the very concept of 'female victim' was also problematised. It was argued that the female victim also reinforces the image of a woman as completely powerless. Women in conflict situation, it was emphasized, go through much more nuanced experience rather than merely being the victims. By referring to them only as victims takes away their potential as survivors and as agents of change.

While analysing the role of the security laws in North East and Jammu & Kashmir, emphasis was placed on the sufferings of women. As conflict exacerbates existing power relations, women suffer increased level of gender based violence. In response to the insecurity faced by men, they impose even more stringent restrictions on women's freedom of movement. Both state and non-state actors resort to gendered forms of violence. Rapes and physical assaults on women are therefore common recurrences. This has been specifically reflected in North East. Much attention was paid on the implications of AFSPA and it was argued that its prolonged use had allowed the security forces to perpetrate abuses and Human Rights violations with impunity. About AFSPA, it was noted has failed to contain militancy but rather has contributed to human misery. When this draconian law was introduced in North East, the number of militant groups was very small. However, the number of the armed groups has now multiplied and as many as 79 armed militant groups reflect the futility of this law in even containing the militancy.

The Second theme concentrated around 'Alternative Feminist Security Paradigms'. Continuing with the critique of the existing militarized and masculinised security perspectives, the papers presenters sought to offer an alternative security perspective from a feminist standpoint. It was argued that militarization and state security system represent one of the biggest paradox of the present state system. The state system attacks the very individual that that it proclaims to protect. The dominant mainstream international relations theory, especially liberalism and realism was also critiqued. Realism's preoccupation with the state, it was argued, renders conflict within a state invisible. Meanwhile, liberal international relations theory obscures individual's social location like class, race and gender. These categories are not treated as important. It was considered imperative to rethink and re-visualize the perceptions regarding the state as well as the security system. The need for gendered lenses in international relations theory was emphasized. Feminist approaches, it was argued, would be better able to offer alternative security analysis. It is from the perspective of women only that the social construction of sexual relations in militarized society could be understood.

Referring to the lopsided approach of the Indian state towards security as it is translated into the policy framework, reference was made to defence spending. It was observed that the masculinist and patriarchal state has always prioritized defense spending in the name of security concerns. It was also observed that defence spending in the Indian budget is highest among all the development expenditures. While sufficient part of the budget is devoted to the 'security' expenses in states ridden by conflicts, the expenditure on social security and welfare is minimum. In case of North Eastern states and Jammu and Kashmir, it was pointed out that these fare badly in use of schemes such as NREGA and NRM. The figures on employment also show a downturn in these states.

A special focus of the session was on the UNSCR 1325. A number of papers discussed the possible use and problems of using this resolution in maintaining women's central position at the peace table. In India the resolution is not considered a peace measure. The problem also arises from the fact that the state does not recognize any conflict areas but calls them as disturbed areas. However, despite such problems the UNSCR continues to be a significant tool in the hands of women to press for greater gender sensitivity in peace discourse and greater participation of women in the peace process. One paper referring to the application of this resolution to the Global South maintained that actors here are 'writing' 1325 through 'acceptance, resistance and subversion.

The third session was the most important one focusing on issue of 'Women's Initiative for Peace. Referring to the masculinised

role of the state within the dominant realist paradigm and the violence perpetrated by it, the need for challenging the state security perspective and offering feminist perspectives for peace was highlighted. Also highlighted was the role of women in peace initiatives. Many presenters focused on the existing examples of women participating in the peace processes. The role of Naga Mother's Association specifically came up for discussion. Their role in spanning the peace discussions and the response of the state and non-state actors was analyzed in a critical manner. This very crucial women's initiative, it was argued, though recognized by both the state and non-state actors but was also used by both to their advantage. Women in the process were marginalized.

Another paper focused on the women of Manipur and referred to Irom Sharmila's resilience. Women of Manipur, it was emphasized represent an ethos of East Asia. This ethos is about greater freedom of women to organize and control their own lives more than in many other parts of the world. Though their inequality and oppression is not to be undermined, however, sexual freedom and opportunity to work outside the house offered them opportunities which were denied to many others. Emphasizing the role of women in East Asian cultures, besides Irom Sharmilla, reference was also made to Aung Sung Sui Kyi.

Among the major issues that were raised in this subtheme, 'Borders' remained a most crucial one. Sufficient discussion took place around the phenomenon of borders and bordering; nationalism and its implications through borders; volatility of borders; shifting borders, displacements; divided families etc. Special focus was placed on the implications of the borders on women in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Manirpur. Discussion revolved around the issues of shifting borders, divided families and role of ideology. Also discussion took place around 'camps'. In a variety of situations people have been dislocated from their roots and homes and have been living in camps. Women among the displaced by conflict in the western sector in Punjab, or communal violence in Gujrat or shellings in Jammu Kashmr, faced multiple kinds of marginalization.

Space was another major point in the discourse. The discourse on space for women ranged from Bangladeshi women in Indian prisons, women who crossed borders were adventurous and did not understand the constrained set up by borders who found no differentiation between India and Bangladesh. While these women wanted freedom from borders there were others like the migrant women consequent to riots who weave around an invisible border for reasons of security. In Gujarat a paper presented the 'Dhobi Ghat' as a space for women's conflict resolution.

The increasing circles of violence was another issue discussed where violence against women is not only perpetrated by the occupying Indian armed forces but also by the local police forces. For those who are attempting to escape the violence for instance in Manipur they become easy targets of traffickers. The breakdown of law and order, police functions, and border controls, combined with globalization's markets and open borders, contributes to an increase in the trafficking of human beings.

One important aspect of the sub theme was the use of not only case studies but also interpreting women's lives in conflict through fiction.

#### SUB THEMES

## Documenting Gendered Histories: National, Regional, Local

Coordinators: Archana Prasad and Manorama Sharma

The papers focused on the use of non-conventional historical sources to recover the voices of women in historical and contemporary writings. Its main objective was to map the types of theoretical and methodological issues raised by the use of non-conventional historical sources especially histories based on oral and textual sources. The sub theme attracted about 45 abstracts out of which 25 abstracts were selected for presentation. Of these 19 were presented at the conference over two days. On the third day three women from diverse backgrounds narrated their own personal histories and enriched the discussions. An average of 25-30 people visited the session on each day.

In terms of its organization the sub theme was divided into three parts. The first day covered issues pertaining to the use and character of textual and oral sources. The second day focused on the question of representation and participation of women in both movements and public life. The third day was an attempt to record the personal narrative of three activists from the north east and discuss their experiences both with organizing women and fighting for their rights.

The first session of the sub theme focused on the methods by which women's voices and experiences could be recovered in history writing. The papers presented in this session used a variety of oral narratives and interviews, autobiographies, texts, photographs and story-telling as methods of recovering and documenting women's voices.

These papers narrated how conventional historical sources such as official records, representations and archival materials often ignored the experience of women. The archival record was in many cases embedded in institutional structures and relationships that espoused dominant patriarchal values that showed the biased character of the very production and reproduction of historical knowledge. This created an invisibility of women in many historical writings and also marginalized their experiences. Therefore utmost importance was to be given to the search for alternative sources and their preservation through methods like digital archiving and videography.

The narratives in this session showed that the use of such sources could create and often contradict mainstream historiography and lead to interesting possibilities, both for the historical as well as contemporary times. Further they were also an important step in the creation of a collective memory. The papers covered diverse themes on from the lives of women performers, women activists in diverse revolutionary and reformist movements, mahila samitis, as well as the little known histories of Mizo, and Naga women. Some of the papers also pointed towards the role of social positioning and structures like caste, ethnicity and class in the structuring of collective memories.

In the discussions questions were raised about the contested nature and the limitations of the process of the construction of collective memory. The character of the construction of the Self (also identity) by these women in their narratives was also a theme that came under discussion. The papers in this theme emphasized the agency of women as leaders and actors in history. They contested the dominant historiography which projects women as victims. In contrast to this several papers presented women as people who recreated themselves as self righteous and proud persons. In this sense the papers in this session attempted to recover the voice and experience of women as the creators of history through diverse representations and interpretations.

On the second day the sub theme focused on the collective memories of women in public life and struggles. The papers on this day largely focused on three themes. The first was the participation of women in anti-colonial struggles and movements. The second major theme was the character of the women's participation and their representation in post-independence movements: especially the Assam movements. Another theme related to the representation of women in post-independence politics and their use by right wing socially conservative movements (Use of the representations of Rani Durgavati) by Gondwana Gantantrik Party. The third theme related with the experience of women in state institutional structures like the police and of women prisoners. The papers focused on the self perception of these women and their role in society. Most of the papers in this session were based on the use of dairies and personal narratives as well as oral interviews.

One of the main points that came out of the discussion related to the character of women's representation in potentially counter hegemonic collective memories. Thus the nature of patriarchal character of the processes of leadership formation in movements like the Assam movement came under much discussion. Questions were raised about the ways in which women's voices were undermined in the larger interests of the movement. The whole idea of the personal narratives was to point towards the omission of lived experiences and how such lived experiences can enrich the movements themselves. Further the ideological factors and perspectives that underlie the structuring of these narratives came under discussion. For example certain women wrote about some issues rather selectively while ignoring another set of issues. In many cases they did not allow access to their personal diaries for fear of harming the larger cause. This created an ambivalence in the memory itself and it was agreed that nature of memories of protest had to be put to more stringent questioning. The contested and the hegemonic character of the collective memories outside the women's movement was one of the main focus of the discussion in this session. Some methodological issues on the process of collection of data and the dynamic nature of the collective memory also came up. The subjectivity of the process of recording and recalling and its influence on the character of the memory itself became a subject of debate with unanswered questions.

The last session of the sub-theme was an interactive session between three activists who recalled their personal and collective memories in the context of Assam, Tripura and Nagaland. Held in the form of a conversation, the session began with the activists giving their backgrounds and the social situation in which they started dreaming about changing their own and other people's lives. The intertwining of the personal narratives with the histories of their own movements was interesting in that it showed how the personal and the collective are closely interwoven with each other. The social basis for the personalized memories also became clear through these narratives.

It is interesting to note that all three women participating in the dialogue were leaders and activists from diverse backgrounds-one is the Assam General Secretary of the Anganwadi Union, another a leader of the students organization from Tripura and the third activist works for North Eastern Network in Nagaland. All three do different types of work and mobilization but have remarkable similarities in their personal lives. The first common point is that all of them are single women who have faced many social sanctions and pressures. They also undertake the responsibilities for their own families and shared their experiences about the way in which they struggled with the aspirations that their families had for them, especially in terms of marriage. The second important point brought out by all three women related to the main impediments in the participation of women in movements of social change. Since all three were from the North East they narrated how traditional councils and their practices were discriminatory and often curbed the creativity of women. There were some instances of the stereotyping of women and the way in which these women should behave or not behave. All three women narrated that they had to negotiate such stereotypes and build their own organisations. The third

aspect that was prominent in this conversation related to the problems of women's activism even within larger movements and the patriarchal character of the leadership.

The discussion in the session focused upon the further probing their conversations and personal narratives. It also brought out the experience of all three women outside the north eastern regions. The experience shared between these women and the audience highlighted the multiple levels of stereotyping faced by women of the region when they participated in larger processes of social change. It was unanimously agreed that there was a need to document and to understand each other in order to bridge the social and regional distance between the north east and the others. There was also a need to create a unity amongst women in order combat and build struggles against the discrimination and violence against women.

In overall terms the sub-theme yielded a rich body of research and experiences that pointed out towards the frontier areas of research in documenting women's histories. Papers and testimonies in the sub theme also showed that alternative sources and methodologies were needed to capture the experiences and voices of women in writing of past and contemporary histories. The papers in this sub-theme were an important attempt in bring together this body of emerging research.

#### SUB THEMES

## Women's Movement's Engagement with Government Policies

Coordinator: K. Kalpana

A total of 15 papers were presented. The issues that were discussed included women's struggles to access state-mediated economic entitlements, women's movements interfaces with social movements aiming to universalize social protection for the poor and legal changes and their implications for women's movements.

On the theme of state-sponsored economic entitlements, the papers grappled primarily with the question of how to critically understand women's en masse participation in women-targeted economic development programs such as micro credit, livelihood and other anti-poverty interventions. The papers presented positions that ranged from what some participants felt was an unreflective celebration of women's participation in anti-poverty programs to its polar opposite - a blanket denunciation of rural development programs (whether Self Help Groups or Community Forestry Groups) and the very notion that the state might intervene in community management of its resources. A paper making the latter argument pointed to the fragmentation and isolation of women via processes of group formation, vesting leadership with a few people and creating new power brokers within communities, using SHG women as agents in the multi-level marketing initiatives of corporate, etc. The first position was critiqued (by respondents amongst the audience) for its unthinking reproduction of state rhetoric, its equation of women's participation with outcomes such as 'empowerment' or 'gender equity', the non-engagement with the pressing question of the distribution of women's unpaid care work and subsistence work and the apparent disinterest of development NGOs working in these areas in documenting or responding to these issues in any serious manner. For instance, are we unthinkingly using the word 'SHG movement' in a knee-jerk fashion? Might other criteria need to influence our use of this phrase? And what mediates the transition of the SHG phenomenon to a 'movement'?

On the other hand, the position that statist developmental projects must be denounced for their interference in the internal workings of communities was, it was pointed out, problematic. It assumes that state intervention can never have transformative possibilities and that communities are unmarked by power relations or asymmetries, all of which flow from external intervention. Some in the audience pointed out that women and the oppressed castes are using the spaces opened up by state developmentalism and the challenge is to map how they are doing so and what new contestations are generated when they do so. Both by assuming 'empowerment' to be an automatic outcome of women attending meetings, seeking loans and initiating livelihood activities or by denouncing in entirety these initiatives and therefore not engaging with them, we overlook an issue that begs serious investigation viz., the question of how the social identities of women and solidarities and tensions amongst women are re-worked through rural development programmes. More nuanced perspectives emerged in the papers that discussed how perspectives from women's movements shape and influence inter-linked struggles and campaigns for the right to food, to minimum wages, to social security and pensions and to social protection, more broadly. These perspectives were aimed at making policy makers recognize that the census definition of the household (2 adults, 3 children) does not cover large sections of the Indian population including Adivasis, the rural landless or even the urban poor, at placing on the agenda the issue of individual entitlements and forcing acknowledgment of women as heads of households (even as we remain absolutely careful that we do not reinforce women's 'natural' responsibility for food provisioning at the household level), at challenging, at the household and community levels, women's sense of shame in admitting to hunger and food inadequacy and at campaigning for linking maternity entitlements to minimum wages lost/foregone, following from the understanding that all women are workers. The paper presenters argued that labour and feminist movements and discourses have been intersecting and shaping each others demands and campaigns and called for greater reflection of the vocabularies we



use and the way we represent our struggles to ourselves and to others, whether through the 'rights' or 'empowerment' frameworks.

The question of acknowledging women as workers was also discussed in the specific context of state / legislative action towards this end when it conflicts with another important interest group / vote block the state is interested in cultivating viz., the middle classes. A paper on organizing/ mobilizing domestic workers in West Bengal foregrounded this issue in the light of specific challenges such as the 'double invisibility' of domestic workers who labour within households (never recognized as workspaces) in a social and political environment that devalues care work and the prevalence of informal bonding mechanisms between employer and employee through which female domestic workers negotiate their entitlements. While the state government's welfare schemes for unorganized workers have been expanded so as to bring domestic workers within their ambit, the continuing use of the term 'domestic servant' in policy documents reinforces their subordinate class status and servitude. While this paper primarily documented NGO experiences in organizing domestic workers and also therefore the tendency of these initiatives to rely on continuing support from NGOs, a few papers dealt with the issue of women's autonomous and collective resistance seeking to pressure the state to respond to their livelihood and survival-related concerns. A paper on the history of women's movements in Manipur reminded us that women active in the local market exchanges (or 'market women') had valiantly resisted an increase in the water tax and the export of rice during a period of famine in the pre-colonial years, waging a 'women's war' to preserve and protect their survival resources. Another paper on women's participation in collective struggles sought to explore the 'grey area' between organized social/ political movements and the everyday invisible agency that women exercise. Through transgressive behavior such as mouthing obscenities and issuing threats of physical violence, women workers in the tea plantations of the Dooars region appropriated public spaces as political actors, even as they claimed to act as mothers struggling and unable to feed hungry children. This paper sparked off discussion on how women have invested the category of motherhood with political meaning and deployed it as a weapon of struggle in diverse contexts – as mothers of the 'disappeared' in Latin America, in Sri Lanka, Kashmir, the North East via the Naga Mothers Association and so on.

Papers on the 'protection' of women via legal interventions further opened up discussion of state intervention as a double-edged sword that simultaneously oppresses and creates spaces for women. In India, legislation against child marriage has emerged as a critical area of state intervention with the National Population Policy (2000) and the National Empowerment Policy (2001) insisting that 18 be the legal age of marriage for girls and the Prohibition of Child Marriages Act (2006) recommending that all marriages below the age of 16 be made void. One of the papers mapped state legislative interventions in the light of conflicts between state and community (ex: conflicts between the Muslim personal law board in Andhra Pradesh and the State Women's Commission on this issue), the state's evident incapacity to implement its laws (ex: child marriage prohibition officers not knowing that they have been vested with this responsibility), the multiple bureaucratic hurdles and bottlenecks that make it difficult for families to access social sector schemes aiming to raise the age of marriage for girls and the strategic use of these laws by household and kin-based patriarchies to foist kidnapping cases on 'elopement' marriages just below the legal age of consent. While there is, on the one hand, a strong conservative tendency to criminalize sexual activity amongst 'very sexual young adults' as one respondent pointed out, and this tendency is reflected in the language of court judgments, there is also the disturbing rise in the incidence of political organizing by intermediate backward castes in states such as Tamil Nadu that seeks to prevent women from invoking the law to sustain marriages of choice, especially when they choose to live with Dalit men. It was pointed out that the links between social policies of the state to curb/ contain child marriage and the social impulses, fears and anxieties of a caste society to control women's sexual choices and relationships must be closely scrutinized and further elaborated by feminist scholarship through a critical reading of the making of laws.

Another paper on legal interventions highlighted the welcome changes introduced by the new provisions of the Criminal Amendment Act (2013) to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) even as it cautioned that we remain alert to what is lost in the translation from people's movements, agitation and popular anger (such as that which followed the gang-rape and death of the young woman in Delhi in December 2013) to juridical embodiment via specific legal amendments. The Criminal Law Amendment retains the idea of rape as an individual event not addressing thereby the systemic culture of rape, treats spousal rape as an exception thereby making some rapes unreal and retains the notion of outraging the modesty of women, even if it is made a non-bailable offence. The proper subject of rape is still legally constituted in particular ways – as a woman who must be deserving of state protection. A third paper on legal interventions suggested that a fuller picture of women's engagement with the law could emerge through field research (that it proposed to undertake) on the experiences of women who use laws (in particular the Right to Information Act, the NREGS and laws on domestic violence, sexual harassment and property inheritance) to redress a rights denial. What might change in a woman's personal relationships and social context during this process even if her access to the courts is mediated by an NGO or a woman's organization? And what might empowerment mean from the vantage point of women who have experienced a rights denial and have sought redress from the state?

The question of how different socio-economic classes of women access state or market-mediated and privately provided resources was discussed in the context of state support (or its absence) for elder care. Drawing on interviews with older women, a paper presenter argued that the interlocking structures of ageism, sexism, caste vulnerability and class deprivation shape the lives of older women in a city such as Guwahati with high reported rates of elder abuse. The 'Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen's Act of 2007' that ostensibly aims to protect the elderly by fining or punishing children (the inheritors of property) who do

not support their parents have little or nothing to offer property-less women without adult children. While the Assam State Policy appears utopian insofar as it envisions the creation of safe and comfortable havens for the elderly, destitute older women continue to live on the streets and some of the more privileged elderly find shelter in retirement homes to which their Non-Resident Indian (NRI) children make direct payment.

All paper presenters engaged with international conventions and national policies that have a bearing on women's lives. On the whole, the sub-theme presentations and deliberations delineated the complexities involved in invoking the state, rallying against the state, moving the state/ reforming the state and conversing with fellow-travellers when doing so. All acknowledged, in different ways, the inevitability of engaging with state and government policies given the prevalence of patriarchies so deeply embedded within all domains – households, kin/communities, markets and state institutions and actors.

## SUB THEMES

# Caste, Inclusion, Intersectionalities

Co-ordinator: Sujata Surepally

The response was overwhelming- 40 papers, from universities, women' studies centres, research institutions, NGOs and social movements, the majority of paper writers being lecturers and research students. There were six male presenters. Over ten papers presented in each section.

A paper on Tamilnadu spoke of work and descent based discrimination and caste atrocities due to the Brahmanical social values. Manual scavenging is an example and in state institutions, everywhere, in fact, sweeping and cleaning is the lot of dalit caste, women in particular. In TamilNadu dalit women - as Mathammas- in reality masked the forced free labour with sexual exploitation that was at its core. They have to dance in public during temple festivals. They do not hold ration cards, voter Ids, are landless and are deprived of being citizens. Transgressing caste norms leads to violence, as evident from caste riots taking place in cases of inter-caste marriage, even in cases of inter-marriages among dalit sub castes. Dalit women are the target during such violence, facing rape, looting and with the state allying with the perpetrators, dalit women take on the main responsibility of rebuilding their lives and that of the household after such violence.

A study on Balmiki women involved in toilet cleaning in north Delhi held that 'Caste' occupation carries the stigma of social exclusion which influences not only their labouring possibilities but also access to productive resources such as land and capital. Further, historically they were deprived of education which is necessary for human development and also for the understanding of politics of life. On the occupational level, the low caste community especially Balmikis and Chuhra have been engaged in jobs such as scavenging and manual scavenging since long. They are the only low castes that are doing this degrading work as their occupation. The low to lowest kind of jobs are only available for low caste women and that was the reason that low caste women who were historically engaged in the manual scavenging practices, in recent, are doing the toilet cleaning work at household level in the cities and semi urban areas.

Another paper holds that dalit cultural practices at urban workplaces have not been adequately discussed in contemporary studies on women. The paper explores the lifeworld of dalit working women in an industrial township in Mumbai, based on fieldwork within a Public Sector Undertaking that manufactures fertilizers. Dalit women workers here belong to the Bhangi community and are part of the sanitation staff at the company township located in Chembur, an eastern suburb of Mumbai. Most of them have been on long term contracts with the company for over twenty years, and belong to the age group of 40-55. As Company policy does not allow the residence of contract workers in the township, they travel medium and long distances ranging from 10 to 30 kilometers to reach their workplace every day. Though a significant part of their lives are spent away from the township, the festival of the 'gaon devi' celebrated in the month of Aashaadh (roughly third week of June to third week of July) acts as a rallying point for all the workers of the sanitation division to come together. The festival constitutes a day of celebration, marked by a pooja and animal sacrifice in the morning at a small shrine located within the company township, followed by incantations and possession by the Devi of a series of workers. The sacrificial animals are cooked and a community meal is served at the end of the service.

The paper explores this festival and the ritual sacrifice led by female members of the sanitation staff of this industrial township, and argues that it instills in them claims of a 'space' within their workplace. What are the contours of this space? It is indeed rife with everyday tensions and reflections of a hard working life. It is also replete with religio-cultural articulations like possession that are much more than escape routes from the arduous workday, but are in fact pointers to deeper crises that the workers see as shaping their lives in the city. How do dalit women workers, in this instance, respond to the pulls and pressures of diverse cultural trends that have gained significance in Mumbai over the years, those belonging to both the Brahminical canon and the Ambedkarite tradition? To what extent are these responses gendered? These are some of the questions this paper attempted to engage with. This paper looks

at the constitution of Valmiki/ Bhangi community as caste group from the occupational group. In this context, the paper seeks to explore through secondary historical and contemporary sources, as well as interviews with prominent leaders of the community at the local level, the complex process of identity formation for the Valmikis, sometimes as a caste-based group, sometimes as an occupation-based group. Labour and cultural practices of women have been central to the formation of Valmiki identity. This paper attempted to delineate how, why and when these distinctions are sought to be made and the ways in which gender figures in these processes of identity formation.

Another paper explores the debates on the category of sex worker in India, set within the existing national and international debates on sex work. It focuses on the nature of those debates that reproduce the sex worker category. It analyses the ways in which such ideas determine the field of assertions and oppression. Some of the key premises on sex work emphasize 'the autonomy and nature of labour'. It is also contended that forms of sexual labour reconstruct the social stigma associated with those communities who are involved in that work. Mainstream feminist and dalit positions on sex work are analysed here to extend the questions related to justice. Religious groups have generated critiques and justifications to normalize this form of work. It was suggested that radical feminists treat sex work as a product of capitalism. Civil societal gaze on those sections of people who are involved in such labour operates within the logic of appropriation and patronage.

Another paper on Sex Work and its relation with caste stated that India has witnessed implicit relationship between the traditional sex work and caste structure. Modern framework treats sex work primarily in terms trafficking and thus overlooks the embedded caste based framework that naturalizes sex work to many communities which primarily belong to the dalit section of the society. Devdasis, Jogteens, Murlis, Kalavanteens of Maharashtra, all were brought under the stigmatized identity of 'prostitutes' under the colonial legal framework overlooking the questions of livelihood, caste exploitation, and sexuality. Following the Victorian morality, the national and social reform movements, lobbied with the colonial powers to deny the category of labour to this section of society.

Movements for Dalit rights have had varied responses to the issue of sex work and this was also true for the women's movement in India. Both have problems while dealing with the issue. It was important to look at the caste dynamics of Sex Work in India especially by those women and men who come from castes which were linked with practices of ritual sexual exploitation. Based on the field work among the Sex workers in Sangali, Miraj, Sholapur, Barshi and Karhad in Satara, the paper unfolds the intricate relations between caste structure, patriarchies and gender issues focusing on sexuality, labour and identity politics by decoding the recorded life-histories of sex workers during field work with SANGRAM and especially VAMP. These women voice their resistance of labelling them under stigmatized identity, denial of their agency and question the representation of their rights under the banner of any single community or identity of womanhood. They reflect on the self-hood they realized through organisational work that provides them social and political space to exert their agency as citizens.

This paper raised questions such as: How does feminist politics address the issues of sex workers who neither fit into the framework of 'ideal' womanhood or even 'victimhood', and raise their voice against caste patriarchies and modernity which impose stigma and denial of livelihood on dalit women. On the other hand, will Dalit politics introspect on their stand on sexuality and agency of women within the community to provide space to these sex-workers to assert their rights under dalit liberation without leaving their profession? How does Dalit feminism understand the intersectionality of caste, gender and sexuality to provide framework for the struggles of sex-workers?

There has been a spate of debates over land acquisition and alienation projects recently which is projected as insular from HIV/AIDS. Besides this, it is discussed separately not only from the issue of gender but also relative subtle intersections such as sexuality and caste. On this subject, bipolar perspectives - such as liberal perspective which aim to boost economy via infrastructure development projects and in turn claim to invest surpluses into social welfare and Marxist perspective which promulgate that bourgeoisie get benefit at the cost of dispossession and alienation of marginalized communities - predominate. However, in this contested perspective, caste and sexuality does not get sufficient attention if not completely neglected. Even though, these works represent the voice of subalterns or proletariats like dalits, adivasis [first inhabitants], farmers etc, one does not come across the issue of performing communities or former Devdasis and how this process affected them differently. This is not just the matter of adding another group on displacement or merely another unit of analysis. Rather it implies enriching and making sense of displacement differently or understanding it through different lens. The current paper aimed to engage with the issue of land alienation in the context of women from Kalavanthulus [a former Devdasi community] of coastal Andhra Pradesh. It raised questions: "What shape does it take when it is entangled with the issue of morality and HIV/AIDS discourse? In what way their experience is different from other marginalized communities. How does sexuality meddle here? Whether there is a politics in casting them as "other" in the matter of sexuality and at the same time not recognizing their marginality especially by the left academia in the land acquisition discourse. How does land acquisition process doubly affect Devdasis and performing communities? Whether the experience of land dispossession of Devdasi community is any way different or similar from the women from Dalit communities?"

Based on the ethnographic accounts in East Godavari, the paper describes the issue of land alienation and struggle among

Kalavanthulus as part of infrastructure development initiative of the state. There is an inextricable linkage between political economy of the nation state and HIV/AIDS discourse and these linkages are dialectical in nature. The presence of the state so intimately and in everyday world is brought out by the lives of Devdasis. It also aided me to observe the presence of state so intimately and in everyday world. Secondly, the paper attempted to show the power-relations in sexuality not just at macro-level but also in micro milieu like in conjugal relationships. In this connection, the multiple and complex affinity of women from Kalavanthulu community with the propertied classes or dominant castes of the region is explored in the paper.

A paper on Marriage, Violence and Sexuality: Understanding Dalit Women's Agency and Voice in Rural Tamil Nadu stated that the literature on Dalit women largely deal with issues of violence and oppression based on intersections of class, caste and gender. Women's bodies, sexuality and reproductive choices are linked to class power and the ideological hegemony of the caste-gender nexus in India, with marriage and sexual relations playing crucial roles in maintaining caste boundaries. Often the ways in which women manipulate their multiple, interlinked identities as women, Dalits, workers and home-makers to resist control over their bodies (labour and sexuality), negotiate conjugal loyalty and love, and construct a sense of selfhood is missed in the analyses. Based on research in rural Tamil Nadu, this paper on Dalit women's narratives reflect multiple concerns and dilemmas about marital choice and violence, generating in the process a deeper understanding of agency, voice and gender relations, as fluid, dynamic, and intersecting in response to changing experiences, positionalities and subjectivities.

A paper on subaltern women and politics of representation, studied the sect of Kartavaja that arose in colonial Bengal in the eighteenth century. An offshoot of Baul culture, it is also regarded as the marginalized people's response to Raja Rammohan Roy's movement of Brahma Samaj. This sect has in its centre, a concept of feminine power embodied in the legendary character of 'Sati Ma'. Members of this sect comprising mostly of low caste the Sadgopes are the worshippers of 'Sati Ma' - the woman with immense supernatural power specially in the field of fertility and reproduction. Still worshipped in the 21st century by a vast number of people, "Sati ma" was once relegated to the status of 'devi' by the sect members and later extended to people outside the sect. The time of emergence of 'Kartavajas' and 'Sati Ma' is that of Renaissance Bengal, a vibrant period as far as women's movement, empowerment and enlightenment in colonial India was concerned. But this woman 'sati ma', the subaltern and indigenous version of femininity and power, remained marginalized in the narratives of renaissance literature. She was never included in the predominant idea of empowerment of women. The present paper shows how 'kartavaja' and their legendary woman 'Sati Ma' has been represented in the narrative of the literature of Bengal renaissance and explore the politics of that representation to find out how the western influenced individualist and liberal scholarship and the scholarship of the upper caste intelligentsia marginalized and trivialized this alternate version of feminine power.

Another paper considers the debates on the profession of Tamasha. Tamasha is a well-known folk art of Maharashtra, carried on since 16th century, has lot of components like Plot and Songs but is more known for erotic dancing by female artists. This art form was formed, stabilized and still carried on by few lower-caste communities like Mahar, Matang and Kolhatis in Maharashtra. The elements of 'eroticism' in the dancing of these female artists who belong to lower-caste communities raise a concern that can be divided into two approaches. One against the doing this art form, a kind of caste-based exploitation carried on for centuries and forced performance of sexual labour by lower-caste women and poses the need for discontinuation of such caste-based traditional exploitative profession. The second approach sees this profession as a source of livelihood for women and urges us to look at it not from a moralist view but as an income-generation means for women, who being earning members of the family, have autonomy to have greater decision-making power.

There is lack of literature around the lives of female artists in Tamasha. Hence the feminist discussions around the studies of caste-based profession of prostitution on Bedia community, Nautanki performers in north India, debates related to ban on dance bars and tradition of Devdasi in south India are analyzed and parallels are drawn to see these debates in the context of female artists in Tamasha. This paper tries to highlight and contextualize the feminists concerns on the problems related to carrying this art form as a caste-based exploitative tradition and hence suggests its discontinuity or looking at this as earning source for women involved in this profession and consider them as artists. This paper also looks into the interventions suggested by the Dalit Women groups to rescue and rehabilitate women after giving up this profession. Another attempts to map the strength and endurance of the Dalit woman protagonist, Withaa Bhau Maang Narayangaonkar, a Tamashaa artist, under the havoc of discrimination of caste and patriarchy in the poem Aarpar Layit Pranantik (Through Rhythmic Intense). The biographical poem in Marathi by Pradnya Pawar exposes the destructive ramifications of these forces on Dalit woman in particular and women in general belonging to all clime and culture on the globe. The life and struggle of Withaa, the artist against these oppressive forces, has the ability to nurture a fighting spirit among the Dalit women in particular and woman in general. The poem not only questions the validity of the established religion, polity, economy, caste, class and the mainstream feminism but also hints at an ideology of liberation that can accommodate the good of all barring all man-made hallow divisions.

There were several papers on dalit women's writings. A theoretical discussion on the questions of 'caste', 'gender' and 'resistance' through a reading of Dalit feminist writings and literary movement in contemporary West Bengal is the focus of one paper. It held that the Dalit could not successfully emerge as a distinct political subject in the formal-institutionalized domain of activities



in West Bengal due to the so far unchallenged hegemony of the urban, upper caste bhadralok in the all avenues of public life in the state. However, such a curious absence of the caste question in West Bengal is not only problematic but at the same time unsustainable. Organized Dalit literary movement through initiatives like Chaturtha Duniya (The Fourth World), Dalit Mirror, Dalit Sahitya, although is a much latter phenomenon of its kind compared to the other states of India, has started to challenge not only the bhadralok aesthetics of literature, but also their erstwhile hegemony in politics and society. In 2007, one of the leading journals in India published an article titled: 'Is there Dalit Writing in Bangla?'. The answer was positive. The paper sought to take the aforementioned question a step further: 'Is there Dalit Feminist Writing in Bangla?'. The answer in this case too, as the paper shall show, is positive. Then how are Dalit women participating in the contemporary literary movement in West Bengal? The paper delves in the wide body of Dalit feminist writings in order to engage with their stories of victimhood – their narratives of caste-discrimination in their quotidian lives, the post-partition struggles as refugees and unequal treatment vis-à-vis rehabilitation and relief, and obviously their tales of suffering amidst the shackles of patriarchy. How are the Dalit feminist writers in contemporary West Bengal interrogating and contesting not only the overall bhadralok hegemony in the state, but also the forces of patriarchy within their own communities? The paper aims to listen to the small voices of history of these marginalized women in West Bengal. More than just 'Making Visible': Exploring Dalit Women's Writing in Bengal, a paper on dalit women's writings in Bengal states that during 30 years long rule by the Left Front, the caste issue in West Bengal remained 'invisible'. However, as Anjan Ghosh (2001) pointed out, practices of untouchability were more visible in everyday practices like spatial segregation in schools etc.

The Dalit Literature Movement in Bengal was consolidated in 1994 with a quarterly Dalit magazine called "Chaturtha Dunia". This magazine, which is published by Bengali Dalit Literature Organization, also has book stall owned/ located in Kolkata. This is the only stall where it is sold and serves as the meeting place for Dalit authors to discuss issues of common concern. However, it is important to locate dalit women's writings, their double exclusions in feminist rewriting of social history of Bengal and in the Dalit Literature Movement mentioned above. Anthologies like "Women Writing in India" have well documented authors like Rasasundori Devi, Mahashweta Devi etc. Tanika Sarkar (1993), the feminist historian has contextualized life narratives of Rasasundori Devi for feminist social history of Bengal. However Dalit women writing in Bengali were mostly ignored by those who were recovering women's voices from history.

Similarly, in the first translated collection of short stories from Bengali Dalit Literature, Dalit women writers are absent. However the anthology on "100 years of Dalit Literature in Bengal" includes few Bengali Dalit women writers. Manohar Mouli Biswas recognizes that there are very few Dalit women writers. But as he argues, writings by Dalit women further enriches the Dalit Literary Movement and observes that the Dalit women's activism and their literature are inseparable. As underlined by scholars like Rege (2006), Dalit women writing changes the way we understand both the women's movement and the Dalit movement in Maharashtra. She argues that one cannot write only caste or only gender, the two go together.

A paper on Dalit Literature and Dalit Women Writers seeks to analyse how Dalit women shaped Dalit literature that is 'indomitable' and 'revolutionary.' From a comparative point of view, Dalit autobiographies are extremely important as an inevitable journey of the social, economic and cultural change among the Dalits. There are Dalit poetesses who endow women with courage and strength, and prepare them for battle in society. The poetry of Meena Gajabhiye, Kunda Gaykawad, Asha Thorat etc., is reflective. This Dalit poetesses have broken the existing framework and have brought to Marathi Literature and the psyche of the society, for the first time, an awareness of a different sorrow.

In the autobiographies of dalit men, nowhere there is a mention of dalit women's different identities, of her capability, her inner and outer conflicts. He expresses an awareness of how Dalit male was made, how he struggled, how he advanced. But there is no expression of how, with support of wife or beloved, he reached that stage. Kumud Pawade, Shantabai Kamble, Bebitai Kamble, Mukta Sarvagouda in all of their autobiographies, while narrating how they fought with the circumstances, they have given an inspiring message to the society.

A paper 'Dalit Women Litterateurs and the Marathi Dalit Literature: A Study of its Role and Contributions' states that Dalit literature emerged as rebellion to the established Marathi literature. This Dalit literature as a genre is the first development, not only in Marathi but in any Indian language of a literature drawing its inspiration from the life and experiences of the lowly and submerged segments of Indian society and its struggle for securing basic human rights. The role of Dalit women litterateurs is considered as significant in Dalit literature in many ways. Dalit women writers sketched the realistic and authentic accounts of life conditions of the Dalit women, her suppression, humiliation, sufferings, dilemmas and exploitation. This paper focused on the role and contribution of Dalit women to the Marathi Dalit literature- such as Urmila Pawar, Jyoti Lanjewar, Sharmila Rege, Kumud Pawade, Pradya Daya Pawar, Heera Bansode, Babytai Kamble.

The most vociferous voice that speaks about marginalized women is Kandasamy's, the angry young woman obsessed with Dr Ambedkar's dream of caste annihilation.irate and full of black humour and sarcasm, she riles against Hindu society; its gods, its caste system and its upholders. The reader is also implicated and is not let off the hook. She adopts the tone of Sylvia Plath's 'Daddy' against Gandhi, who also upheld the caste system. In her poetry, caste gods are urinated upon and are shown to deserve such treatment,

the gods go to hell and people who die for a cause go to heaven as in 'Prayer'. Titles can be as blatant as 'Reverence: Nuisance'. She satirizes and accuses Brahmins for pigeon-holing Dalits, especially women, in situations from which they cannot escape. Nitoo Das, in 'Matsyagandha', portrays the daughter of a fisherwoman, who is demeaned for the 'fish-smell' that always accompanies her. The poem shows her retaliating against Parashar, the patriarchal figure of authority. 'Geeta sings a thumri' is a tirade against a dead husband who married her just for her voice, but had a physical relationship with another woman. 'Matsyagandha' and 'Geeta Sings a Thumri' show the sexual exploitation of low caste women by men. 'Doiboki' and 'Kinnari' deal with women, mysterious figures on roadsides who wander, mutter, chew betel with sex words exploding from their mouths; women who are ostensibly considered mad and are relegated to the very fringes of society. Thus, marginalized figures and communities seem to find increasing depiction in the work of the poets of the younger generation, although the question of whether they adequately know the reality they represent or are qualified to speak of it is one that demands resolution.

A paper explores the lives of tawaifs, baijis or courtesans (used interchangeably) in Bombay, during the twentieth century, with a particular focus around the Congress House area in Grant Road. The tawaifs' kothas (salons), below the Kennedy Bridge, are interestingly in the vicinity of Congress House, which was the hub of Indian nationalist struggle in Bombay from the 1920 onwards. These two places have come into existence almost simultaneously and have coexisted for many decades. However, there have been various efforts, during the last decades of twentieth century, to remove the presence of tawaifs from this space, through heightened interest of the real estate players in urban renewal and increased surveillance by the police or the moral crusaders, which happens to be the Citizen's Forum of the neighbourhood. Given this contemporary situation, the attempt is to historicize mujra performances in the city and its presence in the nationalist hub of Bombay, exploring the contentious terrain of caste, gender, sexuality, nationalism and urban gentrification.

The paper on Honour and Shame: Reconceptualising the State Response to Rape from a Caste-Patriarchy Perspective, argues that within the legal setting and the criminal justice system of India, rape is not seen so much as a violation of bodily integrity as much as loss of honour or shame. The paper also attempts to understand the notion of shame and honour as a construct of a caste-patriarchy system.

The interaction between caste, gender and language and especially power is the focus of a paper based on primary field work on Denotified Tribe (DNT) in Maharashtra. DNT community are not in the mainstream. They want to come to the mainstream but they feel insecure. At that time they are struggling to protect their language which is also linked with identity. At the same time they need to be part of mainstream. Women are perceived as preservers of community identity. The paper studies activist women of Vadar (VJNT) community special activists of Self help Group and Anganwadis.

Women in public space is the focus of few presentations. Reservation for women through 50% quota in Panchayats was seen as a landmark achievement. Also panchayats are expected to play a key role in inclusion of the SCs for enhancing democracy, and the participation of these disadvantaged castes in the decision making process is supposed to empower them as well. The most important case here is of Dalit women and their participation. They have to deal with the caste based atrocities on one hand and a patriarchal society on the other. The influence of patriarchy can be seen when women come up as proxy candidates. The issues of caste can be seen when dalit females are troubled and humiliated in their workings. Interestingly Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA) can be used against Dalit women candidates. The formal representation of women thus need not be an indicator of their true participation in panchayats. According to Jayshree Mangubhai (lawyer and human rights activist), the "political representation through quotas has not led to effective political participation for the majority of Dalit women. The main obstacle is the multiple discrimination these women face arising from the entrenched caste hierarchy, chronic poverty and patriarchy... Political participation through quotas, therefore, in the absence of other measures, has potential to lead to a situation where caste and gender hierarchies are reinforced, and Dalit women are deterred from effective political participation in future". Thus, to assess participation in its true meaningful sense, it is necessary to give up viewing symbolic aspirations as achievements. What we need is a political space where participation can occur in a dignified and respectful manner.

A paper on dalit women and forms of activism in the context of globalization stated that globalization has changed the ways of how we look at the social order and complexities within it. It has led to the emergence of new public spheres most known of which is the cyber space and has also been the seedbed of transnational activism. The paper is an attempt to outline two interlinked themes in this regard. The first one is to understand the new issues which have come up post 1990s in India with reference to dalit women in particular. The rise and further consolidation of religious identity along with the 'shrinking' of welfare state has made dalit women more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination leading to her further marginalization. On the other hand, we witness a renewed form of energy and activism as collectives of dalit women have organized themselves both at the national and international levels. All India Dalit Women's Forum, National Federation of Dalit Women and All India Dalit Women's Forum were found in 1994, 1995 and 1996 respectively. Again, at the global level, the UN World Conference on 'Against Racism' held in Durban, South Africa in 2001 provided an opportunity to National Federation of Dalit Women to contextualise the Dalit (mainly Dalit women) oppression similar to racism. National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights and National Federation of Dalit Women's Conference on 'Violence Against Dalit Women' (2006) adopted 'Delhi Declaration'. Another issue of prime importance in this regard is the emergence of

the transnational dalit feminist activism which is not only struggling for the gender justice for themselves but also is highlighting the crucial issues of survival and dignity. Such a form of transnational activism has given an impetus to the identity and plight of the dalit women at the global level. However, such an activism has been critiqued on the basis of narrow sense of nationhood which states that 'washing linen in public' has damaged the 'pride' of India given an ample opportunity to the 'neo-colonial forces' to once again see India in poor light. The paper discussed the contesting perspectives.

A paper on dalit women's movement in Bhandara (Maharashtra) looks at cultural conflict and development. In Maharashtra, atrocities against Dalits have various economic, political as well as cultural dimensions. Cultural conflict between high-caste Hindus and Dalit Buddhists has emerged as the major factor of Dalit atrocities in East Vidarbha of Maharashtra. Now Dalit Buddhists are refusing to become a shadow of Hindu traditions and seek to build a new cultural identity as Buddhist. The Khairlanji Dalit Massacre (2006) gave a boost to this cultural conflict and local Dalit women's groups are in search of a new identity.

A paper on construction of womanhood in the context of religious reform and contemporary Muslim women of Kerala attempted to problematize the gender discourses around the category of 'Muslim women' in Kerala by looking at the promotion of education and religious revivalism and economic and social benefits that they have gained through Gulf-migration and Kerala's development model.

The vivid presence of religious reform and revivalism, the material as well as non-material gains from the Gulf migration, and the residual impact of Kerala Model of Development have essentially shaped the socio-religious situation of Muslim women in contemporary Kerala. As in the general case of Muslim women, the number of women being educated and the amount of education women receive have both expanded markedly since the formation of Kerala state. The enrolment of girls in primary school has increased more than twofold and there has been drastic increase at the secondary and tertiary levels. Despite all these changes, Muslim women remain underrepresented at all social spheres, when compared to men. They constitute only a mere 5.9 per cent of the total workforce in the state.

A study of a village health program looks at caste, gender and embodiment. In the contemporary developmental discourse, the Indian state is engaged in using the language of "community participation", "democratic decentralization" at the village level. Further, these vocabularies have become the convenient tools in the hands of liberalization paradigm in shifting away the state's welfare responsibilities towards communities. In this context, the state promoted volunteerism becomes a key leverage for drawing women to the centre of community welfare in the name of women's empowerment. The ASHA (Accredited social health activist), Anganwadi workers assume the role of community welfare workers in this whole discourse. These state sponsored community workers are appointed through village community (gram sabha). Such an exercise of state sponsored volunteerism would mean bringing state agency into the hands of community. This whole process is based on the state's (mis)recognition of community as monolithic category. Further, although women are visualized as a suitable category for welfare work of the community, the question arises does women's caste marked gendered body become a deciding factor for being a suitable state volunteer? Does caste identity of these women volunteers play any role in determining how they are going to dispense the state services among different caste groups?

Drawing on an ethnography conducted in Boudh district of Odisha state during 2006-07, the paper explores the complex interplay of gender and caste in reproducing changing forms of political subjectivity, in the state practices. It examines how the state approach towards village community as a unity has resulted in formulation of upper and middle caste alliance in segregating the stigmatized dalit body. Even when the dalits are incorporated into village community, they are incorporated being marked as stigmatized embodied beings. Further, the paper argues the upper caste community workers' concerns in maintaining their own bodily purity and the purity of the upper caste sections of the village during the delivery of state service makes it superficially possible for them to provide service equitably among all caste groups. Dichotomizing their roles and practices in terms of public/private and state/familial responsibility, helps the upper caste community workers to justify the contradictions in their roles.

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## Cultural Programmes

The North East Network (NEN) organized the cultural spaces during the Conference for people to attend, see and absorb a variety of expressions on each of the four days. These included the Assamese/ Bodo /Tiwa dance expressions along with contemporary music from Meghalaya and Naga harvest songs. Exposure of traditional products such as herbal medicinal products, millet food and ethnic weaves were exhibited through the stalls of North East Network and Anwasha Kalyan Samiti.

### 4th February:

1. The cultural programs began with Naga Folk songs from Chizami village, Phek district. Eight women from Chizami village, presented community work song on agriculture and displayed different agricultural crops and tools through the songs. Their presentation highlighted Chakesang art and culture.
2. Bareboronia Bihu: Bareboronia means colourful. A mixed bihu performance was presented by dancers and musicians representing different forms- bihu of different tribes, namely, Tiwa, Hajong, Mising, Bodo, Goalporia, Jhumur and, including Bhortaal Nritya (Sattriya Music based dance form using cymbals). This mesmerising performance for 80 minutes also showcased different





traditional musical instruments like Dhol, Pepa, Toka, Gogona, Flute, Taal, Khol, Nagara, Madal, Khanjari, Kham, etc.. The performance was choreographed by Dreamly Gogoi and the troupe was from her school, Gandharba Kala Kendra, Guwahati.

3. The audience danced to the tune of Bihu dances and also many were keen to learn the rhythmic steps and play the instruments.

#### **5th February:**

A Rock Concert was presented by 4th Element. Based in Shillong, 4th Element is the only band in Northeast India that bends and blends the four styles of funk, jazz, R'n'B and soul in its quest for creative expression.. Heading the band is Ribor mb, a music director in the Northeast. Sara Lee, a young and dynamic singer, thrilled the audience with her soulful voice. Her performances included songs which conveyed messages- to break shackles which prevented women from realizing their aspirations. The highlight of the evening was the playing of the Bihu anthem by Monisha Behal. The concert had the whole audience dancing- women and men- from all parts of India.

#### **7th February:**

The closing function of the Conference was a Musical Valedictory. A folk orchestra consisting of 25 traditional musical instruments was performed by students of Gauhati University. Eternal songs of Late Bhupen Hazarika were also sung by a young student on the flute.

Students of TISS Guwahati Campus performed a musical drama on the negative impact of trafficking and larger issues of violence against women.

### **Films**

Dr. Asha Kuthari, Gauhati University, co-ordinated the film shows and the discussion that followed.

A significant yet brief component of the Conference was Dristi—Celluloid Representations. The first day saw screenings of the award winning and internationally acclaimed regional film Aideu- Behind the Screen, directed by Arup Manna and a documentary, A Symbol of Courage by Pankaj Kalita based on the life of a feminist from Assam. The delegates later had the opportunity to interact with the directors who were invited and felicitated. Arup Manna, discussed issues about the making of the film based on his own conversations with the first Assamese actress of Joymoti (the first Assamese film by Jyoti Prasad Agarwala) at a time when women were excluded from the world of art or cinema. Consequently, she was ostracised in her own village and had to live a tragic life of poverty. Among other issues, Manna stated his purpose of making films as an exteriorization of his deep felt angst towards social/cultural/economic injustice.

On the second day, a documentary on the matrilineal society of Meghalaya, Spirit of Graceful Lineage directed by Prerana Barbarooah Sharma was shown followed by several shorts projecting themes of violence on women, rape, women's rights, education, etc. These films from around the world produced by an international NGO called 'Cultures of Resistances' focused on political and sexual violation of women's rights in Samburu (Africa) and Afghanistan. The screenings were followed by a long session of discussions among the delegates on similar issues and ways of empowerment of women in remote regions of the world.

## **Resolutions adopted at the XIV National Conference held in Guwahati**

1. Withdraw AFSPA

The AFSPA and other similar Acts like PSA (J&K) remain the most repressive laws in India. We propose removal of these laws as these create an environment of violence against women and have serious repercussions on women's economic and social life. They have created a climate of impunity which we must attempt to remove by taking up the issue around the recommendations made by Justice Verma Committee.

The IAWS supports the continuing struggle by Irom Sharmila for the repeal of AFSPA and hopes that she can end her fast soon.

(This Resolution came from Subtheme 9 and was proposed by: Rekha Chowdhary & Seconded by Asha Hans)

## 2. Violence against women in and from the North East

The IAWS condemns the rising incidence of violence against women in and from the North East. The IAWS notes with alarm growing signs of racialized violence against youth from the North East in mainstream India, such as the city of Delhi. Women students and workers from the NER have been persistently protesting the discrimination and sexual violence and harassment they have to endure in their everyday lives. The IAWS expresses its solidarity against all such forms of violence and discrimination.

(Proposed by Mary E. John, Seconded by Veena Poonacha)

## 3. Communal Violence in Muzaffarnagar, U.P.

IAWS condemns the communal violence that broke out in Muzaffarnagar, U.P which displaced thousands of Muslims during the winter months of 2013. IAWS condemns the inhuman conditions and the manner in which the camps were abruptly razed. Reports of sexual violence and child deaths are deeply disturbing. The IAWS demands that the State government generously resettle, rehabilitate and compensate the victims and that justice should be ensured and criminals brought to book.

(Proposed by Nandini Manjrekar, Seconded by Varsha)

4. The IAWS condemns the attacks orchestrated by Right wing organizations with local television channels such as DY365 and a couple of others, ransacking the office of one of the organizations supporting activities organizing the first Queer Pride Parade in the city of Guwahati on 9th February '2014. The IAWS protests these attacks of 3rd February '2014 and extends support to the activists and collectives organizing the queer pride March, signifying inclusiveness of our diverse and plural societies. The IAWS furthermore supports the Queer Pride Movement in the North east region.

(Proposed by: Preeti Oza and Seconded by Meera Velayudhan)

## 5. Sexual Violence against Dalit Women

The IAWS condemns the widespread incidents of targeted sexual assault and gang rape against dalit women, including cases of murder, especially in the state of Haryana in recent years. The IAWS demands that the state machinery fulfill its responsibility to investigate these crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice. The prevailing climate of fear has grown due to the impunity with which these crimes are being perpetrated.

This must be countered on an urgent basis so that Dalit girls and their families are able to lead their lives and pursue their aspirations with dignity and security.

(Proposed by Sangeeta, Seconded by Anita Ghai)

## 6. On the challenges faced by Women with Disability

The IAWS recommends the inclusion of issues and challenges faced by women with disability as part of the Curriculum in Women's Studies Curriculum, with special emphasis on how conflict (both familial and social) has its profound impact on understanding the structures within which disability operates and remains embedded. In this context the issues of structures and communicational access of care must take centre stage within the dialogue of women's groups.

(Proposed by: Chhaya Datar, Seconded by Samita Sen)

## 7. On Article 377

The IAWS expresses deep regret and shock and registers its protest at the Supreme Court judgment of Dec.11th, 2014, on Section 377, overturning the progressive judgment of the Delhi High Court (Shah & Muralidhar) of July 2, 2009, and creating a set back to the struggles and efforts of LGBTQI people and all others who have supported these struggles. The Delhi High Court Judgment had foregrounded Dr.Ambedkar's insistence on Constitutional morality being the bedrock of rights of all citizens rather than public morality in India's deeply hierarchical and prejudice entrenched society. The IAWS continues to support the struggles and efforts for justice, dignity and rights of all marginalized people, including queer people.

(Proposed by Asha Achutan Seconded by Swati Dahodray)

#### 8. On the Declining Child Sex Ratio

The declining child sex ratio is of serious concern to the 14th IAWS as it means lesser women in the future. We resolve that the PCPNDT Act, painstakingly pushed through by the women's movement is implemented with a display of political will on the part of the state and not in the half-hearted manner as is presently the case. We also resolve that the one stop crisis centre for women for addressing the immediate needs of victims of violence, as recommended by the Usha Mehra Commission be implemented by framing of the rules and guideline, a process to which we from the women's movement would be happy to contribute.

(Proposed by Sehjo Singh, seconded by Sabu George)

#### 9. On Abolition of the Jogini System

The IAWS recommends the abolition of the Jogini System and also that those affected by it be identified and measures taken to support them to start their lives afresh.

(Proposed by Meera Velayudhan and Seconded by Sujata Surepally)

### CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES NEW DELHI

#### Call for Donations to the Vina Mazumdar Memorial Fund (VMMF)

In memory of Vina Mazumdar, well known social scientist and pioneer of women's studies in India, and with the object of carrying forward her legacy, a Vina Mazumdar Memorial Fund (VMMF) has been established. It is housed and administered by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, (CWDS), New Delhi. The VMMF aims to institute and support

- Fellowships / grants to scholars in Women's Studies/Social Sciences
- Action research projects
- Scholarships/stipends to students and young scholars
- Seminars/Workshops



Income Tax exemption U/S 80G would be available for donations to VMMF. For further details including corpus application form please visit [www.cwds.ac.in](http://www.cwds.ac.in) or contact [vmmemorialfund@gmail.com](mailto:vmmemorialfund@gmail.com) The bank details are given below: Please send your donation along with the form duly filled in and signed, for tax exemption purpose.

**A/C NAME: CWDS A/C VINA MAZUMDAR MEMORIAL FUND (CWDS)**  
**A/C NO: 084001000015849**

**BANK NAME: INDIAN OVERSEAS BANK, GOLE MARKET, NEW DELHI**  
**IFS CODE: IOBA0000840**

## POEM (On the outgoing EC of IAWS)

By Kumkum Roy

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

Before I begin I must apologize  
To Geeta who is both young and wise  
For not finding a picture of hers  
And not powerpointing a verse  
In her honour and praise.  
May the young feminist continue to thrive  
As towards our goals we strive

Anita, for reminding us constantly  
Of issues we push beyond memory  
That disabilities are a part of our lives  
Energetic, strong, courageous and brave  
Ensures that we enjoy, think and we save

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

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

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

Ritu our financier par excellence  
Is found here in a reflective stance  
Perhaps the funds haven't flowed in yet

Or may be there are loose ends to be knotted  
And matters of importance to be sorted  
Of course we know it is Nandini's job

Sundry creditors to charmingly fob  
But she's perhaps contemplating the subthemes  
Which range from nightmares to lovely dreams

Ilina steering the motley team  
As well as the multitude and the stream  
Touching hearts and minds of women and men  
As she sang, and will sing again  
Of bread and roses...

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

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

Meera reflecting and newslettering us all  
We wait for her mails, we wait for her call  
She pushes us beyond the matter of fact,  
Compelling us to think, write, and act.

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

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

Samita Sen



**IAWS MEMBERSHIP FORM**

PLEASE FILL IN CAPITALS

**Personal information**

Name (in full): \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_ Age \_\_\_\_\_

Educational qualifications \_\_\_\_\_

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City: \_\_\_\_\_ PIN: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

E.mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address (if different from above): \_\_\_\_\_

Interest in Women's Studies (Please tick categories applicable)

Teaching: \_\_\_\_\_ Activism: \_\_\_\_\_ Writing: \_\_\_\_\_

Research: \_\_\_\_\_ Media &amp; Communication: \_\_\_\_\_ Administration of Programmes: \_\_\_\_\_

Any other: \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Membership (Please tick categories applicable)

 Life (Rs.1500/-): \_\_\_\_\_ Student (Rs.250/-) (for 3 years) (Attach proof of Student ID and age) (Age limit 35): \_\_\_\_\_ Institutional (Life) Rs.10000/-: \_\_\_\_\_ Friends of Association \$100 (in Rupees equivalent): \_\_\_\_\_

Details of Payment:

DD/ Cheque\* No.: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Rs.: \_\_\_\_\_

\*(Rs.50/- additional for outstation Cheques)

**Cheque /Draft may be made in favour of Indian Association for Women's Studies (preferably payable at par in New Delhi).**

Bank: \_\_\_\_\_ Branch: \_\_\_\_\_

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(For online registration, signature not required)

For Electronic Bank Transfer

**Name of the Bank:HDFC Bank Ltd.; Branch Address:Gole Market Branch, New Delhi****SB Account No.:584100003017; IFSC Code:HDFC0000584****Note: Please mention the Transaction ID (UTR), Date and sender's details (Name and City).****Cheque /Draft may be made in favour of Indian Association for Women's Studies (preferably payable at par in New Delhi).**

OR

Cash/ Cheque can be deposited in any branch of HDFC, copy of counterfoil should be mailed /posted to Secretariat with Regn. Form.

Please ensure that the Membership form completed in all respects is sent to the following address:

**The General Secretary****Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS)****C/o Centre for Women's Development Studies, 25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi 110001.**For online Registration: <http://www.iaws.org>By e.mail: [iaws.secretariat@gmail.com](mailto:iaws.secretariat@gmail.com)

## THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES (IAWS)

The Indian Association for Women's Studies was established in 1982 by a resolution adopted by the first national conference of women's studies held in Mumbai in April 1981. iaws is registered under the Registrar of Societies (No.s/12936 New Delhi) and under FCRA. The Association provides a forum for interaction among institutions and individuals engaged in teaching, research or action. The membership includes educational and social welfare organisations, and individual academics, researchers, students, activists, social workers, media persons and others concerned with women's issues, and with women's development and empowerment. One of the major activities of IAWS is organising a National Conference of Women's Studies once every two / three years focusing on a particular theme and several sub-themes. Hundreds of members from all-over india and some from other countries in South Asia attend the National Conference. Fourteen conferences have been held at: Mumbai, Thiruvanthapuram, Chandigarh, Waltair (Vishakapatnam), Jadavpur (Kolkata), Mysore, Jaipur, Pune, Hyderabad, Bhubaneswar, Dona Paula (Goa), Lucknow, Wardha and Guwahati. Themes have included: Women's Struggles and Movements, Women's Perspectives on Public Policies, Sustaining Democracy, Challenges in the New Millenium etc.

IAWS members can

- initiate activities along with the association in an effort to augment iaws interaction, networking, research, documentation and dissemination objectives;
- participate in various activities and conferences organised by the association;
- participate in running the association by voting on the membership of the executive committee and standing for the elected offices;
- contribute to and receive a periodic newsletter that disseminates information about association activities in different parts of the country, explores gender issues, and may include book reviews, announcements, seminar/ workshop reports and lots more.

### IAWS EC MEMBERS (2014 - 2017)

**PRESIDENT**

Ritu Dewan, (Mumbai) dewan.ritu@gmail.com

**VICE-PRESIDENT**

Kiran Moghe, (Pune) kiranmoghe@gmail.com

**GENERAL SECRETARY**

Indrani Mazumdar, (New Delhi) indrani.mazumdar@gmail.com

**JOINT SECRETARY & EASTERN REGION IN-CHARGE**

Syeda Sakira Sahin, (Guwahati) sakirasahin@gmail.com

**TREASURER**

Manimekalai N, (Tiruchirapally) nmanimekalai@gmail.com

**EDITOR & CO-ORDINATOR, WESTERN REGION**

Anagha Tambe, (Pune) anaghatambe@hotmail.com

**CO-ORDINATOR, SOUTHERN REGION**

Mini Sukumar, (Calicut) minisukumars@gmail.com

**CO-ORDINATOR, NORTHERN REGION**

Indu Agnihotri, Ex-officio, (New Delhi)

iagnihotri53@gmail.com

**JOINT CO-ORDINATOR, WESTERN REGION**

Ilina Sen, Ex-officio (Mumbai) sen.ilina@gmail.com

**WEBSITE CO-ORDINATOR**

K. Kalpana, (Chennai) mythkalpa@gmail.com

If undelivered please return to:  
IAWS Secretariat  
Centre for Women's Development Studies  
25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi - 110 001.

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