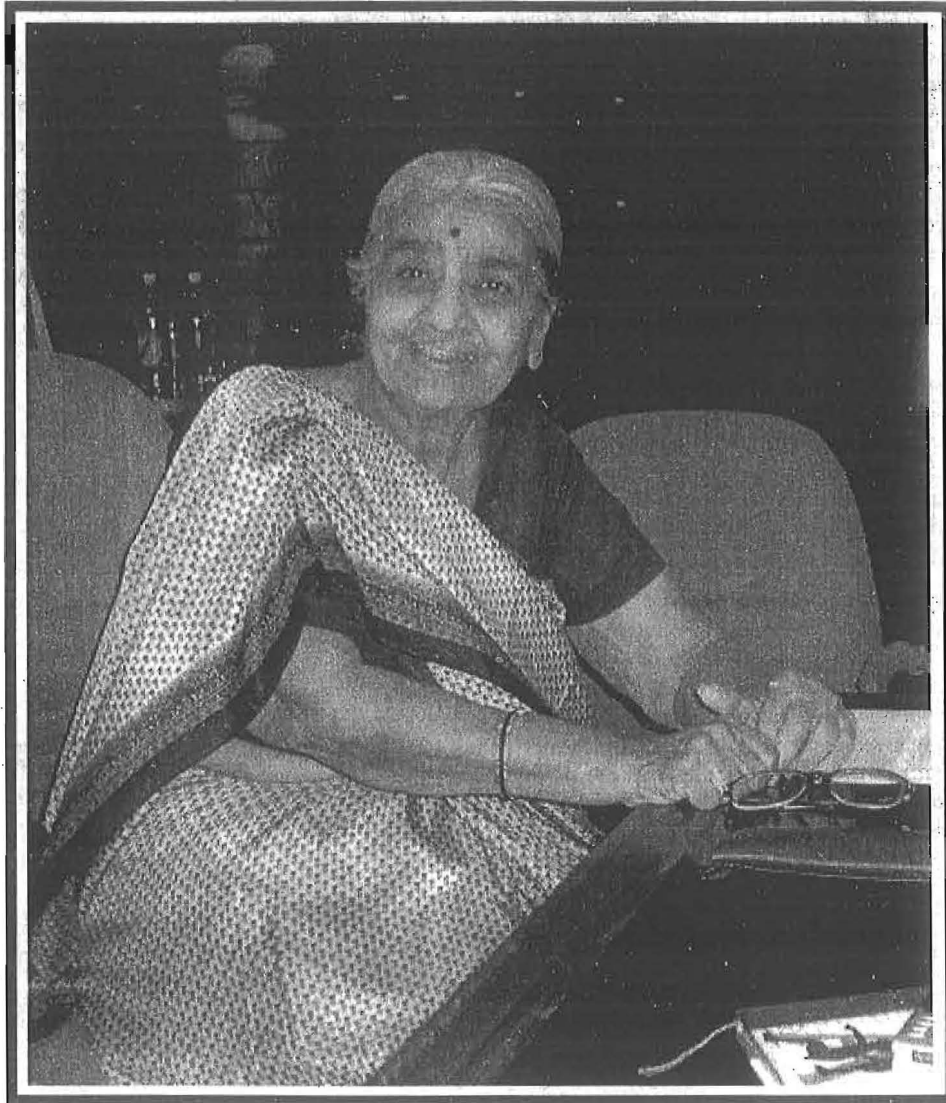




Newsletter

Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) • Special Issue • December 2009, Volume II, No.5



Prof. Neera Desai
1925-2009

Editor's Note

The IAWS deeply mourns the passing away of one of its founder members. Professor Neera Desai, affectionately called as Neeraben by her friends in women's studies is no more. This special issue of the newsletter pays homage to Neeraben who will be remembered forever for her significant contributions to women's studies. Going beyond the social reform ideas of women's education, her critique of educational institutions combined with her research on gender led her to build both institutions for women's studies and the capacity of young scholars across India to pursue research in women's studies. Many of the reminisces on Neeraben's life and work, including the contributions in this newsletter, constantly remind us how this remarkable scholar and a visionary of women's liberation compassionately pursued and launched women's studies as an academic discipline through her sustained activism. If her scholarship challenged the dominant and well-entrenched patriarchal notions of nation, education and family, her activism along with that of others led to forging a strong 'women's studies family' such as the Indian Association for Women's Studies, one of the largest all India associations with memberships from educational institutions, academics and activists, researchers, students and individuals concerned with women's issues and women's development. Even as we grieve the passing away of Neeraben, we are sure that the women's studies institutions and individuals will continue to draw strength from her successful life and work.

In this issue, IAWS also pays homage to another remarkable crusader for gender justice, C.B.Muthamma, the first woman diplomat, whose struggle against gender discrimination within India's prestigious Civil Services requires special acknowledgement. We provide here details of her writ petition and the judgement in favour of gender equality enshrined in our constitution. This was a significant achievement of Muthamma around the time, and almost as an after effect of, the CSWI Report, *Towards Equality* through which women's studies scholars like Neeraben and others had exposed the failure of the constitution in bringing about gender equality.

India's current economic development is marked by an increasing share of women in employment with a significant contribution of women to the household income and to the nation's economy. The implications of these recent trends for gender equality and what meaning such a development holds for women's lives and well-being are some of the issues that concern women's studies scholars. In this issue of the newsletter we bring to you a report of the recent national level consultation on employment strategies and women's work. We also bring to you a critical note on Assisted Reproductive Technologies especially on surrogacy and its implication for women's right to reproductive health prepared by SAMA, Resource Group for Women and Health.

As we mentioned in our last issue, IAWS along with Roshini Nilaya and the Department of Women's Studies, Mysore University organized the southern regional workshop on 'Re-affirming Plurality, Seeking Justice and Democracy' on 12 and 13th October, 2009, in Mangalore. Around 145 participants, mainly students from colleges participated and the event was widely covered by the local media. We provide you here a shorter version of the 'opening remarks' of the former IAWS president and the 'resolution' adopted at the workshop. A detailed version of the proceedings and a report will be made available in the next issue. IAWS is also planning a series of regional workshops for the next few months beginning with the New Year. Readers will find announcements for two workshops to be held in February 2010 in this newsletter. In due course we will provide details of the other workshops through the IAWS website and also detailed reports through this newsletter.

IAWS EC wishes you all a very happy and productive new year 2010.

S.Anandhi, anandhister@gmail.com

Contents

Editorial	2
Prof. Neera Desai Remembered	
A Tribute to Neera Desai - <i>Uma Chakravarti</i>	3
A Homage to Dr. Neera Desai - <i>Maitheyyi Krishnaraj</i>	5
Dr. Neera Desai: Grace Under Fire - <i>Veena Poonacha</i>	7
CWDS Pays Tribute to Neeraben	9
Notes and Reports	
Struggle for Gender Justice: C.B.Muthamma Remembered	10
National Consultation on Employment Strategies and Women's Work - A Report	11
Assisted Reproductive Technologies - A Critical Note	13
The IAWS Southern Regional Workshop	16
Announcements	
IAWS Workshop on Feminist Methodology	18
IAWS Seminar and Workshop on Gender and Science	19
Book News	19
Book Review	20
Photo of Neeraben by Meena Gopal, August 2006	

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A Tribute to Neera Desai

Uma Chakravarti¹

I first met Neera Desai in the early 1980s, of all places in Warangal where she and Prof. A. R. Desai had come to attend a women's conference in Warangal University. The conference coincided with a civil rights week. So one evening we all walked to the venue of a civil rights meeting—perhaps on encounters—in a public park only to find the meeting cancelled by the police. That early meeting defined the relationship that Neeraben and I came to share: an unqualified engagement with 'women's issues' but an acute consciousness of the larger political economy that lay as the ground from which we could understand the context of women's issues. It framed all Neeraben's work: the early analysis of Women in Modern India which was her M.A. thesis that was published many years later in 1957, her work on women in the bhakti movement, and all her later writing on such a wide range of issues that it is impossible to do full justice to them. What is notable is that she was wonderfully eclectic in her work; perhaps this was an imperative of the first generation of women's studies scholars who did not have the 'luxury' of specializing since there was so much to write about—work, family, culture, history, sociology, just about everything. All of this made her an apt person to figure in the series on foremothers, written up by Geraldine Forbes and Usha Thakkar, published in a women's history journal some years ago.

Neeraben began to think and write about women before the women's movement of the last quarter of the last century took off, so she was easily a pioneer in the field. The participation in the Committee on the Status of Women would have sharpened her early thinking as did the democratic movements of the late sixties and early seventies. Her youthful years had already been influenced by the democratic aspirations of the early post independence years, and her close companionship with her Marxist husband made her acutely aware of economic, social and political institutions that impacted patriarchal structures. As she went on to write her Ph.D

thesis on social change in Gujarat, analyzing the social reform movement in Gujarat, she provided an early but acutely sensitive conceptualization of the limits of modernity: the reform movements she argued bifurcated the reforming middle class into two halves which happily adopted 'modern' values in the public sphere while leaving the private sphere of the home to be ruled by tradition, a formulation that preceded Partha Chatterjee's argument of the 'nationalist resolution of the women's question' with that terrible split of the Bengali bhadralok male's world into two parts wherein the inner domain was sacred and the outer public domain was profane. She went on to show the vitality of women's critique of the reformist male by examining the arguments of the non literate wife of the Gujarati reformer Narmad which highlighted his hypocrisy as a reformer. And most pithily she pointed out, as Pandita Ramabai had done, that there never was a golden age for women, as they were always under the domination of men, a position that would have offended the intelligentsia that had found comfort in the construction of a golden age of women in the ancient past from the days of social reform onwards.

In this brief recall of Neeraben's contribution to women's studies I will pick a couple of her essays to focus on her work to outline some of her concerns and modes of analyzing a given field. Let me begin with her essay on women in bhakti. She read this paper at the Trivandrum conference of the IAWS in 1984. It was published thereafter in the co-edited volume on women and culture spearheaded by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, brought out by the SNTD Research Centre for Women's Studies, Mumbai which Neeraben had founded. Beginning with a discussion of the social institutions—typically identified by her as feudal institutions of medieval times, exploitative but ideologically difficult to resist because the brahmana's had fed the peasants with the theory of karma, the obligations of the caste system and an investment in rituals. She then proceeded to examine the democratic thrust of the bhakti movement

¹ Feminist historian and a member of the Executive Committee of IAWS (2008-2011).

for men and women as well as its potential for change. She noted the use of vernacular by the bhaktas: she quoted Kabir's statement that Sanskrit was the water of the closed well, while *bhasha*, the spoken language was the water of the running stream. Finally she went on to focus on women bhaktins, their regional and caste location and their attempt at negotiating both caste and patriarchy, as they sustained their search for a democratic mode of experiencing religious liberation. She noted the development of a religious framework that bridged the divide between householder and renouncer enabling more women to be part of a movement that did not require them to leave home. There were brief outlines of Janabai, Bahinabai, Meera and other less known Gujarati women saints. And of course there was the critique of Bhakti and its limitations for radical social change.

Neeraben led a considerable body of research that SNTD initiated as part of its attempt to understand the lives of poor women. Using fieldwork to generate data she examined the life, family and work of working class women. Like a number of pieces of work that Neeraben produced where she collaborated with a range of scholars, some well known like Alice Thorner, others younger than her, this paper too was the product of joint work co-authored by Alice Thorner. It is an early account of living conditions of working class women living in the chawls and slums of Mumbai. Drawing from urban sociologists like Lewis Mumford and others she provided a brief history of Bombay, its growing industrialization and financial importance, migration from the rural areas, and a terrifying pressure on space as interlinked processes that gave rise to a substantial underclass that lived on the 'edge' of the city at least metaphorically. The essay goes on to sensitively capture the vulnerability of women living in slums as they could easily be uprooted by a combination of urban land mafias and state policies.

The essay goes on to use its case studies to build a picture of individual women, 'living tales of the hazards, tensions, turbulences, and simple joys and hopes' as she puts it, to draw attention to a segment that sociologists had neglected up until then. Among these women a number of them were *khanawalis*, a unique institution of Mumbai, who supplied food to the migratory worker living without 'his' family, in sleeping houses with minimum facilities. This is a preferred occupation

because it keeps the woman within the home, able to manage household and children while contributing to the family income. Other women did putting out work of various kinds for similar reasons. It is clear from this essay that Neeraben was sharply aware of sociological 'holy cows' such as family as the basis of social relations: she subjects the myth of integrated family relationships, normally drawn from middle class family patterns and the ubiquity of the joint family to scrutiny. By contrasting her narratives from the chawls with the slums she shows that the slums have a predominantly nucleated family structure whereas the chawls often serve more extended families. Domestic relations too are subjected to critical analysis as she breaks down the 'naturalness' of the 'integrated' family. Instead she shows how much strife there is within the family including domestic violence as husbands/men assert their power over women, subjecting them to surveillance and humiliation on an everyday basis. Yet Neeraben points out with acute perceptiveness that women do not leave bad relationships because being without a man makes them vulnerable to predatory assaults by other men. She writes: For women, marriage and family provide a sign of protection, whether she really gets protection or not is a different matter. It is a placard that she is not available for people at large. A battered woman is scared of leaving the symbol of security, since she might be exposed to hundreds of wolves instead of one...The umbrella of family is accepted not for the emotional warmth it is supposed to provide as an institution but more as a social fortress providing protection to women from lustful desires of men.

Neeraben is not judgmental: there is no celebration of family in the middle class homes and no special critique of the working class man, merely a way of capturing the distinctive experience of working class patriarchy shaped by class and circumstances of urban existence.

I met Neeraben many times over the years in Mumbai, in Baroda and other cities where seminars and conferences were held. Always warm and encouraging, wonderfully supportive to younger scholars she epitomized both scholarship, and commitment: not only to women and women's studies but to democratic rights for all. Goodbye Neeraben, we will think of you often.

A Homage to Dr. Neera Desai¹

Maithreyi Krishnaraj²

To every one she was always “Neeraben”, a kind of benign mother figure who protected and carried with her, the brood of Women’s Studies scholars. I do not believe in hagiography because that makes her as a person uni-dimensional and misses out on the struggle she had in the challenges of the period, the challenges she faced in remaking herself in ever new roles. Like most of us, she had her strength and weaknesses. She was not a ‘saint’ endowed with wisdom, preaching to us but a very human being with human foibles and excellences, angry sometimes, forgiving at other times. Most of all she had a caring nature. One misses the *dhoklas* and tea that always awaited us when we had meetings arranged at her house.

What is remarkable is how she learnt all the way. I joined the SNTD women’s studies ‘unit’ as it was then, a small one room place heroically managed by the Hon. Director of the unit. Both Neeraben and myself grew in women’s Studies and grew with it. Women’s studies changed us and we changed women’s studies as our understanding grew and the fact that a totally new area emerged, threw open vistas of exploration, ideas, and theorization. Above all, underwriting the whole enterprise was a deeply felt concern for bringing true equality for women. I am still uncomfortable with the new notion of ‘empowerment’ that bypasses the question of gender equality.

Not many people know of the history of how the unit blossomed into a full-scale research center gaining recognition across the country and abroad. It was the outcome of a set of fortuitous circumstances, a period in history, when the time had come. International conferences of the UN had placed women’s issue center stage. But what was amazing was that Neeraben, long before all this flurry of activity began, had identified research and documentation of women’s status as an important area of concern for a women’s university. In a

symposium held at the university to celebrate the golden jubilee of the S.N.D.T. university in 1966, Dr Zakir Hussain declared that ‘whatever else these educated women would do, they would be housewives and mothers on whom would largely rest the responsibility of running the enlightened home and of moulding the future generations of the country.’ While the perceived function of women’s education had widened, the idea remained that women’s education was primarily to make them better mothers and wives. Most members who attended this symposium had endorsed this view. Neera Desai’s voice was alone among these voices of the experts. She pointed out the dilemmas. I paraphrase her words freely to reflect the essence of what she upheld. All laudable objectives mentioned by the experts in education cannot be pursued un-problematically. The values a girl was supposed to imbibe through education such as self-respect, rationality, objectivity, application of knowledge for a desired social change, a new self hood as a citizen irrespective of any other consideration contradicted with the actual situation of girls in the family and society because the survival of the family depended on women subordinating their interests to that of the family. The working paper on that occasion emphasized that women’s education should help develop among women a sense of social purpose and competence to play one’s role in social and national development. She had proposed that a women’s university should not only advocate career promoting courses for women but investigate how women fared in the country. This was before the ICSSR formulated the programme of women’s studies, before the path breaking ‘Towards Equality’³ Neeraben arrived at a period of history with her own background of openly acknowledged feminist consciousness. She was never afraid to declare she was a ‘feminist’. Kamladevi Chattopadhyaya had taken umbrage at Neeraben’s ‘feminism’. Kamladevi was among those who believed socialism and nationalism would get divisive if women asserted their rights as a separate issue.

1 Source: *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.44, no.36, September 5-11, 2009.

2 A well-known feminist economist and one of the founder members of IAWS has co-authored a book, *Women and Society in India* along with Prof. Neera Desai.

3 I was about to say ‘seminal’ but after I imbibed feminist consciousness learnt not to say ‘seminal’ Unfortunately we cannot say “vaginal” or ‘uterine’ or ‘Ova’. Patriarchal language is against us.

Thus early on Neeraben had not talked of women's studies as a mere academic enterprise but as a tool for the development of women for themselves and society. In this perspective, she held great store by women becoming aware of their rights, of their subordination and promote action in many spheres. In a book that she prepared for Sparrow, the title was 'Feminism as Experience'. Interestingly, Neeraben's own 'feminist consciousness' did not arise out of any painful experiences within the family. Neeraben arrived at a period of history with her own background of openly acknowledged feminist consciousness. It was, I surmise her engagement with the national movement as a young girl and her MA thesis on women that prepared her for women's studies.

The setting up of a unit for women's studies was aided by a benign and caring matriarchy at SNDT. Beginning from Premilila Thackersey, who nurtured the women's university in its inception to later by Dr. Madhuri Shah who in her position as Chair of the UGC helped transform the Women's Studies Unit into a Centre. Dr Jyoti Trivedi made the state government take up the UGC granted posts so that the Centre had full fledged permanent faculty. The matriarchy had another crusader in Kamilini Bhansali who as Vice chancellor helped the Center through out her regime not only through negotiations with UGC and the State Government but also through appreciative acknowledgements of the contribution that the staff of the SNDT Research Center made. The tremendous rapport Neeraben built with this matriarchy was as much responsible for what she achieved as much as her own efforts. This is not to belittle her own efforts or her achievements but to highlight the milieu in which she began. It is rare to get this confluence of favourable stars. As times changed and new outsiders came to SNDT there has definitely been less support.

The point of the story is to say it was a tide in the affairs of women's studies. The setting up of the center for women's development studies in New Delhi by Vina Mazumdar who was on the advisory committee of the SNDT center gave further fillip to Neeraben's efforts. After all the women's studies movement was a political enterprise and needed leaders. I as a close collaborator from 1975 learnt much from Neeraben. We differed temperamentally in many ways. I was more at ease in

conceptualisation but had less understanding of political nuances. Often I would dash off angry letters to ICSSR or UGC for withholding grants and she would caution me not to put things in writing so strongly. In the seventeen years I worked there, she gave me space to do what I liked and what I was good at. More than anything else, the combination of action and research, the contact with women's movement that I gained from her support and example enriched me. There were times however when I expected fulsome praise but she would withhold it but tell someone else about how well I articulate issues. She admired my writing but often I also felt an undercurrent of unease in her. She had great insights but I had the gift of the gab. I got quick promotion to eventually take over as Director and Professor thanks to her support. She wrote extensively in Gujarati to which I have no access.

Her contribution to women's studies is not just what she did at SNDT or what she wrote but her unstinting support to young scholars all over the country, to women's organizations and women's movement. Her outreach was vast. She was active in the IAWS. In fact IAWS was launched at SNDT during the first conference. Neeraben grew gentler, more accepting of me and others as years passed. Her own insecurities melted away as she became accomplished and grew more confident. In the early years she was often impatient with juniors. Through all the years she had also, this other side, where she was a kind host, humane. Because we were in the same department there was an undercurrent of a mild rivalry but this phase did not surface when she retired. There were many occasions when she came over to comfort me. During the first conference, I was at work long hours in SNDT while my children were left at my sister's. I stayed at the SNDT guest house as she did. Once I fainted due to overwork, someone reported to her, she came and briskly whisked me away. When I had a fracture and I was staying at Borivali she came all the way to see me. When I was leaving for the USA as my son who had cancer had only a few days to live, she came to see me off at the airport. Most persons who met her felt this 'motherly' quality.

Her failings? Sometimes I felt she was too cautious to take a stand-too circumspect. May be I am wrong. May be I am the political innocent. ○

Dr. Neera Desai: Grace under Fire

Veena Poonacha¹

Dr. Neera Desai, the founder-Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies and the Centre for Rural Development was also a Professor of Sociology and Professor Emeritus at the SNTD Women's University, Mumbai. In the course of her long and illustrious career, she was a distinguished Fellow at the Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi, and held the J.P. Naik distinguished Fellowship. She was an office bearer of the International Sociological Association, the chairperson of the Research Committee on Women and Society, the founding member of the Indian Sociological Association and the founding member of the Indian Association of Women's Studies.

Her Contributions

Her contribution to the development of the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) is particularly noteworthy, for it was initiated at the first national conference of Women's Studies held in 1981 at the SNTD Women's University. Over the years the IAWS has lobbied for the development of Women's Studies within the university system. Her participation in a wide range of activities ranging from research and writing to political activism and grass-roots development stemmed from an understanding that academic life would be sterile without hands-on experience in initiating social change. It was because of her capacity to bridge the gap between academics and activism that she was able to contribute to some of the significant policy documents such as the *Towards Equality Report* (1974), that aimed at expanding opportunities for women. She was a member of the Social Taskforce in the Committee on the Status of Women in India established by the Government of India to examine the status of women. She was also a member of the National Commission on Self Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector in 1987.

It was because of her understanding of the needs of education and civil society interventions that she founded the Research Centre for Women's Studies. From its inception, this Centre went beyond research to include community development and lobbying for social change.

To her research, teaching and extension activities were not discrete categories, but rather intricately interwoven. It is from one of the many action research projects that she conducted that the Centre for Rural Development evolved. It is indeed recognition of her vision, that the University Grants Commission used the institution that she founded as a model for the development of Women's Studies in the country.

Research and Publications

Dr. Neera Desai's prolific research and writings have focused on a wide range of issues, ranging from a sensitive understanding of the sociological context of the medieval women poets to an analysis of an efficient communication system for rural women in the unorganized sector. It also included an analysis of the women's movement, the development of feminist consciousness and a critical analysis of women's life writings in Gujarati. It was her commitment to the democratization of knowledge systems that much of her publications were in Gujarati. By writing in Gujarati, she aimed to reach out to the non-English speaking people the messages of social change and women's liberation. Addressing a wide range of readers, her writings in Gujarati were equally prolific. It ranged from legal literacy booklets for women at the grassroots to theoretical expositions on the women's movement, life writings, feminist concepts and developmental issues. Her well-known writings in English and Gujarati are as follows: *Women in Modern India* (1957); *Women and Society in India* (1987) jointly with Maithreyi Krishnaraj; *Women in Indian Society* (2001) jointly with Usha Thakkar; *Indian Women Change and Challenge in the International Decade* (1985) jointly with Vibhuti Patel; *Bharatman Nari Andolan: Saman Adhikarathi Nari Mukti* (2000) jointly with Trupti Shah; *Gujaratma Oranisms Saadims Samajik Parivartan* (2000); *Bharat Ni Stree No Paltato Darajjo; Baratiya Samajma Stree Jeevan: Streeya Darajjo-Vishayak Ahevento Sankaske* 1971-74 (1978), an award winning book; and *Manav Shastra* (1969). Her most recent publication was *Feminism as Experience: Thoughts and Narratives*, published by SPARROW.

¹ Director, Research Center for Women's Studies, SNTD Women's University, Mumbai

Her Career Highlights

Through a career that saw many heights, she has held several important positions within SNDT as senate member, executive council member and dean of the faculty of social sciences. She has also been the member of Boards of Studies and selection committees of universities of Mumbai, Pune, Jaipur, Nagpur, Gujarat, Saurashtra, Delhi, Gauhati, Tirupati and Kerala as well as Shivaji University, and the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. Through this long career of five decades, she was awarded the best teacher award in 1976 by the Government of Maharashtra, and was appointed a national teacher by the University Grants Commission. Additionally, she has also taught, delivered lectures and participated in conferences/seminars in various academic forums. To mention a few, these included: The Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs in New York; Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University, UK; the Institute of Social Studies (Hague); Duke University of North Carolina; Mount Holyoke, Rutgers; Institute of Research, Douglas College, State University of New York, Oswego; the Feminist Press of the City University of New York and Asia Pacific Institute for Broadcasting, Kuala Lumpur. These achievements were not easily won and her struggles were many. No doubt, as the wife of an eminent sociologist, Dr. A.R. Desai, she did not face active hostility in academic forums, but she had to face subtle discrimination and indifference to her ideas. Even within SNDT Women's University, she had to struggle to get Women's Studies accepted as an academic discipline.

Ideological Influences

Her lifetime academic and political work can be traced to her early experiences of participation in the nationalist movement. Her association with Pushpa Mehta, a noted social worker of the time in Gujarat, made her sensitive to gender issues. Pushpa Mehta was the first person to set up rescue homes and shelter for women. Her participation in the Hindustan Scouts Movement as a young student also raised her socio-political consciousness. It is therefore no wonder that she was among the earliest scholars to focus on the women's question with her award-winning book *Women in Modern India* (1957). Written from a distinct feminist orientation, the book explores the situation of women in India, critiques the rise of conservatism that seeks to push

women back into the private domain. It also raises uncomfortable questions about the purpose of women's education.

Her educational philosophy was shaped by the Gandhian and the New Left ideals. She believed (along with other educationists in the early decade of India's Independence) that education should enable participation in social development and reconstruction. It was also shaped by the political upheavals initiated by the various tribal, peasant and student movements since the 1960s. From this ideological location, she shaped the Research Centre for Women's Studies as a movement within the academia to break the academic isolation of the University system.

Her Personality

Despite her tremendous intellectual and leadership capacities, Dr. Neera Desai, was essentially a very modest and shy person. She did not believe in talking about her achievements. It was this quality that drew people to her. She was my Ph.D. guide and I hope, over the years, my friend. Her greatness lies in that she treated everyone with equal dignity and she has been a source of support in all my many endeavors. She is one of those few people on whom academic achievements and fame sat lightly upon. I have been particularly impressed with her strength and determination during her recent illness. At no point did she complain about pain and continued to lead her life with quiet dignity and charm, managing her household and life. This was her essence—grace under fire. With quiet dignity and charm, she overcame all obstacles that greeted her and to the very end, she was planning on possible research and translation projects. She will be sorely missed by scholars and students of Women's Studies. ○

The Dr. Neera Desai Memorial Library

To commemorate Dr. Neera Desai's Work and Contribution, SPARROW (Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women) based in Mumbai, of which Prof. Neera Desai was the founder trustee, has named its library with its 70553 holdings as the Dr. Neera Desai Memorial Library.

Remembering Neeraben

Centre For Women's Development Studies (CWDS) New Delhi

We at CWDS join the rest of the women's studies community in grief and remembrance of Neeraben, who passed away June 25 2009. As the founder Director of the Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University in 1974, Neeraben was responsible for carving out a new space in an institution that carried the legacy of social reform. Her interest in women went all the way back to her student days – during the very years when India became an independent nation, she decided to study the impact of British Rule on Indian women for her Ph.D. CWDS is fortunate to have her own account of her life and work in the collection *Memory Frames: Oral Narratives of Four First Generation Women's Studies Scholars* where she recalls her struggles within sociology, joining SNDT and becoming more involved in progressive social movements.

In 1981 the first National Conference of Women's Studies was held at SNDT. Though it was the responsibility of a group, it was Neeraben who made the historic event a reality. Well beyond the space of her own institution, she helped found the Indian Association for Women's Studies. The creation of the IAWS was as much a task of activism as promoting new scholarship, in her search for an overcoming of the dichotomy between academia and action.

She warmly acknowledged her exposure to women's issues by virtue of being a member of the Special Task Force of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI). In her own words this experience was an eye-opener, and brought new perspectives into her work. Her relationship with the founding members of the CWDS grew, as she was amongst those who strongly supported its establishment in 1980. As Chairperson of the Centre from 1987-96 she brought substantive issues to the discussions of the executive committee, challenging the Centre to publish more on women's studies' relationship to the social sciences, while contributing new ideas for projects and further research. The action research evolving in West Bengal was particularly close to her heart.

Neeraben was one of the first generation women's studies scholars who helped the Centre in framing its perspectives. Her scholarship within the broad and evolving world of women's studies was impressive in its time. Some of us have been struck by her deep interest in feminism as a theoretical orientation and a practice, when many of her generation did not choose to identify with the term. Indeed, Neeraben vividly recalls her first publication "Women in Modern India" (in 1957, based on her Ph.D.) with a preface by Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya. Though appreciative of the book, she was not happy with its "feminist" analysis. Of course, Neeraben took this as a compliment! Many years later, as one of our early JP Naik Distinguished Fellows (2001-03), she pursued her interest in feminism through interviews of feminists of different generations in Maharashtra. This has now emerged in full book length form.

We also remember Neeraben for her commitment to the cause of education. In her contribution to a festschrift for Vina-di, she did not mince her words in her critique of both the women's movement and women's studies for not taking education in the contemporary context seriously enough.

Our sorrow is that we did not have the opportunity to meet with her in recent years. We vividly remember her efforts to attend the last Silver Jubilee Conference of the IAWS in Lucknow last year in February where she was to be felicitated along with other founder members. Unfortunately, her travel plans were thwarted by the inclement weather.

Neeraben will be remembered for her quiet determination and warm interactions, whether in her home in Mumbai or in Delhi, where no formalities were necessary. Her strength in the face of terminal illness can also not be forgotten. Neeraben will always occupy a unique place in our institutional and individual memories.

REPORTS

Why It Is Important and Relevant to Remember C. B. Muthamma

An innocuous report in the HINDU dated October 15, 2009 announcing the passing away of C. B. Muthamma, India's first woman diplomat, also mentioned, among other things, the fact that Ms. Muthamma would be remembered for her successful crusade for equality for women in the male dominated Indian Civil Services of her time through her petition against the government of India on the ground that she had been overlooked for promotion. Her case was upheld in 1979 in a landmark judgment by a three-member Bench headed by Justice V R Krishna Iyer. Out of sheer curiosity I procured the details of the petition and the judgment, most of which is reproduced below. Needless to add, a glance at the contents will immediately make clear its continued relevance for our struggle towards gender justice.

Grounds of Muthamma's petition:

Muthamma, a senior member of the Indian Foreign Service, complained that she had been denied promotion to Grade I of the Indian Foreign Service on the grounds that (i) there is a long standing practice of hostile discrimination against women (ii) had to give an undertaking at the time of joining the foreign service that if she were to get married, she would resign from the service (iii) had to face the consequences of being a woman and thus suffered discrimination and (iv) the members of the appointment committee of the Union cabinet are basically prejudiced against women as a group. She further challenged two rules namely rule 8(2) of Indian Foreign Service (Conduct and Discipline) Rules 1961 and Rule 18(4) of the Indian Foreign Service (Recruitment, Cadre Seniority and Promotion) Rules 1961, which in short states that a woman member of the service shall obtain permission in writing of the Government before marriage and the woman member may be required to resign any time after marriage if the Government is satisfied that her family and domestic commitments will hamper her duties as a member of the service and under the second rule no married woman shall be entitled as of right to be appointed to the service. The petitioner's remaining grievance was that during the interval of some months between her first evaluation and the second, some officers junior to her, have gone above her and her career would be affected.

The Judgment [1979]: [Extracts]:

The Judgment of the Court was delivered by KRISHNA IYER, J. "This writ petition by Miss Muthamma, a senior member of the Indian Foreign Service, bespeaks a story which makes one wonder whether Articles 14 and 16 belong to myth or reality. The credibility of constitutional mandates shall not be shaken by governmental action or inaction but it is the effect of the grievance of Miss Muthamma that sex prejudice against Indian womanhood pervades the service rules even a third of a century after

Freedom. There is some basis for the charge of bias in the rules and this makes the ominous indifference of the executive to bring about the banishment of discrimination in the heritage of service rules. If high officials lose hopes of equal justice under the rules, the legal lot of the little Indian, already priced out of the expensive judicial market, is best left to guess. This disturbing thought induces us to make a few observations about the two impugned rules which appear prima facie, discriminatory against the female of the species in public service and have surprisingly survived so long, presumably, because servants of governments are afraid to challenge unconstitutional rule making by the Administration".

"Discrimination against women, in traumatic transparency, is found in this rule. If a woman member shall obtain the permission of government before she marries, the same risk is run by government if a male member contracts a marriage. If the family and domestic commitments of a woman member of the Service is likely to come in the way of efficient discharge of duties, a similar situation may well arise in the case of a male member..."

On the Rule which stated that "No married woman shall be entitled as of right to be appointed to the service", the Judgment pronounced thus: "At the first blush this rule is in defiance of Article 16. If a married man has a right, a married woman, other things being equal, stands on no worse footing. This misogynous posture is a hangover of the masculine culture of manacled the weaker sex forgetting how our struggle for national freedom was also a battle against woman's thralldom. Freedom is Indivisible, so is Justice. That our founding faith enshrined in Articles 14 and 6 should have been tragically ignored vis-a-vis half of India's humanity, viz., our women, is a sad reflection on the distance between Constitution in the book and Law in Action... We do not mean to universalise or dogmatise that men and women are equal in all occupations and all situations and do not exclude the need to pragmatise where the requirements of particular employment, the sensitivities of sex or the peculiarities of societal sectors or the handicaps of either sex may compel selectivity. But save where the differentiation is demonstrable, the rule of equality must govern".

Subsequently, the obnoxious gender unjust rules were deleted, Muthamma was promoted. The Court however directed the government of India to review Muthamma's case with particular focus on seniority vis-a-vis those junior to her who had been promoted earlier than her. What is equally important is the concluding statement of the judgment, namely, the following: "It was further impressed upon the respondent [GOI] the need to overhaul all service rules to remove the stains of sex discrimination, without waiting for ad-hoc inspiration from Writ Petitions or gender charity".

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Women and Work: Contemporary Trends and Challenges

Report on National Consultation on 'Current Employment Strategies and Women's Work' organized by International Labour Organization (ILO), in partnership with the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE) and the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi, July 6 - 7, 2009.

The National Consultation brought together representatives of the government, workers, employers, academics and civil society. India's total workforce has grown to 455.7 million by 2004-05, and an increasing share of women in employment forms an important aspect of the current scenario of growth. Women's participation in the labour force and contribution to household income as well as the GDP is both significant and increasing. The Consultation was held in the context of an emerging National Employment Policy; the upcoming Census 2011; insights from the field that recommend reviewing some key programmes, and building the knowledge base for gender sensitive macroeconomic policy making.

The inaugural session took stock of persisting gender inequalities in job creation, wage differentials, disproportionate representation in poorly paid work and vulnerabilities of the informal economy and highlighted the need to focus on education as the key determinant of opportunities and wages for women and stressed the need for gender sensitive policy architecture. In the first technical session on 'Emerging Trends for Women's Work in the Current Growth Scenario and Issues', Professor Nirmala Banerjee defined women's empowerment as their control over their own labour, which questions the standard belief that social division of labour is natural and housework automatically women's responsibility. Women's unpaid work is not simply care work - in the sense of extension of the reproductive role - but very often productive and contributing significantly to the family's livelihood and real income. The state is complicit in making women 'housewives' because it accepts the official measurement of workforce. Banerjee underscored the informalization of women's work - between 2000 and 2005, the share of casual work for women in manufacturing has grown and regular jobs shrunk. As men migrate out of rural areas, cultivation becomes women's work. Women are increasingly taking up home based manufacturing like beedi rolling, embroidery and zari work. Women's employment in the tertiary sector has also increased. We need improvements in quality and productivity of work.

Saraswati Raju, Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, presented data based maps on 'World of Women's Work in India: Regional Patterns and Perspectives'. Female work participation is very low in the northern plains compared to the rest of India. Such variations are absent for males. The high growth in self-employment in some states is a corollary of declining wage work. The complexity of women's world of work cannot be overstated; about 20% of 'non-working' rural women cited 'social and/or religious constraints' - varying from 42% in Haryana to 26-27% in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh, 21% in Bihar and none in Mizoram. The analysis brought out clearly that women's work has different connotations in different regions and policies must be sensitive

to these differences. Preet Rustagi, Fellow, Institute for Human Development highlighted that the recent increase in women's employment perpetuates earlier gender-based differences in the labour market. More (and newer) employment avenues including retail trade, maids/housekeeping services, tailors and dressmakers, clerical jobs, salespersons, food processing, nursing/health technicians, gram panchayats - are drawing women into the workforce. However, majority of the urban, regular and salaried female workers are in the unorganised sector with limited social security benefits. Major differences remain in wage incomes of men and women. Educated women gain regular jobs at better returns while those with poor human capital attributes remain at the low end of self-employment. The challenge lies in improving human capital endowments, skill enhancement and changing perceptions regarding women's work. In the discussion that followed, issues ranging from vulnerabilities of single, migrating women, poor coverage of Maternity Benefit Act, Equal Remuneration Act, increasing informalization of the economy to absence of social recognition of women's work as 'productive'. Increasing female workforce participation rate can go along with poor performance on other indicators and need not always be a positive development outcome.

The session on 'Emerging Issues against the Background of a Changing Economy' focused on issues of feminization of agriculture with the number of women constituting the agricultural workforce rising to 41.5% from 39.3% between 1993-94 and 2004-05. Strengthening women farmers is critical for rejuvenation of agriculture, calling for gender mainstreaming of planning, policy and implementation at all stages not just special programmes for women. The Eleventh Plan makes efforts to address women explicitly, yet presents agricultural workforce estimates that are not gender disaggregated! A large proportion of women workers in agriculture (64%) are in self employment. The bulk of women's work is unpaid. This process is aggravated during times of (general) joblessness. The impact of policy on work burden is generally ignored in planning. Making cheap and clean fuel available and ensuring assured supply of drinking water are two of the most important steps to substantially reduce women's work burden. In addition government must take women's time disposition into account while designing and implementing all policies but especially extension. Recommendations include improving access to land, credit, skill and training; micro finance though important cannot justify failure to augment institutional production credit for women. The discussion on how trade impacts women's work, especially in the 'export-driven' sectors, highlighted women's concentration in industries whose international markets are highly contested - food grains, cotton, tobacco, textiles - renders them more vulnerable; textile

exports directed to US/EU markets have fallen post-recession, badly affecting the 33.17 million people directly employed in the sector (2008-9). It took the view that promotion of SEZs is an important and controversial policy issue, particularly in the context of agriculture. While SEZs enhance employment opportunities, other issues such as wages and work conditions may not be favorable to women, given global experience and suggested that the policymakers could link sectoral fiscal and export incentives with provisions of social benefits for women. Another policy strategy to bolster employment is to seek designation of gender-sensitive products as 'Special Products' that would take less than full formula cuts in tariffs thus protecting vulnerable women agricultural farmers.

Jeemol Unni, Professor, Gujarat Institute of Development Research suggested that in multi-caste and segmented labour markets, combining of poverty alleviation that include the 'Commodity Line' providing for basic minimum of food, clothing and shelter, providing of wage employment through 'Labour Line' that initiates public works like the NREGA and of the 'Cash Line' which can be either direct or conditional cash transfers so that labourers are guaranteed supplementary inputs: skill, infrastructure, market, technology, institutions. The Kerala Paradox: High Human Development Index and low work force participation of women; high incidence of violence, dowry, erosion of property rights, mental ill health was discussed by Mridul Eapen. Schemes such as the Gender Awareness Programme, Health Clubs and Finishing School have had some success in increasing productivity. There is need for greater budget allocations and re-orienting of existing allocations to address women's work issues.

The session on 'Rethinking Strategies for Youth Employment particularly in the Rural Context' emphasized the need to assess the situation of rural youth, especially the economic opportunities available to them and stressed the importance of focusing on youth representation in decision making bodies. Participants discussed problems of reaching out to children/youth not in school; role of the private sector in relation to youth employment and employability; the need for a system for forecasting employment on a regular basis.

In the session on 'Measuring Women's Unpaid Work', a statistical overview of women's work in India was presented. The average growth rate of women workers between 1999-2000 and 2004-5 is 3.74%, (against 2.26% for men) with wearing apparel, computer related activities and private households recording the greatest increase in female workforce participation. The System of National Accounting (SNA) is used to divide economic and non-economic activities. Processing of primary products for own consumption is not regarded as economic activity as per the definitions followed in India. Further, activity status is self reported. It was concluded that women are doubly disadvantaged by virtue of being engaged in traditional industries where productivity is low and informality is high. The use of time-use statistics in engendering macro-level policy was explained. Time use

statistics reveal that macro policies affect market work, non-market work and leisure time in different ways with evident gender differentials. Some findings using NSS data and minimum wages to calculate contribution, productivity and output to incorporate gender into a macroeconomic social accounting matrix, was also shared in this session. Discussion followed on different methodologies of measurement and ways to incorporate women's work beyond paid SNA activities. ILO expressed interest in building statistical capacity in nations to track women and informality in the labour market.

In a session on 'Strengths and Challenges confronting SHGs and their Future Direction', K. Kalpana, based on her field work from Tamilnadu, discussed how women might use their agency to destabilize schemes that do not meet their requirements or match their life-circumstances and stressed the need to analyse the social dynamics and collective energies associated with SHGs to ensure 'decent work' in the sphere of wage employment as well. Participants shared their experiences with SHGs. Conflict between older broad-based mahila sanghams and newly formed SHGs was a common occurrence. Homogeneity - a relative concept and not absolute; women can be similar in one respect (caste, locational proximity, combating militarism in Kashmir) but diverse in others.

Suggestions emerging over the two days include the following:

- a. In agriculture, along with fighting for land rights, efforts to be made to ensure that women who are increasingly in charge of cultivation get the advantage of all public policies for farmers.
- b. Increasing women's productivity in neglected women's crops like oilseeds is important for the country's balance of payment.
- c. Expansion of efficient manufacturing is a national priority and requires increasing women's skills, and access to physical and human capital.
- d. EPZs offer ways of promoting women's decent work, thereby taking advantage of possibilities envisaged in GATT agreements.
- e. Increased employment of women in services is welcome but must be made more productive by appropriate training at all levels.
- f. The state has an obligation to reduce the burden of women's unpaid labour through making provisions for bringing water within easy reach as well as for adequate fuel.
- g. Single adult women may have difficulties in accessing NREGA because of the definition of a household.
- h. Measurement issues and ways for valuation of women's unpaid work.

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Assisted Reproductive Technologies – A Critique

Sama - Resource Group for Women and Health¹

This report examines the extent of commercialization of Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs)² including surrogacy in the context of increasing medical tourism in India and points out certain critical trends in medical tourism and how it encourages the growth of ART 'industry'.

Medical Tourism: Lucrative Venture

Economic globalization is no longer restricted to goods but includes health services as well. This has resulted in a phenomenal growth in medical tourism, with people traveling across the globe to use these services. It is a rapidly growing global market, which is now being actively developed and promoted by both public and private sectors and healthcare organizations. According to a joint report by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and McKinsey Consultants, there is a staggering 30 per cent growth annually in medical tourism in India and this could become a \$1-2 billion business by 2012³.

The Indian government, and private hospitals promote medical tourism by offering easy access to financial incentives like low interest rates for loans to establish a hospital, special 'medical visa', subsidized rates for buying drugs, import of equipments, subsidized lands etc.⁴ The USP of the Indian medical tourism industry is that it provides technologically advanced healthcare services at rates cheaper than in developed countries. The slogan being used to promote medical tourism is: "First world treatment at third world prices".⁵ India has the technological sophistication and infrastructure to maintain its market niche when compared to other countries. Additionally, Indian pharmaceuticals meet the stringent requirements of the USFDA. The maximum in-flow of medical tourists to India is from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Gulf countries and Africa. The influx of medical tourists from West, particularly from US, Canada, UK and other European countries, has also increased over the years.

Promoting ARTs as an Industry

Within the frame of medical tourism promotion, Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ARTs) are the latest addition to the long list of medical services being offered. Clinics providing IVF procedures have sprung up in most parts of the country. India is slowly turning into the surrogacy outsourcing capital of the world. It is estimated that the surrogacy business is worth \$445 million in India⁶. There has been a rise in IVF centres in smaller cities like Surat, Baroda and Rajkot. Some of these clinics work in

co-ordination with referral ART centres, located in tertiary healthcare institutes in cities. While the public health system remains in shambles, the growth of ARTs almost exclusively in the private domain is a matter of concern.

In the past years, there has been a tremendous growth in the surrogacy 'market'. An article published in the Telegraph reported that the incidence of surrogacy (in India) has doubled in the last three to five years.⁷ Interestingly, many of the clinics that have a surrogate program explicitly target foreigners and NRIs. This is primarily because a foreign clientele has always been seen as a more lucrative option for any domestic service. For foreigners too, India is an attractive destination for a number of reasons like legal ban on surrogacy in the home country, cheaper cost of treatment and easier availability of women who come forward to act as surrogates for a smaller fee as compared to women in their own countries.

Cashing in on demand

A significant number of the clinic websites were found to have promotional material for attracting couples from other countries through promotion of 'packages', which include several incentives, discounts, 'deals' with regard to services provided. These generally combine boarding, lodging and other facilities for enjoying the local tourist attractions alongside the ART 'treatment' schedules. Along with the IVF clinics, many surrogacy agencies have also come up specifically catering to the demand of foreign couples with regard to surrogacy and egg donation. IVF clinics that promote surrogacy seek to attach the values of benevolence and altruism to the process. The 'giving of life', 'helping someone build a family' and other such phrases are used to emphasize the 'good deed' in giving a womb for rent. The clinics promote surrogacy by glorifying the act of bearing a child for another couple, in an attempt to camouflage the underlying social forces that cause a woman to act as surrogate and a couple to seek one.

Complexities of Commercialization

While promoting surrogacy and egg donation, the websites conspicuously omit to mention the various

complications that may ensue in the process. Dr Alga Gupta, a freelance surrogacy advisor says, "You only make a payment once they are pregnant and you make sure you don't hand over the major money until they hand over the child." During the course of the nine months and even beyond, the surrogate may face serious complications pre and post delivery, miscarriage or even death. In the absence of a binding regulation, the socially and economically weak, and in many cases non-literate, surrogate may become a party to a contract that is life-threatening for her. The contracts are usually drawn up at the clinics, with little participation from surrogates or donors. The payment process may be more complicated if the surrogacy has been commissioned by a foreign couple.

Surrogacy arrangements may also lead to legal complications, particularly in the context of the commissioning couple getting divorced or splitting up before the birth of the child. In India, where a single man cannot adopt a girl child, the husband will not be allowed to keep the child if it is a girl child. There might be also instances where a surrogate, as a result of the emotional bond developed with the child, is no longer willing to give the child to the commissioning parents. Sometimes, the couple might just decide not to take the child from the surrogate, leaving behind both the surrogate and the child in a difficult situation. Owing to the tangle of medical, ethical and legal implications of surrogacy, the significance of informed consent, provision of counselling and giving complete information to the surrogate cannot be emphasized enough. Most of the clinics, however, neither mention the risks nor offer information and counselling facilities to the surrogates. In spite of the clear prohibition in the ICMR (Indian Council of Medical Research) Guidelines⁸ and the Draft Legislation⁹ regarding the involvement of ART clinics in sourcing surrogates, arranging surrogacy contracts or advertising for surrogacy, there are clear violations by the ART clinics. The clinics not only blatantly advertise surrogacy in their websites, but also post pictures of the surrogates and egg donors. This is a complete breach of the provision regarding maintaining the anonymity of surrogates and donors.

New forms of Commodification

Though the practice of surrogacy has existed for a long time, in recent years, it has become a huge means to earn money, cutting across geographical boundaries. The ART industry has also created new commodities. Reproductive body parts like sperm, ova and uteri can be treated like any other commodity to make a profit. A market

is created of people willing to buy and sell their body parts. In such circumstances, it is not only the reproductive organs, which become a saleable commodity, but also the individuals who sell/donate/rent these organs. Unlike sperm donation, which is a relatively simple procedure, oocyte donation is longer and more complicated. Thus, providing huge financial rewards in exchange of oocytes may encourage many women from lower socio-economic backgrounds to undergo the retrieval procedure for financial reasons without understanding the physical and psychological burden associated with it.

The process of surrogacy turns the normal biological function of a woman's body into a commercial contract. Services for surrogacy are advertised, and surrogate agencies make large profits in recruiting and providing/arranging the services of surrogates. Just as in the case of other donors, the selling point here too is "quality" of the surrogate, which is determined by social background, looks etc., and, preferably, by proven fertility. The advertisements for surrogacy are exemplary in driving this point home. Advertisements in magazine read, "Good looking, fair, 27-year-lady from respected family available for surrogate mother. Only rich and genuine people contact."

Regulation

It is also interesting to note that while supporting these technologies, the state has evaded regulating them till now. That the ART clinics do not follow the guidelines is a point raised repeatedly. The issue is further complicated since the guidelines are non-binding. Moreover, laying down stringent legislation may not be in line with the commercial interests of the state and private entrepreneurs. Very recently an attempt has been made towards this by the ART (Regulation) Bill and Rules 2008, which was released in September 2008 by the ICMR and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW). Although this is a welcome step, the Bill has come under a lot of criticism from the health and women's rights groups for its inadequacy in safeguarding the health, rights and overall interest of the users, especially women. The bill seems to be guided by the commercial interest of the Providers of ARTs and is weak on the operational realities of the provisions it proposes to put in place. It is also inadequate in addressing many of the issues related to surrogacy and the rights of the surrogate.

Conclusion

The entire process of assisted reproduction that women undergo provides a picture of a private industry, which

capitalizes on individual's vulnerability and the social construction of the desperate need to have a child. The provision of piecemeal information regarding diagnosis, process of 'treatment', success rate, side effects and costs adversely impacts the decision-making of couples. Schemes like 'money back' and 'shared risk' have been invented to mask the uncertainty of a successful outcome from ART procedures. The combination of ART procedures with tours and holidays as a medical tourism package has emerged as a new trend in ART promotion. This is being aggressively marketed by clinics, in collaboration with the state. With developed countries having well-regulated mechanisms, the focus has shifted to countries like India, where the price are lower and regulations are not stringent. Many unregistered clinics still operate and function under the tag of "infertility clinics". Since most of these technologies are provided within the private sector, profit making becomes the driving force. Since governments need money flowing into their economies, legislation is driven by capitalism and corporate interest. Since techniques for assisted conception are here to stay, it is important to ensure public safety and ethical behaviour.

¹ Sama - Resource Group for Women and Health is a Delhi based organization working on the issue of ARTs since the past 6 years through research and advocacy. Sama looks at issues of women and health through a caste, class and rights perspective. Contact email: sarojinipr@gmail.com.

² Assisted Reproductive Technologies are a group of technologies, which assist conception and pregnancy. These techniques are designed to increase the number of eggs and/or sperms, or bring them closer together, resulting in improved 'probability' of conception/pregnancy not otherwise possible. These technologies used for assisting reproduction range from simple or 'low-tech' methods like intrauterine insemination (IUI) to 'high-tech' methods such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF).

³ Net Scribes (India) Pvt. Ltd., (2008), 'Medical Tourism in India', Research and Markets, www.research and markets.com.

⁴ Booklet on Globalization and Health, Towards the National Health Assembly-II, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, 2007.

⁵ Booklet on Globalization and Health, (Booklet 1), Towards the National Health Assembly-II, Jan Swasthya Abhiyan, 2007.

⁶ IANS, (August 25th 2008), 'Surrogacy a \$445 mn Business in India', *The Economic Times*.

⁷ Martins, R., (January 22nd, 2006), 'Rent a womb', *The Telegraph*, Kolkata, www.telegraphindia.com.

⁸ Indian Council of Medical Research (2005). *National Guidelines for Accreditation, Supervision and Regulation of ART Clinics in India*.

⁹ Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW) and the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) The Assisted Reproductive Technologies (Regulation) Bill & Rules -2008 (Draft).

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IAWS Welcomes Delhi High Court Ruling on Section 377 IPC

The Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS), established in 1982, provides a forum for interaction among institutions and individuals engaged in teaching, research and action to help support and strengthen the outreach of women's studies to marginalised groups and under-served regions. We are proud to be associated with more than 1500 individuals and institutions from different parts of the country. The membership includes educational and social welfare organizations, individual academics, researchers, students, activists, social workers, media persons and others concerned with women's issues, development and empowerment.

In its commitment towards engaging with the experiences and emerging perspectives of communities who are stigmatized and denied citizenship rights because they are perceived to deviate from what is considered "natural" or "normal", such as, for example, people with disabilities, those who desire the same sex, lesbian and bisexual women, transgendered people, hijras and sexworkers, and their interaction with the women's movement, IAWS had passed a resolution at the General Body Meeting of the XIth National Conference, Goa (2005), on the politics of sexuality. The resolution categorically condemned the violation of every principle of equity, justice and citizenship by Section 377 of the IPC and the way it infringed the spirit of the fundamental Rights enshrined in the Constitution which guarantee equality and freedom to all citizens.

We, at the IAWS, welcome the ruling of the Delhi High Court on Section 377 of the IPC. The landmark judgment passed on July 2, 2009 struck down the provision of Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code which criminalized consensual sexual acts of adults in private, holding that it violated the fundamental right of life and liberty and the right to equality as guaranteed in the Constitution. We consider this to be an important step which would help evolve a framework of citizenship which is not merely a liberal framework of inclusion but one which is transformatory and liberatory.

Signed by Members of the IAWS Executive Committee:

Anita Ghai (President)

Meera Velayudhan (Vice-President)

Samita Sen (General Secretary)

Rukmini Sen (Joint Secretary)

M. Indira (Treasurer)

S. Anandhi (member)

Meena Gopal (member)

Uma Chakravarti (member)

Wandana Sonalkar (member)

Ilina Sen (member)

Sumi Krishna (ex-officio)

Mary E. John (ex-officio)

The IAWS Southern Regional Workshop

Re-Affirming Plurality, Seeking Justice and Democracy

The IAWS Southern Regional workshop on 'Re-affirming Plurality, Seeking Justice and Democracy' was held at the Roshini Nilaya School of Social Work, Mangalore on 12 and 13 October, 2009. It was organised in collaboration with Roshini Nilaya and the Women's Studies Department of Mysore University. Nearly 150 persons participated. The response from local students in particular was most heartening. The workshop sessions and the resolution adopted by the participants were widely covered in the media. The report on the proceedings will be available in due course. Below are the short version of 'Opening Remarks' at the workshop by Sumi Krishna¹ (which sets the context of the workshop) and the 'Resolution' that was adopted at the workshop and released to the media.

Violence Against Women

At the end of January this year, citizens in Karnataka and elsewhere came together to express their deep anguish and anger at the spate of violent attacks on the human rights and civil liberties of people all over the country, particularly women. Among the many voices was a 'Joint Statement', which was endorsed by 700 persons in varied locations: they included home-makers, writers, photographers, film and media persons, health professionals, lawyers, bankers, students, teachers, scientists, information technologists, social workers, women's rights activists, human rights activists, and many others. (South Asia Citizens Web, 29 January 2009. <http://www.sacw.net/article560.html>)

Deeply disturbed by the sharply escalating trend of political and social violence against women in public and private spaces in Karnataka and other parts of India, they believed such violence was a means by which particularly regressive interpretations of culture were being enforced in the name of 'religion and country'. Condemning all forms of gender-based violence and the attitudes that make such violence acceptable, whether in the family or in the social and public spheres, they pointed out that no civilised and democratic society could condone violence in the name of religion, tradition and culture. No religion, and no one with any kind of religious faith, would ever support the kind of barbaric acts that had been witnessed.

Moreover, no administration could dismiss such acts

¹ Sumi Krishna was president of IAWS (2005-08).

as 'minor' or 'unfortunate incidents' for it was apparent that this was part of a pattern in a political environment that supports a particularly narrow and fanatical view of Indian culture, as also a repressive attitude towards women. The 'Joint Statement', like several other voices of protest, called upon Governments at the Centre and in the States to act promptly against all forms of criminal violence, and urged all citizens, especially those who serve the Government as policy makers, administrators and law enforcers, to actively and continuously uphold the Indian Constitution and its values, in letter and spirit. They said: 'We strongly believe that the State and democratically minded citizens must stand up to the violent targeting of women and re-affirm our commitment to the human rights and civil liberties of all people. There can and should be dialogues on what constitutes "Indian-ness", but regardless of the interpretations of Indian culture and traditions, beating and molesting women cannot be condoned.'

The Workshop

The women's movement in India, which has had a long and varied history, grounded in the material and cultural reality of women's lives, has recognised the profoundly contested political struggle over what constitutes Indian traditions, religions and cultures. It has tried to articulate the linkages between state repression and different forms of violence against women and other marginalised groups, in the family, community and society. So, when some of those who endorsed the Joint Statement suggested to IAWS that we should hold a workshop or conference to take forward these concerns, the present Executive Committee readily agreed.

We decided to hold a Southern Regional Workshop because we knew that there were many groups and institutions in southern India who had been involved in such struggles. To name only a few, who are present here, I would like to mention the efforts of the Roshini Nilaya in Mangalore, the Samata Vedike in Mysore, the Alternative Law Forum and the Hengasara Hakina Sangha in Bangalore, several women's groups and the Women for Cultural Freedom in Hyderabad, besides the academic initiatives of various universities and institutions, the work of individual Women's Studies scholars and the writings of some media persons. It is especially heartening that so many teachers and students from local colleges, civil society organisations and media persons in Mangalore have gathered here. We see the role of IAWS as facilitating interaction and dialogue

among these diverse groups, and being part of and supporting the struggles against repressive forces, because it is important that together we strongly reaffirm our plurality and fight for justice and democracy. It is this commitment, often in the face of severe constraints, and your cooperation that has made it possible to hold this workshop.

In recent decades, the culture of plurality, and ideas of justice and democracy have been challenged by old and new forms of cultural, socio-economic and political exclusion. These challenges have come from the institutions and arms of the state, global economic processes, fundamentalist religious and casteist forces, and vigilante groups. Fundamentalists of all kinds construct a particular 'public' identity of religion, which they then use to promote narrow discriminatory definitions of citizenship, nationalism and culture, leading to violence in terms of gender, caste and community. Casteist brutalities against Dalit affirmations of dignity and rights, xenophobic attacks against migrant workers and citizens, the pan-religious backlash against the decriminalisation of queer communities by the courts, and cultural violence against social freedoms are a few instances. Such happenings at the regional and national level make it important for us to re-engage with these concepts, especially from the perspective of those who have been excluded, marginalised and oppressed.

Across the country, individuals and groups are also expressing and asserting their rights and freedoms as citizens; voices of protest have emerged and been strengthened within homes, courtrooms, in the media and on the streets. Individuals and groups who are public spokespersons for the values of plurality, justice and democracy are themselves under dire threat. We need to recognise and analyse the varied forms of dissent and protest and strategise ways to deal with the multifarious challenges to our democracy and diversity.

In particular, the workshop hopes to focus on the plurality of our social life, the constitutional protections guaranteed to us as citizens to live and work with dignity, and women's varied efforts to gain cultural freedoms. It seeks to understand the contemporary economic, socio-political, religious and cultural processes of marginalisation and the threats to those at the margins who attempt to challenge forces of power and control. It also seeks to enlarge the discourse on identity politics to concerns for livelihoods, development and citizenship.

It is pertinent that this workshop is being held in Mangalore, the hub of a region which has always prided itself on its unique social fabric incorporating and reflecting

a range of religions, communities and cultures, as also a heritage of educational expansion and relative gender equality. In recent decades, however, as in other parts of the south-west coast, even as the traditional caste and class hierarchies have been eroded by occupational mobility and social emancipation, the region has begun to witness the rise of new moralities that impact upon the fabric of tolerance, creativity and peace. The path ahead is fraught with challenges but we need to understand that we are dealing with human rights issues both at the level of the economy and of culture. We hope the workshop will help us to retrieve and share examples and experiences from within our lives of an ethic and politics of co-existence, tolerance, camaraderie, and mutuality to counter exclusiveness, intolerance, and violence. We need to coordinate our efforts as citizens to intervene in public discourse and be vigilant in identifying state responsibility and in seeking legal redress. As scholars, practitioners and activists, it is also important that we reflect on our own work and reformulate our analyses and actions to counter both old and new forms of exclusion and oppression, bringing our voices together in strong, yet diverse ways.²

Resolution

About 145 participants, individuals and organizations attending the IAWS Southern Regional Workshop at Roshni Nilaya School of Social Work, Mangalore, which concluded on Tuesday, October 13, 2009 unanimously resolved:

- 'We affirm that the Indian Constitution is based on the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity, which are being systematically subverted in various sites, undermining the fabric of social relations.
- We are disturbed by the series of attacks on people, especially the young, who choose to live out the meaning of fraternity by interacting across boundaries of caste and religion. We are disturbed that these forms of attack continue and that it is becoming increasingly difficult for women to move about and interact freely.
- We are further disturbed by the attempts to constrain the expressions of women within narrow cultural codes through intimidation and violence.
- We believe that young people by living out the ideals of the Indian Constitution represent the challenge to the boundaries of class, caste and religion. In the context of these attacks, which threaten the plurality that characterizes the very idea of India, we reaffirm our commitment to the fundamental ideals of the Constitution, and to uphold justice and democracy.'

Sumi Krishna, Bangalore
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² I am grateful to Meena Gopal, Ammel Sharon, Nandita Dhawan and Ponni Arasu for their inputs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

IAWS Workshop on Feminist Research Methodology

Feb 23-26, 2010, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai

Co-ordinators: *Prof. Padmini Swaminathan and Dr. S. Anandhi*

A Note :

In a critical study of women's studies institutions in Tamil Nadu, we were constrained to conclude that teaching and research on women's studies in Tamil Nadu had not moved beyond what Leora Auslander calls as 'recovery projects', that is, documenting women's experiences and recovering of positive female role models. Further, we realized that, academic enquiry exploring the interconnections between gender, sexuality and caste, and, the linkage of women's studies with various disciplines did not form part of the women's studies programme in Tamil Nadu. A major, though not the only, rationale for this Workshop stems from the challenge that the above critical enquiry posed for our efforts to sensitize the current generations of students entering these institutions to the fact that feminism is not 'old fashioned', 'extreme' or 'unrealistic', and that, feminist methodology not only has a distinctive place in social research but is essential for unraveling the way knowledge is produced of gendered social existence.

To begin with, the Workshop is aimed at teachers and researchers of women's studies. Rather than prescribing what feminist methods must do or specifying how feminist researchers should proceed, the modest aim of the Workshop is to demonstrate, among other things, how feminist approaches to social research have led to disagreements in mainstream ideas and interpretations of the relationship between the social world and people's lived realities; how this critique of mainstream ideas at one level, has, at another level, also contributed to diversity within feminism; what imparts distinctiveness, if any, to feminist scholarship even as feminists are continually struggling to produce and justify authoritative knowledge of gendered social life.

The emphasis on methodology is purposive; even as abstract issues of theory will be connected to field work practice, the stress will be on the challenges that feminists face in converting field knowledge of gender into knowledge that can authoritatively question received mainstream knowledge that is at variance with women's lived experiences.

This workshop on feminist methodologies that we plan to organize in the month of Feb 2010 (23rd Feb -26th Feb) at the Madras Institute of Development Studies as IAWS workshop intend to cover a range of issues and concerns which are broadly grouped as under:

Issues and Concerns to be addressed:

- (1) Family (2) Caste (3) Religion (4) Women and work

- (5) Violence (6) Health and Reproductive technologies
(7) Feminist geography

Each of the above will be explicated with concrete examples to enable participants to comprehend what it has meant to conduct research using feminist research methodology, feminist research tools and methods ranging from, and combining, quantitative and qualitative information, Life histories, Personal Narratives, Autobiographies, Memoirs, Testimonies, etc.

Resource Persons

Resource persons for the workshop will be feminist scholars of eminence who have many years of teaching and research experience in their respective social science and science disciplines. The Workshop is designed in such a way that the resource persons, prior to the workshop would provide a detailed lecture design along with the reading materials which would be circulated for the participants to read and reflect on them at the end of each lectures. This would be followed by presentations to be made by the participants based on the readings.

Participants

We plan to select 30 participants (while this is not restricted to women we give preference to them) mainly teachers and researchers from various academic institutions in south India. Ph.D scholars engaged in above issues, teachers who teach gender studies and doing PhD in any discipline of social sciences, independent scholars engaged in women's studies research are welcome to apply with their CV, a 2 page note on their current research along with one of their publications (if there are). **Applications may be sent to Dr. S. Anandhi, Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, 79, II Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai-600020. The last date for the receipt of the same is December 7th 2009.**

The selected participants will be provided with food, accommodation and travel allowances.

Address Changes

If your postal address or that of any other IAWS member you know has changed in the last year, or if you have not been receiving your copy of the IAWS Newsletter, then please send the full details of the current postal address to
iaws.secretariat@gmail.com (or)
anandhister@gmail.com

LAWS GENDER AND SCIENCE SEMINAR, WORKSHOP, TALKS

SEMINAR and WORKSHOP

The Indian Association for Women's Studies
in collaboration with the
Research Centre for Women's Studies,
SNDT, Mumbai

Date : 16 and 17 Feb, 2010

PEER-REVIEW WORKSHOP

**TRANSFORMING SCIENCE: FEMINIST
PERSPECTIVES**

Dates : Tuesday 16 Feb: 2.00 pm – 5.00 pm;
Wednesday 17 Feb: 9.30 am – 4.00 pm

Venue : SNDT University, Juhu campus

Participation: Contributors to volume edited by
Gita Chadha and Sumi Krishna

SEMINAR

TAKING STOCK: WOMEN IN / AND SCIENCE

Date : Tuesday 16 Feb 2010: 9.30 am - 1.00 pm

Venue : SNDT University, Juhu campus

Coordinators:

Gita Chadha, Meena Gopal, Sumi Krishna, Veena Poonacha

All are welcome : Participation by registration

TALKS

The Indian Association for Women's Studies
in collaboration with

Disabilities Studies Department

Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Mumbai

Speaker : Anita Ghai, President IAWS

Date : Thursday 18 Feb. 2010

Venue : TISS campus, Chembur

BOOK NEWS

Genderscapes: Revisioning Natural Resource Management

Sumi Krishna

Why does gender bias persist in natural resource management policies and programmes, despite increasing recognition of rural and tribal women's contribution to conservation and sustainability? Examining this question from the perspective of an academic and practitioner, the book looks at the socialization of attitudes, shaping of community ideologies, construction of disciplines and research methodologies. It also advances the novel concept of 'genderscapes' to reflect the totality of women's lifeworlds and to revision natural resource management in complex landscapes.

Zubaan, 2009, pp. 476, Hb, INR 695, ISBN 9788189884123

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Manual on Gendered Research in Health

Renu Khanna

This manual, an outcome of two ten day courses conducted at the M.S. University, Baroda, introduces concepts and tools in Gender, health, Rights and Development, discusses the methods of researching gender and social issues in health and suggests strategies for communication and Advocacy.

SAHAJ and *WOHTRA / WSRC*, Vadodara; 2009, pp. 211, INR 150 + postage

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Melodrama and the Nation : Sexual Economies of Bombay Cinema 1970 -2000

Karen Gabriel

This book on popular Bombay cinema presents a comprehensive discussion of its contemporary history, background, financing and social and political underpinnings. It maps the cultural landscape of this medium, tracing the relationship between the state, nation, cinema and society. It reviews the ways in which gender and sexuality are articulated in their cinematic organisation and representation, and demonstrates how heterosexuality operates

as a stabiliser within this constellation. More generally, it looks at the emergence of heroes and anti-heroes, at the changing faces of masculinity, at femininity and the regulation of desire, and at Bollywood's construction of gender, sexuality and the nation.

Women Unlimited, 2009, pp. 392 + xlii, INR 600, ISBN: 81-88965-49-9.

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Codes of Misconduct: Regulating Prostitution in Late Colonial Bombay

Ashwini Tambe

This study focuses on the relationship between forms of prostitution, discourses on law making and law enforcement practices over 100 years. This book argues that while the expansion of Bombay's sex trade over the past century might suggest that laws were simply ineffectual, law making was instead a productive process that sustained particular forms of prostitution. In examining this dimension of colonial governance, Tambe evaluates the uses and limits of Foucault's approach to law and sexuality.

Zubaan, 2009, pp. 180, INR 395, ISBN : 9788189884420.

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Gender, Language and Learning: Essays in Indo-Muslim Cultural History

Gail Minault

This book is a collection of articles, published over the last thirty and more years, by a well-known historian which analyses the Indian Muslim women's rights and self-expression, Urdu as a language of cultural politics and identity, and education as a vehicle of social change among Indian Muslims. Also included is her well-known and frequently cited essay (coauthored with David Lelyveld) on the campaign for Aligarh Muslim University.

Permanent Black, 2009, Hb, pp. 328, INR. 695, ISBN : 81-7824-266-4

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BOOK REVIEW

Macroeconomics and Gender

Ritu Dewan and Seeta Prabhu (eds)

This collection of essays by some of the best-known academics and practitioners in the fields of economics, women's studies, development and sociology, examines a wide range of areas in which women's studies has played a crucial part. Accessibly written and rigorously researched, this book will be useful for academic and general readers, and for those in the related fields of economics, development and gender studies.

Zubaan, 2009, pp.300, Hb, INR 595, ISBN: 9788189884512

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Wives, Widows and Concubines: The Conjugal Family Ideal in Colonial India

Mytheli Sreenivas

The book examines how the family became the centre of intense debates about identity, community, and nation in colonial Tamil Nadu. Developing ideas about love, marriage and desire were inextricably linked to caste politics, the colonial economy, and nationalist agitation. The book argues that notions of community centred around the changing family were fundamental to shaping national identity in the early twentieth century. Mapping the complex history of conjugality in relation to the culture, politics, and economy of the Tamil region, the book opens new arenas of inquiry about the family and colonial modernity in South Asia.

Orient BlackSwan, 2009, pp.184, Pb, INR 375, ISBN 9788125037255

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Translating Women

N. Kamala (ed.)

Indian women writers have been translated into English in the Indian context as well as into other western languages. What are the linguistic and cultural specificities of these literary productions? What is foregrounded and what is erased in these translations? What are the politics that inform the choices of the authors to be translated? What is the agency of the translators, and of the archivist, in these cultural productions? What is the role of women translators? These are some of the questions that this book explores. The book contains insightful essays by some of the best translation scholars in India with an in-depth Introduction and an essay by the well-known writer Ambai on her experience of being translated.

Zubaan, 2009, pp.300, Hb, INR 595, ISBN 9788189884680

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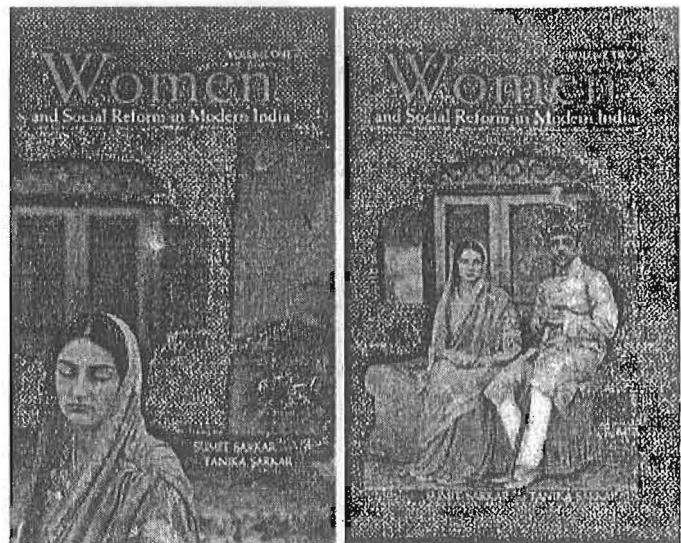
States of Trauma: Gender and Violence in South Asia

Piya Chatterjee, Manali Desai and Parama Roy (eds.)

This book examines gendered actors and gendered scripts of violence by staging a set of questions. How are we to think about the moral charge that accrues to violence? What is the relationship between violence and non-violence? In considering the moral and affective economy of violence, how may we speak of the seductions of the idioms and practices of militarism and sexualized violence for women? How are these seductions/pleasures distinct from those proffered to men, if indeed they are distinct?

Zubaan, 2009, pp.300, Hb, INR 595, ISBN 9788189884116

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Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar. *Women and Social Reform in Modern India*, 2 vols, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007. ISBN 8178241994, hb, pp. 870, Rs. 1422.

In 1813, James Mill wrote in his *History of India*, that the condition of women in a society is indicative of its place in civilization. Quite clearly, Indians, who burned their women alive in the funeral pyres of dead husbands scored very low in the civilizational stakes. Viewing their own society through the lens of enlightenment and the eyes of white men, some Indian men found a ground for criticism of their own treatment of women and correction of such practices. This launched the social reform movement, beginning in Bengal with the abolition of sati. Lauded at one time as the moment Indian women embarked on the journey to modernity, the social reform movement has been through a number of interpretive turns- in recent years, the Marxist, Subalternist, the Feminist and the Post-modern (or Culture Studies) approaches offering very different evaluations. Despite these vicissitudes, the significance of Social Reform as a way to understand nineteenth century India remains seminal and the figure of the woman is central to all these discussions.

The persuasiveness of gender as a category of analysis supplanting 'women', a descriptive term, must be admitted. In certain contexts, however, the use of the term 'women' carries both a historical-analytical significance as well as a political imperative. The centrality- descriptive and categorical- of 'women' is reasserted in the very title of these two volumes by Sumit and Tanika Sarkar. In these two volumes, they have collected and re-published some of the key essays around the social reform debate, with a focus on the myriad ways in which the 'women question' intersected with almost all debates about social change in

his period. The two Sarkars are both pioneers in the field of social reform history-writing, Sumit Sarkar having initiated in the 1970s a Marxist critique of the class character of Bengal's renaissance and social reform¹ and Tanika Sarkar having made some of the earliest contributions to our understanding of social reform from a gender perspective². This is a good moment to remember also the insightful connection made by Sumit Sarkar between the women's question and the formation of the colonial middle class in Bengal.³ While both the Sarkars' work in this connection has been focused on nineteenth-century Bengal, they have chosen a broader 'Indian' framework for these two volumes. They have not, as many historians of nineteenth-century Bengal are wont to do, assumed that we should read India when we are reading, in fact, only Bengal. Rather, they have taken care to include as many regions and communities as possible and taken the story of social reform beyond the colonial period up to the passing of the Hindu law reforms in the 1950s. The essays they have collected range from those written in the early 1980s to quite recent publications; and some of the papers have been revised for this volume. Altogether, we have 23 essays, written over 25 years, and excerpts from five documents, which were originally published between 1820 and 1906.

Many of the essays are now virtually classic, well-known to scholars in the field. The essays by Lata Mani (on the sati debate), Lucy Carroll (on the property cases following the Widow Remarriage Act of 1856), Sekhar Bandopadhyay (caste movements and widow remarriage) and Tanika Sarkar (the Age of Consent controversies in Bengal), for instance, are standard citation and quite easily available. Many of the other essays are not, however, easily obtained even with the aid of the miraculous internet. The inclusion of some of the less easily accessible essays is only one of the major contributions of these volumes. Certainly I am grateful, since I have tried for a few months, unsuccessfully, to find Padma Anagol's essay. These inclusions, such as Anagol's article with its very atypical approach to the Rukhmabai case and the Age of Consent agitations are, however, not just a fortuitous convenience for the researcher but also compel, through the range and variety of the collection, a redefinition of the field. As such these volumes will be invaluable for teaching, making it far easier to convey to students in the class room and to potential researchers the breadth of the social reform project and its immense possibilities as an entry point for writing social history.

The collection urges rethinking social reform on at least three counts, which emerge from a careful reading of the essays. I will take the first cue from Sumit Sarkar's essay on Vidyasagar. In the early 1980s, Lata Mani offered an extremely imaginative and provocative reading of the

colonial 'discourse' (when the term was still very new) on Sati. She argued that both sides- opponents of the abolition as well as its advocates- were more concerned with the definition of 'religion' and what constituted Indian (or Hindu) 'tradition' and that women were neither the subject nor the object but merely the site of such a discourse. This has been an enormously influential formulation, which has been extended to characterize the whole of the project of social reform. Sarkar shows from a reading of some of Vidyasagar's tracts that while this reading may have been applicable to the Sati debate, its extension to other discourses of the social reform may be problematic. In his reading, 'women' were very much at the centre of Vidyasagar's concerns. Many of the following essays reinforce this insight. In 1891, the opponents of the Age of Consent Bill were not defending the 'tradition' of child marriage: there was no major issue about the age of marriage of men (a regulation suggested by Mr. Malabari in his famous Notes of 1884) but only of an assertion of the right to give in marriage infant girls. Anagol's essay not only places such debates in the context of case law but highlights women's responses to social practices which they perceived as oppressive to women. In Gauri Viswanathan's exposition of Pandita Ramabai's little known debates with British missionaries, which led to an assertion of her own understanding of Christianity, there is a rich and textured account of the negotiation of the subjectivity of the (colonized) woman. Women were thus the object and sometimes even the subject of social reform (as also in a later period during the passing of the Sarda Act, 1929), justifying the title of the book.

Despite the 'women' in the title, the Sarkars have, in keeping with their critical and analytical approach developed from the 1970s, complicated the story of social reform with categories like class, caste and community. The contributions by Arunima, Anandhi and Xaxa pose complex questions about inequality and social change. While Arunima's essay shows how matrilineal practices in the Malabar gave way to pressures of nuclearisation and to mainstream patrilineal family forms, Anandhi's explores Perriar's radical agenda of changing gender relations within the framework of the Dravidian self-respect movement. Virginia Xaxa explores the multiple trajectories of social change among India's 461 tribal communities of which 174 are considered to be sub-groups (as enumerated by the Anthropological Survey of India, 1985: p. 187). Some of the other case studies, such as that of Viresalingam by John and Karen Leonard and the Sikhs by Kenneth Jones add to the range of the coverage and focus attention on previously not so well known processes within the social reform movement. The striking addition of an essay by Saroj and John Parratt on Manipur and the genesis of the women's

movement in the process of the state's democratization in the 1930s is not just the addition of a little known story, but shows how the inclusion of the 'margin' changes our perception of the trajectory of social 'reform'. Many of these case studies show that the process of reform was not in the direction of 'modernisation' and democratization at all, but often moving in multiple and even contradictory directions.

Some of these essays, focusing on social reform legislation, advance our understanding of the legal-judicial changes under colonialism. There has been considerable new research in this field, problematising the earlier influence of the modernizing thesis. Tanika Sarkar, for instance, shows how the British abandoned any attempt at bringing coherence within personal law and how this space was claimed by the emerging nationalists towards the end of the nineteenth century to assert elite and brahminical practices. Gregory C. Kozlowski's essay on Muslim property law and the situation of women shows how so-called Anglo-Muhammedan law created an uncertainty about women's rights by introducing a strain between the customary behaviour of Muslim communities in different parts of the country and the written norms of their faith, favouring one or the other seemingly at random. The variety of case studies urge the conclusion that colonial homogenization failed more than it succeeded and it replaced the plural legal regime of the eighteenth century with another, but equally plural, regime.

In his essay as well as in the introduction, Sumit Sarkar flags another concern—that social reform, for a long time considered to be confined to the urban high caste and middle class, affected others as well. In his essay, Sarkar demonstrates the participation of lower castes and rural communities in widow remarriage campaigns. Many of the other essays reinforce the value of a greater inclusion in definitions of social reform. Prem Chowdhry's essay on peasants in Haryana, the three essays on attempts at redefining private and public as well as ideals of womanhood among Muslim communities (C.M. Naim, Gail Minault and Faisal Fatehali Devji) flesh out some of the disparate trajectories of reform.

The idea that the impetus of social reform fizzled out with the Age of Consent agitations to be revived much later and on radically different terms in the late 1920s with the Sarda Bill has now been challenged by many historians. In fact, many of these issues continued to be debated and remained contentious. One major engine of change, women's education, chugged forward despite enormous resistance from many quarters (essay by Geraldine Forbes). The result was a transformation in the position of middle class women, who began to enter the public spheres of

employment as well as associative politics. They participated not only in nationalist movements in large numbers but also began to organize around 'women's' issues, often leading the demand for legislative intervention. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, there were a number of attempts at social reform legislation, which culminated in the formation of the Rau Committee to consider the possibility of comprehensive reform in family law. The second volume ends with the fate of this last colonial initiative, which came to pass under Nehru's leadership in 1955-56, with the passing of four watered down pieces of legislation applying only to Hindus.

These two volumes have captured many dimensions of the vast social change in 'Modern India', between 1820s and 1950s, from early colonial interventions in social customs and practices to newly independent Indian state's attempt to manage its agenda of modernization along with the huge commitment to community identities, the latter acquiring enormous political force in the aftermath of partition. And yet, the essays in the volume also show the endurance of many of the issues across these seemingly major changes. The voices of women from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with which the volume ends leaves us with two important messages. First, social reform was not authored only by men and that women were and continued to be both objects and subjects of social reform. Second, if we consider self-scrutiny and criticism and the will to address oppression and inequality to be the best features of the project of social reform, it is an agenda that did not end in the nineteenth century and indeed remains relevant even today.

The conventional ending of reviews is of great relevance in the case of these two volumes: They are a must read for students and scholars and invaluable additions to libraries as well as the private collection of a researcher.

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- ¹ Sumit Sarkar, "The Complexities of Young Bengal", *Nineteenth Century Studies*, October 1973.
- ² Some of her earlier published articles were the following. Tanika Sarkar, "Politics and women in Bengal- the conditions and meaning of participation", *Indian Economic Social History Review*, 1984, 21, 91-101 and "Nationalist Iconography: Image of Women in 19th Century Bengali Literature", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 22, No. 47 (Nov. 21, 1987), pp. 2011-2015.
- ³ Sumit Sarkar, "The Women's Question in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh vaid (eds) *Women and Culture*, RCWS, SNDT Women's University, Bombay, 1987.