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NEWSLETTER

INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES (IAWS) • JULY 2012 • VOLUME II, NO. 9

Editor's Note

T

he last IAWS National Conference held in Wardha in January 2011 saw the tremendous growth of studies conducted from varied institutional sites: universities and colleges, centres (university, institutes, civil society), diverse movements, as well as the energy of large number of young women who are now part of this journey. The special session on critical review of women's studies pointed to areas that require more investigation as well as dialogues. Two of the key concerns that emerged related to (a) women's studies pedagogy, curriculum, experiences of students and teachers, institutionalization of women's studies (b) the nature and spaces for linkages between academics/women's studies and activism, developing critical sense within disciplines. This edition of the newsletter focus on these concerns, drawing from the recent regional workshops conducted by IAWS, book review and book news, a lead article, workshop news from different regions and archiving our diverse and rich history. We also remember Prof. Leela Dube, Mrinal Gore and Capt. Lakshmi Saigal, who, in varied ways, defined and created spaces for moving towards a transformation that we all seek.

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IAWS REGIONAL WORKSHOP

MANY VOICES, MANY QUESTIONS: The Challenges of Institutionalizing Women's Studies

■■■ NORTHERN REGIONAL

THE POSSIBILITY OF DIALOGUE

The IAWS, in collaboration with the Women's Studies Program (WSP), Jawaharlal Nehru University, organized a two day workshop (19-20 April, 2012) on the challenges of institutionalizing women's studies. The idea was to set up a dialogue between members of the IAWS and those working in UGC supported women's studies cells/ centres/ programmes/ departments in the region. In spite of the usual logistical problems, the workshop was extremely well attended—100 participants—and provided space for a lively, intense discussion on a wide range of issues. On the agenda were discussions on engineering pedagogical material for schools, the ways in which the programs have shaped up in the universities, at the undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels. Inevitably, the vertical and horizontal axes we set up for ourselves threw up several questions, and opened up space for future thought and action.

DIALOGUES WITH DISCIPLINES

Prof Zoya Hasan, Dean, School of Social Sciences, inaugurated the workshop by flagging certain issues, which resurfaced in subsequent discussions. She argued that locating women's studies within the social sciences was fruitful. At the same time, she drew attention to the ways in which different mainstream social science disciplines had responded to the challenge of women's studies—some had proved to be sensitive, others more resistant. Clearly, the need for an ongoing dialogue and engagement is obvious.



SCHOOLS- GENDER-BLIND/ GENDER INSENSITIVE OR ...

Malini Ghose (Nirantar) drew attention to the ways in which the new textbooks on Social and Political Life, produced in terms of the National Curriculum Framework, 2005, were path breaking. They shifted the focus from creating passive citizens, the ideal of the civics textbooks as they had existed, to a far more complex and critical engagement with issues of gender and caste. She highlighted the problems encountered in creating the texts, the strategies used to move beyond them, and the ways in which attempts were made to circumvent a fixing of gender roles. At the same time, she underscored the need for teacher training on a far more intensive scale than had been attempted till date.

Dipta Bhog (Nirantar), addressed the more general issue of contexts—how the idea of the girl child was constructed within

government policy frameworks—and how, in a certain kind of biological determinism, social structures of patriarchy were lost sight of, perhaps deliberately. She pointed out that engaging with government institutions and policies, and intervening in these is complex and often frustrating. The nation, she argued, is often constituted through language text books, illustrating this through a discussion on books in Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu, summarizing an intensive study that she had conducted, along with several others. In this vision of the nation, women figured, above all, as mothers, limiting all possibilities of rich and diverse representations.

This was followed by a discussion on the ways in which some of the textbooks prepared under the NCF 2005 attempted to grapple with social complexities, but at least occasionally fell short of expectations. Kumkum Roy focused on two chapters from the Class XI History and Political Science textbooks for this exercise—pointing out

how attempts to engender these often ran against hurdles in the mainstream disciplines.

The two discussants, Nandini Manjrekar (TISS) and Mary John (CWDS), raised several critical issues such as the need to engage with teachers, and, more broadly, to visualize education as a site of struggle in meaningful ways. They also drew attention to the broader contours of a rapidly changing educational environment, which complicates interventions. The chair, Geetha Nambissan (JNU) drew attention to the need to engage with the sociology of education far more systematically—to study the implications of neo-liberal frameworks, rapid privatization, and the tuition industry that works along with the formal school system as a parallel economy.

COLLEGES OF (DIS)CONTENT?

Addressing college education, Shubhra Seth (Indraprastha College), who teaches a course on gender and human rights, shared her experience of transacting the course with women students. She suggested that the college provided a safe space, within which students felt comfortable in exploring issues that they may not have been able to address otherwise. Manjeet Bhatia (Delhi University) discussed the problems of what she described as the sprinkle effect—the idea that if the centre of the university provided refresher courses and trained those who were interested, it would have an impact on mainstream disciplines. However, not surprisingly, this did not always have the intended impact—Political Science, History, English and Sociology seem to have responded better than Economics and Geography.

Next, Shobhna Iyer (JNU), a student, shared her experience of studying history—her recollections of her undergraduate classes were of vast time spans and spaces, with little or no scope for engaging with questions of gender. Most history, she felt was taught from a top down perspective,

SHAZIA'S PRESENTATION

One day, I was in the School of Social Sciences building elevator and a guy asked me what department I was from? When I told him that I was a student of Women's Studies, he gave me a very curious look and asked, "What is that? What do you guys study?" Before I could reply, the elevator doors opened and we were at the ground floor. The question remained unanswered! Well this tells us how unfamiliar people are with Women's studies as a discipline. And those who have some idea about what Women's studies is, think of us as women who read too much into things or women who are inclined to anarchy, and more importantly where we read good things about women and very bad things about men! I am not just saying it, People say this most of the time to me.

But as student of women's studies, I know it is not about 'good women' and 'bad men'. That is not what we do. It is an exercise in building and constructing knowledge and also questioning the hegemonic and male centric patters of understanding. Employing the category of gender, it tries to understand the basis of knowledge practices and aims to find a new way to conceptualize the already existing patterns of understanding. It is committed to the ideals of gender justice and also interrogating the various naturalized (normal) ideas about gender, sexuality, and the relationship that women have with their society. It also creates spaces for challenging and reframing the existing theoretical perspectives and frameworks.

What is the significance of having a Women's Studies (WS) department? I consider it imperative to study the historical and cultural experiences of women, and their contribution. A very interesting thing about WS is that it encourages interdisciplinary, which is not appreciated that much in the subcontinent. WS is not just about women, although women are central to any studies under taken at a WS department, but it is about exploring ways to live in a socially just world. It is certainly about women but not exclusively for women, for men are always welcome to undertake research in WS. Male students from our department can vouch for that!

I would want to say that women's studies is not a just the right arm of the women's movement (Though I do believe that it is very much a product of the women's movement) or the manifestation of feminism on campus. It is, like many other disciplines, very much a complete discipline in itself. It is often argued that like other disciplines, it does not have a certain 'past' on the basis of which a community of scholars is created and knowledge is

further constructed and built on. I believe Women's Studies like other disciplines is not much different in terms of having a body of knowledge, specific technical terms for effective communication and furthering of ideas, methodology which is both empirical (social science approach) and interpretative (humanities approach) considering the inter disciplinary nature of the subject. The liberty to import the methods of enquiry from various other disciplines, to me, gives it an edge over, what people call traditional disciplines. Having students from various streams, like literature, journalism, social work creates a vibrant community of scholars.

To me the value of doing women's studies is its critique of inequality, revising 'knowledge', canons and 'correcting historical omissions'. One would say that this could be done in some other traditional social science subject as well, why do we need to have a separate discipline for this? Drawing from various interdisciplinary approaches and various methodologies gives WS a distinct privilege of challenging the dominant knowledge patterns, presupposed assumptions about knowledge and theory, which to me certain 'traditional' disciplines cannot do due to the restrictive approach that they employ to study and analyze. Moving away from certain categories which have always been used for analysis, WS focuses on gender by making it central category of analysis. It examines the ways in which women's and men's roles in society have been constructed and also considers the ways in which these roles have changed and continue to transform on personal, political, and transnational levels. Having said this WS is not just about impact of gender and analysis of gender but it is also about the impact of sexuality, race, class, age, ability, nationality, religion, and so on. It is an exercise towards sensitizing students about issues of concern to women. Such issues are confronted by us all the time, but WS helps us to understand them clearly and put things in perspective.

While WS is political because it questions and interrogates the system that oppresses women, just because of being women, it also involves rethinking disciplinary assumptions and methodologies, developing new understandings of what counts as knowledge, seeking alternative ways of understanding the origins of problems/issues, formulating new ways of posing questions and redefining the relationship between subjects and objects of study. It creates communities of scholars on campus and also reaches beyond the campus. It is a confluence of activism and academics.

with little scope for problematizing social formations. The only space for something more exciting than clearing the exam was when she could do a project on the Greek household.

The discussant, Shaila DeSouza (University of Goa) then brought in the perspective of the teacher, struggling to run courses on gender within a typically resistant university system. Kandala Singh, a former student shared how it would have been useful if the courses enabled learners to understand how gendered subjects are constituted.

MASTERING WOMEN'S STUDIES

The second day's focus was the post-graduate scenario. Mallarika Sinha Roy (Visiting fellow, JNU), pointed out how several students joined the optional MA courses on women's studies in the hope that it would provide immediate resolutions to practical problems. There was a reluctance, if not resistance, to engage with conceptual complexities. She also drew attention to how canonization of certain kinds of scholarship precludes further critical engagement, and, more positively, how inter-disciplinarity and its challenges can become part of the everyday complexities of the classroom.

Ritu Dewan (University of Bombay) then turned the spotlight on Economics, which she described, rather graphically and grimly, as a discipline marooned in a patriarchal island. Her experience of creating a course on gender and economics, was a reminder of how arduous the task of gendering 'hard-core', resistant mainstream disciplines, and their practitioners, is. Finally, Anu Aneja (IGNOU) shared her experience of developing courses on women's and gender studies in a context where consumerism and capitalism are significant. The peculiar challenges and potential of an open and distant learning mode were evident in her presentation.

The two discussants, Uma Chakravarti and Meera Velayudhan (both feminist historians and activists) highlighted some of the intractable problems of the scenario—the weight of received categories, whereby cus-

THE DASTANGOI GHARE BAIRE

The evening of the first day of the workshop ended with an extraordinary performance of Ghare Baire, Rabindranath's novel that explores the ways in which a militant nationalism intersects and conflicts with both universalism and the domestic, even as the latter is transformed. The performance was directed by Mahmood Farooqui, who shared the stage with Danish Husain. The two captured the dilemmas, agonies and momentary joys of the three principal characters, translating this into verbal and visual representations that left the audience enthralled.

todial killing of women who marry men of their choice goes by the name of honour killing, and where the state considers its task complete when it has set in motion an almost mindless expansion of women's studies cells. They also alerted us to the need to engage

with other movements—to learn and share. Indu Agnihotri (CWDS), the chair, reminded us of the need to return to the classroom with a continued awareness of the enormous gaps that exist in the ways in which we conceptualize and transmit knowledge effectively.

IS THERE ROOM FOR RESEARCH?

The final session, focused on research. Here G. Arunima (JNU) drew attention to questions that figure time and again—is there academic research as opposed to applied research? Does institutionalization of women's studies imply de-politicization? How do we create space for meaningful dialogues between scholarship and state initiatives? Are there ways in which the academic encounter with the world outside be visualized in constructive, creative ways? She illustrated some particularly significant interventions drawing on the work of Tanika Sarkar, Judith Butler, and Gopal Guru. Maitreyee Chaudhuri (JNU) shared her perspective from within sociology. She argued that institutionalization was necessary, adding that feminist scholars needed to engage with theorizations within existing disciplines even as we may critique them. Renu Adlakha (CWDS) drew attention to research methodologies, making a case for an acquaintance with both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as preparing students to ask questions, familiarizing them with the

vocabulary of research. The last presenter, Shazia Salam (JNU), sent in a written presentation, discussing, with wry, poignant humour, how her fellow students regarded research in women's studies as absurd, and why she found it relevant, and, as she argued persuasively, as the way towards a socially just world. The two discussants, Veena Poonacha (SNDT, Mumbai) and Samita Sen (Jadavpur), reminded us of the range of epistemological and practical problems that had to be negotiated by those engaged in research in women's studies, and the ways in which institutionalization both provided and foreclosed opportunities and spaces. It was also noted that similar problems were not faced by other 'new' interdisciplinary fields such as film studies or cultural studies. They also cautioned us against too great an emphasis on streamlining—diversity is not bad, we were assured.

Irina Sen (Wardha) steered us through the last session as well as the round table—returning to certain fundamental issues, including that of languages of communication and research, ways in which the space of the classroom can be used creatively and the bewildering speed with which educational spaces are being transformed with a range from self-financing courses to those located within more traditional institutions. Questions of employability were raised, but not resolved. In a sense, Irina's sharing of the complexities at Wardha, where the local language is Marathi, while that of the university is Hindi, and the caste composition is also sharply varied, gave us a glimpse of the issues we were grappling with in a microcosm.

IAWS REGIONAL WORKSHOP

**DESERTED AND SINGLE WOMEN:
Right to Livelihood and Dignity**

WESTERN REGIONAL

I AWS and TISS (RURAL Campus, Tuljapur) jointly organized a workshop on Deserted and Single Women: Right to Livelihood and Dignity, on 24-25th February, 2012 at Tuljapur. The objectives of the workshop were:

1. To bring together organizations working on the issues of Deserted and Single women in Maharashtra and Gujarat and learn from each other the strategies for organizing and discuss the steps for consolidation at the state level as well as national level.

2. To share experience of the lawyers working with women who are victims of violence as well as who want to take legal action in case of desertion or separation.

3. To encourage the faculty of newly set up Women’s Studies Centres in Maharashtra to help undertake small localized surveys to strengthen the data bases on this issue.

The first day there were panel discussions for all the categories of participants. Next day there were separate sessions for two categories; organizations and academics. Pradip Prabhu, the Dean of the Rural Campus, TISS inaugurated the workshop. He was very appreciative of the concept of holding a seminar at Tuljapur, since the incidence of desertion is very high in that region. In the village of Dahiwadi, he found 24 deserted women in the village of 250 households. He noted that the process of sex selection was also spreading fast among the village population.



Ginny Shrivastav in her opening address described the work being done at the national level and also invited the organizations to join the National Forum for Single Women. She urged the participants that they must think of taking the movement forward in Maharashtra. She was aware of the work of 10-15 organizations in Maharashtra, but was told that at present the movement as such was undergoing a stagnant phase. Shilpa Kashelkar and Usha Kale (Ekal Mahila Adhikar Manch, Maharashtra) Maharashtra presented their organizational approach where single women themselves become the executive committee members and run the organisation and the others remain as facilitators (Sahyogis-individuals and organizations). A major issue that emerged in the discussions was on the nature of the national forum: is it a NGO coalition, what will be its funding sources, should it become a lobby group to exercise pressure on political parties to take up the issue into

their agendas. Little thought had been given to the process of network building and its nature in Maharashtra. However, all agreed to move in this direction. It was decided that a Sampark Samiti would be formed but concrete suggestions about its shape, who could be the convenor, etc, remain to be worked out. The mood was spelt out by Seema Kulkarni who said, “since the movement has evolved quite early in Maharashtra, it has its own dynamics and the process of consolidation would be quite different than the one appearing in other states. While the National Forum is taking initiative to reach out to the individuals and organizations and bring them into the fold of the national umbrella, in Maharashtra, it may take different course.”

Two women participants from Gujarat Ekal Nari Shakti Manch, Hansaben and Gomatiben reached late and hence only a brief discussion was held on their experience of working for widows’ rights to land.

WOMEN'S STUDIES CENTRES

Out of 24 centres in Maharashtra, only seven were represented including from TISS and Pune University, WSC of ILS Law College in Pune, who are very active in the women's movement in Pune, one was from North Maharashtra University and others were from colleges. They showed interest in taking up this issue and talking to their colleagues about conducting surveys as a part of the students' curriculum activity. There is a lack of motivation from many principals of colleges and also among faculty.

Seema Kulkarni presented two studies in brief, one on the extent of singleness, due to desertion and widowhood, and another one in more detailed explaining the causes and the deprivation experienced by the single women in society. In Daund taluka out of 5558 households 17 percent women were single, and in Pune slum the percentage was 26. The detailed interviews were conducted in Pune, slum areas and one in Daund Taluka. The most striking feature was that many young women came under deserted category. She explained that one of the reasons could be young women were no longer willing to tolerate violence. Only 12 percent women had gone to the court for maintenance or share in the property. Only 12 percent women claimed to have taken advantage the government schemes such as ration card and registration under BPL category. She suggested issues for further exploration; such as identifying the extent of the deserted women through the Anganwadi catalogues; caste factor among the deserted women, changing attitudes among different castes especially Dalits and upper castes; impact of the rapidly changing economy and its impact on the family institution; listing all the schemes applicable to single women in a booklet for advocacy.

Meena and Nilanjana stressed on the

need to redefine the category of single women to capture its diversity. However, since the focus of the workshop was about deprivation experienced by the women who are coming to the organisations for help and are willing to fight for their rights to livelihood, this dialogue could not be carried forward. Shiraz Balsara highlighted the rising problem of desertion among Adivasi women in Thane district. Also, aged women, usually widows, are increasingly left alone by the family members and are unable to fend for themselves as very few of them are able to claim widows pensions.

ORGANISATIONAL RESPONSES

Archana More emphasized on the need to create support system at the village level, lack of which lead many women to stay in an abusive marriage. Kiran Moghe (Janwadi Mahila Sanghatana) pointed that the demands of these women single women are known but the need is to prioritize those demands and then pressurize the government. Also, it was important that the government takes up the survey of different categories of single women and build an authentic data base. Nisha Shivurkar (Samajwadi Janparishad) felt that quite a few demands have been achieved by the women's movement so far, but implementation is lacking. She felt that Muslim women need to be integrated in the movement so far. She agreed that the women's movement has lost its vibrancy at present.

Shiraz Balsara (Kashtakari Sanghatana, Thane) spoke of corruption in the implementation of various schemes and hence worthy person remains deprived from the benefits of the scheme. Before starting a movement or any campaign, the need to prioritise the demands, is a must.. Seema Kulkarni (Stree Mukti Sangharsh Chalwal, Kasegaon, Dist. Sangali) held that there was a need to go back in the history of last 25 years of the

movement in Maharashtra, to understand why it has stagnated today. One cannot build a network from above in Maharashtra, given the historical background of the women's movement in Maharashtra which was always grassroots based. Lata Pratibha Madhukar (NCAS) argued that the Ekal Stree Adhikar Manch Sanghatana should evolve from below. Every tola, every pada, every village should have Stree Adhikar support group which will ensure that single women get their dignity and security.

LAWYERS EXPERIENCES

Asuntha Pardhe stressed that we must see to it that every deserted woman's case is filed in the court which will ensure that we know their numbers. Law has to be used as a weapon, tool to get justice. Maintenance can be asked in kind, also we should insist that maintenance amount has to be deposited in the court so that women do not have to file a suit if it is not paid for months. There is a record in the court for defaults. Archana More suggested that a demand be placed to allocate morning period in court for women's cases so that they need not wait the whole day for their cases to come up. The government has announced that "Tantamukti Committees" (conflict resolution) should tackle the cases of desertion, marital conflicts etc. However, there are few women in these committees who can understand the women's issues. Deprived women require support groups outside of the formal structure of police stations and courts.

Manisha Tulpule said that women dealing with the situation of domestic violence or desertion require legal help at every stage. There should be legal advice available in the shelter homes. Women going for abortion are asked to get signature from their husbands, which is illegal, but the doctors insist. Jaya Sagade

felt that by making women joint owners of the house, does not ensure that they become the real owners.. Supreme Court has given a judgment that daughter cannot claim job on the ground of compassion in case of death of a father or serving mother while on the job. We have to oppose this judgment. We should not accept Tanta Mukti or Gram Nyayalay concept. We need a formal structure, the legal language has to be made simpler. Going to court, even though cases of success may not be many, involves an assertion of rights as citizens and right to justice. The process itself is empowering.

ACADEMICS' GROUP DISCUSSION

There was agreement on several issues: to take advantage of the thrust of the XII

plan on the building up of data of vulnerable groups; efforts to build empirical data by carrying out surveys, research on complexities of the life realities and everyday existence of single women by focusing on their narratives, going beyond the binaries of victimhood vs celebration of their agency.

Work was needed on the conceptual level to write on how we understand and theorise singlehood, how we relate it to marriage and other family institutions. This will help the task of definitions and identification, both at the theoretical and at the ground levels. Discussions were also held on the need of legal inputs on a variety of issues for organizations working on the issues of single women, including sexual harassment at the work

place, Domestic Violence Act, maintenance provisions etc. Women's Studies Centre of ILS Law College expressed willingness to provide training on these issues. It was suggested that WSCs should connect to the local law colleges in their area. Chhaya Datar, IAWS EC member its western regional co-ordinator, offered her willing to train the investigators/students of the colleges which wish to undertake these surveys based on the questionnaire circulated in the workshop. The newly established women's studies centres felt the need to keep in touch with each other to get to know various programmes which can enhance feminist perspective among the students.

Gender and Migration: Key Issues

The Centre for Women's Development Studies organized a National Colloquium on 6th March in New Delhi to present the Key Findings on completion of a three-year study on Gender and Migration, undertaken with support from the IDRC. The study highlighted some of the most neglected and hitherto poorly delineated dimensions of internal labour migration in India from a perspective drawn from the experiences of the contemporary women's movement in the country. The CWDS research project was distinctive both in terms of the vast span it covered—with questionnaire based survey and field visits in over 20 states of India—as well as its focus on both labour and marriage related migration by women, be it as individuals or as part of family related migration. Some of the key findings from the study show that:

- Migration has led to only limited

diversification of women's employment, in precisely the period when the country's higher levels of particularly service driven growth had become the most celebrated topic of Indian development discourse.

- Occupational shifts through migration indicate greater concentration of women in a relatively narrow band of occupations, often with limited scope for social advance, generally differentiated however along the fault lines of entrenched social hierarchies based on caste and community.
- There is more medium and long term migration among women workers from upper caste communities accompanying relatively greater levels of diversification of their employment into various types of services in urban areas.
- Concentration of migrant women workers from the historically disadvantaged and stigmatized communities of Scheduled Castes and Tribes

in short term and particularly circular migration for hard manual labour with little scope for social advance.

- Concentration of women in paid domestic work, particularly through rural-to-urban migration, cutting across all castes/tribes/communities; with textile based factory production drawing migrant women from all communities other than scheduled tribes and being relatively less characterized by caste features.
- High levels of female density in some circular migration based employment regimes such as brick-making across the country and sugarcane cutting in western and southern India, pointed to women's wage work in the capital accumulation oriented modern sector being itself subsumed in laboring units comprising of male female pairs or family units.

- Indrani Mazumdar, Associate Professor, CWDS, Delhi

ARCHIVES

When the EC of 2008-2011 took over the administering of the IAWS, one of the tasks it addressed was to get the IAWS archive going. Kamla Ganesh had gone through the important but tedious and time consuming task of looking at the two steel almirahs containing the IAWS papers which had travelled around from one city to another –wherever the IAWS Secretariat was housed. It finally arrived at the SNTD Women’s Studies Resource Centre where they now rest .Kamla Ganesh began to sort out the papers, getting rid of the mundane stuff and keeping the rest which contains in a sense the history of the IAWS, while Veena Poonacha of the SNTD Women’s Studies Resource Centre facilitated its presence there and laying the foundation for the archive. When the archive committee was set up by the earlier EC, Sumi Krishna, as former President of IAWS , played a key role in maintaining continuity between the earlier two ECs . A larger Archives Committee was formed with a rollover principle of earlier and later members working together to complete old activities and initiate new activities, bringing in historians along with members of the EC into the Archive Committee.

A number of new ventures were initiated by the Archive Committee: in October 2010 the northern regional conference was built around archiving the cultural production of the women’s movement and the entire proceedings were videoed. Cultural activists from Mumbai and Chennai joined the activists from Delhi to attempt a partial retrieval of the songs and theatre activities generated by the women’s

movement. Among its highlights were performances on theatre and music, reflections of theatrical engagements by Tripurari Sharma, Maya Rao, Moloysree Hashmi, A. Mangai, Saheli and Sushma Deshpande and a talk cum performance by Vidya Rao. The early songs created by the women’s movement were recalled by Kamla Bhasin, Jaya Srivastava, Haseena, and a team from Saheli. Urvashi Butalia took us through a short history of the posters with a visual presentation of the artefacts created by the women’s movement.

In January 2011 the IAWS conference was held in Wardha: its plenary sessions and its rich cultural performances were also videoed. This is an important archive of the amazing diversity of the plenary sessions, the local tribal and folk artistes of the regions performative traditions and the energy and vitality of the solidarity march by the participants and the students of the Mahatma Gandhi Antarrashtriya Hindi University.

A brief account of the three completed projects is provided below.

1. THE FEMINIST MEMOIR PROJECT

Undertaken by a new generation feminist this project placed two or even three generation of feminists in dialogue with each other. The completed project provides a marvellous account of the recent history of India as seen through twenty women. Feminists from Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and Bengaluru were interviewed for the project: audio records are accompanied by transcripts of the audio files and from one source 400 photographs have also been acquired. The in-

terviews bring together events across the country and the individual journeys of feminists as they responded to the events and in many cases shaped them. A long report comprised of 20,000 words prepared by Ponni Arasu who collected the narratives accompanies the audio files and the transcripts. It is a personal and political account raising many questions about the past and the present, and between the interviewees and the young feminist compiler of the narratives which captures the complexities of the moment as it unfolds in all its rich regional diversity.

2. THE SNOWBALLING ARCHIVE OF THE 1990 CALICUT CONFERENCE.

A ‘snowballing archive’ refers to a potentially ever-growing repository of information about specific events, processes, or institutions, built up through voluntary contribution of information by participants and observers. Such an idea becomes easier to imagine precisely because of the expansion of cyberspace and cyber networks. This kind of archiving is perhaps best for events or processes or institutions with a recent history, since it can be built largely by people who have direct experience of it. In a context in which the surfeit of information circulating in the public sphere contributes both directly and indirectly to the erasure of historical memory – and this danger seems to loom over, especially, the recent past -- building up ‘snowballing archives’ about key events, struggles, debates, and so on may be vital for social movements.

The ‘snowballing archive’ may also be interesting for many more reasons: it is essentially participatory; it can reduce the costs of archiving significantly; it requires

not a great deal of human power to collect or maintain; it also can be widely and openly shared easily. This may also be an effective way of making available material from the regional languages and regions, at least in a preliminary form, to a larger English-speaking community.

As a first step the material collected by J. Devika (CDS, Thiruvanthapuram) will be digitised and then put up in web space and that we hope will initiate the snowballing process. The preliminary archive must be set 'snowballing' with some effort: people who could potentially contribute further to the archive will be identified, and the material and summaries will be actively shared with them. The idea is to encourage them to put down their own memories and reflections on the event/process/practice/institution, which could then be incorporated into the archive. The availability of different kinds of material may help to elicit memories on facets that otherwise get ignored or neglected in more conventional forms of documentation and even research. Additional

information on where more materials, especially those in non-digital formats, will also be provided, as also the contact information about key informants etc., with their consent duly obtained.

3. DIGITISING THE DOCUMENTS IN THE EXISTING IAWS ARCHIVE.

After the process of discarding and selecting documents of the IAWS archive undertaken by Dr. Kamla Ganesh in the 1st stage of the archiving process in the next phase most of the selected documents have been digitised under the able guidance of Kamla Ganesh and Veena Poonacha. Ms Unnatti who was appointed to actually conduct the process has compiled an inventory of the items digitised, which comprise of 1700 documents amounting to approximately 3400 pages of material. The documents have been classified under sub-headings such as minutes of meetings: of the EC, the General Body, planning of National Conferences, Sub-themes of the Conferences, Co-ordinators of sub-themes, constitutional amendments etc. The material

pertains to the Conferences beginning from Chandigarh in 1986 to the Goa conference held in 2005 and also of regional conferences and workshops held during roughly the same period. The digitised material also includes correspondence with funders, correspondence with the UGC and miscellaneous material such as letters from members, reports by office bearers, and photographs.

In the next stage there are plans to continue with the generation of materials for the archive: proposals include interviews with selected individuals to explore the relationship between activists of the women's movement and the disability movement, a documenting of the Patna Conference, archiving of materials from women's studies centres, the continuing of the snowball archive and the digitising of materials in the IAWS archive from the Lucknow conference and the Wardha conference which will complete the digitising up to the present.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Feminist Archiving: Possibilities And Challenges: A seminar organized by Dr. Avabai Wadia and Dr. Bomanji Khursehdji Wadia Archives For Women, Research Centre For Women's Studies and University Library, SNDT Women's University in association with Indian Association For Women's Studies (IAWS) on 13-14 December, 2012, Mumbai. The seminar will focus on (a) conventional historiography and women's histories (b) retrieving women's histories and source materials (c) organizing, preserving source materials, focusing on unconventional sources (d) creating new resources for women's histories.

Contact: Prof. Veena Poonacha : email : veena_poonacha@yahoo.co.uk

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Mrinaltai always encouraged women to be self dependent. For her, the concerns of Dalits, women, workers, farmers, and tribals were indivisible and demanded a holistic approach. Her politics, consequently, was always inclusive rather than divisive. This was why she could win the affections of diverse sections of people and come to be universally called "Mrinaltai", or elder sister. As veteran feminist and

recipient of coveted award "Daughter of Maharashtra" at the hands of Mrinaltai, Manisha Gupte states, "She lives on, especially through her tireless commitment to the people residing in the slums of Mumbai city, and her empathy with women struggling to survive through skyrocketing prices of household commodities."

Mrinaltai will remain a constant

source of inspiration and role model for many generations of social activists.

Dr. Vibhuti Patel, Head, Dept. of Economics, SNDT University, Mumbai

CONTEXTUALIZING WOMEN'S STUDIES and Women's Movement in India in the Neo-liberal Era

As someone who participated in the first National Conference on Women's Studies in Bombay in 1981 as part of a group of students on behalf of the JNU Women's Committee, I find it relevant to recall and put on record the process by which the University based Women's Studies Centres, as well as the Women's Development Centres located in Colleges, came into existence. These were set up on the specific recommendation and pressure built up by participants in the 1981 conference. These included both academics and activists. The conference was witness to a dialogue between young women students who expressed their dissatisfaction with the educational system, particularly its failure to equip them to face up to social challenges of the contemporary period, and the unfulfilled expectations that senior academicians, such as, Vina Mazumdar, Neera Desai, Saradmoni, Devaki Jain, Madhuri Shah as well as leading activists from varied women's organizations voiced with regard to developing critical thinking among youth, students in particular and their due role in shaping the future. What emerged was that a focus on women, their rights and conditions were missing from the educational curriculum and there was need to infuse fresh energy to move towards the vision that informed the varied struggles of women in the freedom struggle.

Thus the first centre came into existence, around 1984, due to this combined pressure of the movement and the positive response

of those located within the academic establishment in influential positions. The IAWS itself was born as a result of this symbiotic relationship between academicians who pushed for a focus on women within Higher Education and the women's movement. What was common to both was a central concern with processes of social change and the desire to see that the direction of change would be socially transformative and proceed in a manner so as to advance the debate on women's rights. While undertaking this exercise, it may also be appropriate to recall one of the central aspects of the contributions of the Committee of the Status of Women in India and its report, *Towards Equality*, which has been referred to as one of the 'Foundational texts' of Women's Studies in India. The strength of the intervention made by the CSWI lay in its approach which linked emerging issues of women's status with developments at the macro-level and drew, in turn, upon the contribution of the best academic traditions and activists of the country to argue its point. *Towards Equality*, published in 1975, specifically argued that deterioration in women's status was not a result of some 'historically given' backwardness, but rather that it was linked to the path of development adopted in post-independence India. It also went on to empirically establish and argue that point.

In a sense these factors laid out the context within which the emerging perspective for Women's Studies was spelt out in the formative years. Firstly, there was a clear understanding evolved that rather than 'sepa-

rate' courses or papers focusing on women, there was an urgent need to push for more sensitive gender focused research within existing disciplines. It clearly emphasized the link between evolving social concerns, policy debates and governance.

The message at that time was clear, that academic analysis would be enriched and sharpened by the interface with vibrant debates in the movement. They formed a continuum, both in our minds and in the movement for social change in the larger domain. At the personal level, many of us benefitted tremendously from the rich discussions this generated which, I daresay, informed both the academics as well as the activism that some of us came to be a part of over subsequent decades. The platform of the movement too was conceived of as part of the larger coalition/alliances of social movements of that time.

WOMEN'S STUDIES IN THE PRESENT JUNCTURE

Much has changed since those early years in the 1980s, both in the movement and in academics. While reflecting back on the manner of evolution of Women's Studies in India today, there is, firstly, a need to historicize the very significant change that has come about in the context within which Women's Studies developed and within which it operates today. The 1970s represented a radical phase in Indian politics which also imparted a critical edge to social science analysis of that period. Thus, even though the mid 70s were marked by the imposition of the Emer-

gency and attempts at suppressing critical thought, the scuttling of democracy itself evoked responses which asserted from the right to research from an oppositional location. In contrast with the 1970s, today we live in times which are marked by processes of subjugation and forms of oppression are more complex. What is disturbing however, as Hobsbawm observed, is the fact that the primary purpose of analysis does not quite appear to be the same either.

Apart from some specific interventions, the large body of Women's Studies today appears to be unconcerned with critical interrogation of social formations and their link with women's oppression. For most recent entrants into Women's Studies and the scholars located in these, Women's Studies remains at best, a discourse located in a formal commitment to advancing academic analyses focused on gender based equality. It is increasingly a professional response to discriminatory practices, processes and perceptions, unmindful of the ground reality or the challenges thereof. This is not unexpected, for the institutionalisation of Women's Studies, the world across, has brought in a huge body of such professional scholars. Hence there is a greater need to push for an ideological debate within Women's Studies to counter the challenge of becoming part of the status quo. For, to lay bare the forms of oppression without confronting the contextual frames wherein these remain etched, would end up exposing the subjects, and in this case perhaps also the objects of our analysis, to further and more pervasive forms of exploitation. Apart from the risks involved, this would also open up various unanswered questions of ethics and accountability.

CHANGED ACADEMIC CONTEXT

Indian academia has had a rich history of critical interrogation and building of pressure for change and more inclusive perspectives in terms of the discourse on power. The social sciences, especially, have had a long his-

tory of evolving methodologies to address issues of inequality and rights while appreciating differential perspectives based on social location. It is this tradition that Women's Studies chose to draw and build upon even as it critiqued the limitations which led to the invisibilization and neglect of women's perspectives.

There is in Women's Studies, as in other fields of academia today, a distinct trend to move away from traditional social science research and analysis, to a predominantly cultural studies framework with an increasing emphasis on individual experience. However, does this turn to culture justify a new kind of substitutionism, or, exclusionism in our analytical approach and academic discourse? Can a drastic shift away from analysis of structures, macro-trends and deeper processes of historical change be justified in the name of a 'feminist' gaze? Or, is it that we believe that these are to be taken as given, leaving us with the task of only interpretation and, perhaps, the observation, of inter-sectionalities, convergences and tensions, with no attention being paid to how the text itself may be in the process of being re-written as part of the changing context and in particular, globalization and its impact on women's lives and livelihoods?

However, there is no doubt, as evident from the papers presented at Wardha, that women's studies scholars are researching newer areas of social life. Cultural studies and analysis do provide fresh insights, sharpened tools for analyzing minds, mentalities, consciousness, yielding exciting results. We are today more conscious of our subjectivities, prejudices, as well as the limitations that arise from our own social location. However, doubts persist.

Turning away from critical examination of macro-data and a shunning quantitative methods is what we witness in the bulk of writings emerging under the rubric of Women's Studies. This is very often directly reflected in the Women's Studies

courses that are being developed and taught across the country, to speak in a more general sense. A more detailed examination of the activities/ seminars organized by Women's Studies Centres would also illustrate this point and if we were to probe further into the entire gamut of publications under the titles of Gender / Women's Studies, the gap would be even sharper. In fact, the more interesting studies of recent years have come from sensitive scholars within traditional disciplines rather than those trained or located in Women's Studies per se. The point here is not to pitch Women's Studies against other disciplines, or quantitative analysis and methods over qualitative studies, nor to argue for the privileging of one over the other. The issue really is that having intervened in policy debates since the 1970s, pioneering scholars ensured that today a rich body of data exists for us to unpack and lay bare discriminatory processes and their structural basis as also the social implications of these. Thus, even as a large part of the early energy of activists and scholars in the 1970s and 1980s was spent in sensitizing official machinery and academicians while collecting data and undertaking research, today we do not sufficiently draw upon micro-studies and field based studies are even fewer. This in itself is a matter of concern since Social Sciences in India earlier relied upon a very rich resource of field/village based studies. There is insufficient use of the Census data and even less of the NSSO survey data. While the discussion on sex ratios, continues we are not better informed of the complexities based on regional or state wise patterns in different segments/ age groups of the population. Again, trends in women's work patterns are not being examined in any detail; even as women and land and ownership have gained prominence, in terms of research and advocacy, agrarian change and land use patterns and its politics need much more work to capture the gender dimensions of changes and diversities. While violence against women

in varied forms are the focus of not only research and sustained advocacy, have we examined the crime data to specifically arrive at an understanding of what lies at the back of the statistics which the NCRB gives us? This now includes details on those crimes for which we have had to struggle in the past to get them recognized as offences in that category? Can we even get back to government agencies to say that these are the questions that you need to ask to get better results from the data you collect on a regular basis? At what levels do we look for answers? We need to confront this problem if we at all wish to address the increasingly visible gap between the women's movement and Women's Studies.

My quarrel is not with the 'turn to culture per se,' but in the reduction of the process of social and critical enquiry to becoming primarily an exercise in the writing of a narrative and interpretation thereof. What we are then left with is a discourse on oppression and/or the subjection of women, along with assertion of agency, often on an individual basis. This may even be supplemented by a focus on the state and how its agencies are instrumental in perpetuating inequalities, including those grounded in patriarchy. This would only enhance our glaring inability to engage with the state in any meaningful way to advance the process of strategizing for collective and long term change.

NEED TO CONTEXTUALIZE DEBATES IN THE MOVEMENT

How do Women's Studies practitioners look at social movements? Firstly there is a need to recognise that there are a range of movements at the local, regional, national and transnational levels, with connections between these. Present day movements may also have linkages with earlier histories. These earlier histories and contexts also sometimes determine the processes by which trajectories of movements develop. It is equally important to note that there are

shifts within movements. These may be triggered by changes in the context. The shifts may, in turn, also flag conceptual issues.

It is important to also note that many of the debates and issues are not settled. These are often presented in Women's Studies' analysis as 'given.' Often these 'givens' that are drawn upon may have emerged from an international pool of positions which may have come up in different contexts, different societies, even different cultural situations. The fact that movements have their own trajectory is not sufficiently recognized. Women's Studies analysis needs to contend with the fact that academic analysis can facilitate evolving of critical perspectives with regard to on-going debates, but it cannot substitute for the resolution of debates on the ground. Nor can it abrogate to itself the role of leading the movement. There has to be recognition that understanding on specific issues in the movement evolves at its own pace. Enormous time and energy goes into creating a space for discussion while also allowing for conflicting positions to be sorted out or the playing out of differences.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

In our obsession with the text in post-modernist times, we have moved further away from analysing contexts. There are significant lessons to be learnt from the international women's movement, particularly from the experiences of countries in Latin America and Africa. All the research that has come from these countries underscores the manner in which globalization, and measures introduced under the Structural Adjustment Programmes, to begin with, significantly exacerbated poverty levels, threatened and altered the terms of economic sustenance and livelihood, and also thereby the terms on which negotiation of patriarchy was to be based. These gave rise to new forms of exploitation, more intense forms of conflict and more volatile socio-political formations. Incidentally, this

period also saw significant shifts in research agendas in Latin America, based on available funding patterns. All this impacted women in very significant ways. Above all, these factors underline the need for more contextualized analysis drawing upon the linkages between the macro-reality of trends of a more strident and brazen capitalism which, though itself crisis-ridden, or perhaps because of it, plays havoc with the world order in order to deal with its own crisis.

No one, least of all the women, are left un-impacted by this reality today. In fact I would argue that in this phase of capitalism, given the backdrop of a uni-polar world, imperialism has not only adopted a more aggressive strategy to tide over the crisis, but it is clearly using women to break down the last bastions of resistance. Across the world as agriculture based social and community based livelihood patterns are being destroyed, or while more jobs in urban centres are lost as the masses are exposed to volatile shifts in labour markets, women are having to bear the brunt. While many emerge as the sole breadwinners, others plod on in conditions of self-exploitation, hidden from the glare of public policy grappling with different forms of work to keep the hearth burning.

True, this world reconfigures patriarchy, including in the individualized personal worlds that each one of us inhabits. But underlying those individualized inequalities / denials/ discriminations that each one personally grapples with are the deeply embedded structures which uphold and give scope for more un-free and unfair play to those forces which peg their arguments on 'free trade' and a 'level playing field.' For all the emphasis in recent decades on human rights, and the chanting of the neo-liberal mantra of Free Trade and good governance, we know that the scale on which exclusions are decided is tilted against the poor of the developing countries. The question we need to ask ourselves is

whether and how has Women's Studies engaged with this hydra-headed reality?

Women's Studies has given us a significant body of literature in recent years around the axis of Gender and Caste. However, while opening up very complex processes of socialization and social exclusions and the links between these and consciousness and socialization, these have generally not led to further probing the links of these with the structures within which these relations are embedded. These point to the intensely exploitative aspect of the persistence of pre-capitalist forms of relations social and economic relations and their specifically brutal face with regard to gender. Further, the executive and judicial responses to such outrageous incidents highlight the tenacity of pre-modern structures in our growth driven economy.

ADDRESSING COMMONALITY WITH DIFFERENCE

One of the tasks before us in Women's Studies is to examine these to allow for a more informed debate on issues of caste, identity, community, to cast our net wide and look at varied movements, its diverse forms and social dynamics. At the same time, there is a need to draw from the past gains, the interventions and the critical role of political timing. Consider, for example, the fact that a sustained push for a universal public distribution system as part of people's larger struggle for food security marked one such issue where women's organizations-led interventions compelled rights activists to re-think their own position of supporting targeting PDS. This could be done on the basis of sustained and systematic engagement with the issue of the PDS in course of mass organization-based work. There were many linked issues, such as child labor, female child labor, girls' education, exclusionary practices around PDS, etc. Ignored are historical legacies-The role of communist and varied peoples movements, mass organizations of women and institution building focusing on

'food' as a basic right. What we witness now is a phase of Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT) as the preferred strategy from the state, even as food insecurity grows. Before the mass of people, including women. The enactment of the NREGA (now MGNREGS), offers a similar example. Here again issues of women as workers, as part of and heads of households, as well as measure of work and productivity have come up in a major way from entering into the debate on the ground. But Women's Studies has, by and large, not been involved in this. There was a need to contest, through data bases, the current policy regime and governance policy to introduce differential categories of citizenship within the official framework.

CONCEPTS TO UNDERSTAND THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

There is another kind of privileging happening within the discourse of Women's Studies..As Women's Studies proliferates in its many and varied institutional locations, it is time to ensure that the collapsing of distinctions between activism and scholarship does not happen in a manner as to end up privileging academics and academic theory over praxis.. Whereas there are and should be links between the two, this tendency to substitute one for the other should not be allowed to go unchallenged. The movement operates at different levels, in conjunction with other social movements which encompass the overlapping/ interlocked spheres of women's lives and existence. This should help us understand how identities, consciousness, mentalities and memories are formed, absorbed and interface with other aspects of social life. The need to strengthen Women's Studies' analysis of these tensions as well as linkages is one of the challenges before us.

FEMINISMS/ FEMINIST METHODOLOGY: THE NEED FOR MORE DEBATE

As is well-known by now, there is a huge mass of literature on the concept of Feminism. It is now recognized, within women's

studies and within movements, that there are many feminisms, although the picture may not be very clear yet and more research and dialogues are needed. A breakthrough has been made, particularly in recent debates around 'dalit feminism', even dalit women's organizations/platforms are mainly addressing issues of dignity, survival, erosion of livelihoods and newer forms of patriarchal control and oppression. The link between the two, is clearly lacking.

More recently, as Women's Studies Centres and University departments have undertaken teaching of Women's Studies on a regular basis, there is also assertion and conceptualization around a 'Feminist Methodology.' This is also linked to the attempt to develop a separate discipline of Women's Studies. What precisely do we mean when we speak of 'Feminist Methodology'? Maitrayee Chaudhuri's edited collection on this was a step in the right direction in that it tried to historicize the debate, but we need to move beyond it to view how the contemporary women's movement has framed its own analysis of the discrimination, oppression and marginalisation that women are subjected to. A small but significant step was made when IAWS, at its national conference at Luknow, held an entire session on new methods of feminist research.

RESPONSE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

IAWS has emerged over the last three decades as one of the foremost platforms showcasing some of the major challenges before us. The papers presented at our successive conferences have been known to focus in complex ways, on the inequalities that exist on the ground, along with the inter-linkages with caste and class formations. Over the past several decades IAWS provided a research back-up for much of what the activists were grappling with on the ground. However, in recent years a gap is visible on this count. As we are face the political fallout of these increasing and emerging conflicts, the

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LEELA DUBE (1923-2012)

With passing away of Prof. Leela Dube on 16th May, 2012, we have lost a stalwart who enriched a discipline of anthropology by bringing insights of women's studies and enriched women's studies as a discipline by bringing sharpness and technical expertise of an anthropologist.

Dr. Leela Dube's academic career began in 1960 at Sagar University and she moved to Delhi in 1975. She played a crucial role in shaping Towards Equality Report: Committee on Status of Women in India (1974), GoI discussion of which in the Parliament of India brought women's studies centre stage in the Indian academia via UGC and ICSSR. Dr. Leela Dube successfully executed innumerable research projects for both these apex institutions for higher education. She was a mover and shaker in Indian Sociological Society in the nineteen seventies and was responsible for introducing women's studies concerns in the mainstream sociology. She played crucial role in World Sociological Congress in 1984 in which women activists and women's studies scholars played dominant role thro' Research Committee (RC 32). Leeladee chaired a panel on "Declining Sex Ratio in India", in which Dr. Ilina Sen gave a historical overview of deficit of women in India throughout history of Census of India, Prof. Veena Mazumdar passionately spoke on the finding of towards Equality Report and I spoke on "Sex Selective Abortions-An Abuse of Scientific Techniques of Amniocentesis". Leeladee summed up the session with her insightful comments on tradition of son preference in India. Her greatness lay in synthesising complex concerns and providing an analytical framework in a lucid and convincing way.



In a debate on sex selective abortions carried out in Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) during 1982-1986, her contribution was immense and her predictions about direct relationship of deficit of women and increased and intensified violence against women has proved to be true in the subsequent years.

Due to team efforts of women's studies scholars (that included Prof. Leela Dube), RC 32 got institutionalised in World Sociological Congress. She invited many activists (that included me too) for an 12th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, Zagreb, 24-31 July 1988 to present paper on "Codification of Customary Laws into Family Laws in Asia". In the Congress, Leeladee's speech on feminist anthropologist Eleanor Leacock provided new insights into departure of the feminist anthropologists from its colonial legacy of "Big brother watching you". Power relations between the North and The South in construction of knowledge and hegemonic presence of ETIC approach in academics were questioned by Leacock as well as Leeladee who propagated "dialogical approach" in anthropological and ethnographic research.

Her work on Lakshadweep island's

matrilineal Muslim tribe was eye-opening, so was her deconstruction of polyandry in Himalayan tribes in the context of women's workload of collection of fuel, fodder, water, looking after live-stock and kitchen gardening in mountainous terrain resulting into high maternal mortality and adverse sex ratio. She showed interconnections between factors responsible for social construction of women's sexuality, fertility and labour rooted in the political economy.

A co-edited volume *Visibility and Power: Essays on Women in Society and Development* by Leela Dube, Eleanor Leacock and Shirley Ardener (Oxford University Press, 1986) provides international perspective on the anthropology of women in the context of socio-political setting of India, Iran, Malaysia, Brazil, and Yugoslavia. Her meticulously researched piece "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India", (*Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 23, No. 18, Apr. 30, 1988) has been used by women's groups for study circles and training programmes. In the debates around rethinking the household, *Structures and Strategies: Women, Work, and Family* (1990), co-edited by Leela Dube and Rajni Palriwala, has been extremely useful in teaching women's studies in Economics, Sociology, Geography, Social Work and Governance courses. *Women and Kinship: Comparative Perspectives on Gender in South and South-East Asia* by Leela Dube, (Brookings Institution Press, 1997) argues that kinship systems provide an important context in which gender relations are located in personal and public arena.

Her highly celebrated book *Anthropo-*

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INQUILAB ZINDABAD: Captain Laxmi Sahgal (1914-2012)

Daughter of Ammu Swaminadhan, one of the foremost women in the struggle for India's independence and S. Swaminadhan, a prominent criminal lawyer, Lakshmi Sahgal (Lakshmi Swaminadhan) was born on 24 October 1914. Her courage in her personal and public life was matched by a boldness of approach which stemmed from the early influence of her parents, her father who broke all caste orthodoxy and her mother, a Gandhian and member of the Women's India Association and All India Women's Conference (AIWC) and one of the 11 women members of the Constituent Assembly of India. Her family was drawn into the freedom struggle during her schooling in Madras and as a medical student at Madras Medical College from where she took her MBBS in 1938. Her political life evolved, when in medical college, she met Suhasini Nambiar, Sarojini Naidu's sister. "She was a communist, staying in my house, in hiding from the police for her suspected role in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. She had extracts from communist literature and I read the Communist Manifesto and other literature then. I was convinced I did not want to join the Gandhian movement but wanted to be active in the Indian revolution. Then the war broke out and there was a political vacuum. My political ideas were being formed", Capt. Lakshmi recalled.

In 1940, as a young medical practitioner, Capt. Lakshmi arrived in Singapore and started her medical practice. She noted the plight of the Indian community, mainly labour, and noted the struggle of rubber workers and the sexual



exploitation of women workers by supervisory staff and management. She met political exile, P Keshava Menon and became the only woman member of the Indian Association that was formed in 1941. Following the Japanese occupation, Rash Bihari Bose initiated the setting up of the Indian Independence League and similar leagues sprung up all over the Japanese occupied territory. Just then, Subhash Chandra Bose broadcast on German radio. There was a 4000 strong meeting of all the Indian Independence leagues which Capt. Lakshmi attended. She said, "I was becoming a force by myself" and received Subhash Chandra Bose at the air force base in Singapore. Although the Japanese were strictly against women entering military bases, I went, nevertheless. Netaji spoke to us about the freedom struggle, 1942 should have made a difference and time had been lost, that an army had to be formed, not just by former soldiers but also with civilians. The final blow to the

British rule had to come through armed struggle."

At a meeting, Netaji suggested the setting up of a women's regiment. According to Capt. Lakshmi Saigal, "Those present shouted- where are the women- Netaji said, what do you mean, I have seen thousands of women at meetings, we must involve poor women. The President of the Indian Independence League suggested my name as leader of the regiment. Netaji had heard about my parents and called me for a 5- hour interview. He emphasised that women should be involved from the beginning itself, the Bengal revolutionary movement had few women participants. This should not happen. I was given a few days to go among the women, talk to them and see their responses before calling a meeting of women. The response was tremendous, from young girls, to young married women, elderly women. At the 5000 strong meeting of women, I spoke, in Tamil. Netaji asked women whether

they were willing to join the INA, they all rushed towards the dias. Recruitment began to the Rani of Jhansi Regiment, 100 women initially trained in physical and arms training. On 23rd October 1943, a camp was organized with 300 women. Apart from military training, discussions were held on women's situation, male domination, social and economic insecurity. Within three months, one batch was trained and another one in Burma, both in my presence. A 1000 strong women's regiment, an infantry regiment, emerged, including 200 trained women nurses. Our hands were toughened, we could carry loads for long distances, moved silently at night, managed with little food. I was made a minister in the Provisional Government of Azad Hind, as well."

Early 1944, the Rani of Jhansi Regiment moved from Singapore to Burma. Capt Lakshmi said, "The first batch was sent to Maymio for an assault on Imphal. Unfortunately, the monsoons started early, the Japanese were busy defending their island and we were up against Allied bombing and a reinforced by British force at

Imphal. We knew that advance was not possible. The INA made another valiant attack but were outnumbered. We had no air support. Netaji took the decision to ensure that the women from the regiment returned to their homes, with INA soldiers and he himself accompanying the women to Singapore. I stayed back in a hospital, was captured and put under house arrest in Rangoon. I was released only in 1946 when the INA trial was over." She met Netaji for the last time in May, 1945".

Capt. Lakshmi, as she came to be known, married her colleague and a leading member of INA, Col. Prem Kumar Sehgal in March 1947 and they moved to Kanpur from Lahore, when she started her medical practice, working among the refugees who had come from Pakistan. Till the end, she attended her crowded clinic in Kanpur, open to all sections of the poor. When her daughter, Subhashini Ali, joined the CPI- M in the early 1970s, she drew the attention of her mother to an appeal made by Jyoti Basu, veteran Communist leader, for doctors and medical supplies for Bangladeshi refugee camps.

Capt. Lakshmi left for Calcutta with medicines, clothes and worked for five weeks in the border areas. After her return, she applied for CPI-M membership saying, "My thinking was Communist, I did not want to lot of money, acquire property. Capt. Lakshmi was one of the founding members of AIDWA, a leading member in all its activities. However, her reach was unparalleled, her speeches, in many languages, always aroused the crowds that she addressed to shout "Inqulab Zindabad".

Recalling her INA experience, Capt. Lakshmi said, "the INA posed an alternative to the compromising role of the Indian National Congress. The lessons of the INA are forgotten, the national integration that it displayed, the role of women. The INA showed that all colonial legacies must be done away with, that trained people should form the nucleus of the Indian revolutionary army".

By Meera Velayudhan who interviewed her in the 1980s.

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logical Explorations in Gender: Intersecting Fields (2001, Sage) is a landmark contribution in feminist anthropology in India. It examines gender, Kinship and Culture by sourcing a variety of distinct and unconventional materials such as folk-tales, folk songs, proverbs, legends, myths to construct ethnographic profile of feminist thoughts. She provides a nuanced understanding on socialization of girl child in a patriarchal family, "seed and soil" theory propagated by Hindu Scriptures and Epics symbolizing domination-subordination power relationship between men and women. In 2009, her last publication in

Marathi titled Manavashastratil Lingbhavachi Shodhamohim a translation by Vidyut Bhagwat of this book was published. There is also a Hindi translation of these explorations by Vandana Mishra. Dr. Neera Desai translated into Gujarati Leeladee's article "On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India" published in Economic and Political Weekly Vol. 23, No. 18 (Apr. 30, 1988), pp. WS11-WS19. In 1990, we serialised the same in our Feminist Quarterly in Gujarati, Nari Mukti.

In 2007, Leela Dube was conferred on the Lifetime Achievement Award of the Indian Sociological Society, and in 2005 she was given prestigious UGC National Swami Pranavananda Saraswati Award.

She remained intellectually charged and busy with scholarly pursuit till the end.

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need to strengthen links with the movement is felt more directly.

Director, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Delhi and General Secretary, IAWS. This is an abridged version of the paper presented at a special session on 'Critical appraisal of Women's Studies' held at National Conference of the IAWS at Wardha, 2011.

On 17th July 2012, Mrinal Gore passed away. With her demise, an era of women freedom fighters with feminist sensitivities in praxis is over.

Inspired by Quit India Movement under leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, 14 year old young girl Mrinal became active in the freedom movement. Drawn to political and social causes, she gave up a promising career in medicine in order to organise the poorest and most powerless.

She married her comrade, Shri Keshav Gore and when he died at a young age in 1958, she founded Keshav Gore Smarak Bhavan which provided democratic platform to progressive forces for debate and discussion, meetings and public gatherings, documentation and institutional base for Samajwadi Mahila Sabha, Bombay Nurses Association, Anganwadi Workers Union, Swadhar and innumerable issue-based action fronts involving liberals, socialists and left groups.

In the sixties she worked as corporator and then as legislator. Her agitations were always related to basic issues — water, kerosene, inflation — and they were always fierce. But there was no violence ever, neither in her actions nor in her words. Even friends weren't spared, if she was convinced they were wrong. She was revered and respected by the ministers and chief ministers of her time.

Making of a Legendary Political Persona: In the early seventies, she along with her coworkers formed Yuva Kranti Dal that fought against vested interests in rural, urban and tribal areas as well as caste based oppression, injustice and violence. She believed in transparency and social accountability in public life.

She brought the issue of safe drinking water in the political agenda of local self government body of Mumbai and earned a title of "Pani Wali Bai". A political reformer by instinct, Mrinaltai helped to set up in September 1972 the Anti-Price Rise Committee, which mobilised the largest-ever turnout of women on the streets ever seen since the Independence movement. At the same time, Mrinaltai also worked within the Socialist Party and outside, to get the government to focus on drought in rural Maharashtra.

The year 1975 was an eventful one for Mrinal Gore. It saw Indira Gandhi's government impose an internal Emergency and suspend the constitutional rights of the people. Mrinaltai went underground to guide the protests against the Emergency. She was arrested in December that year and placed initially under solitary confinement. Once the Emergency was

MRINALTAI GORE (1928-2012)



withdrawn in 1977, she was elected on a Janata Party ticket to Parliament, winning by the highest margin of votes in the entire state of Maharashtra.

She supported renaming of Marathwada University to Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University. When I led a team to 48 riot torn villages in Marathwada in connection with renaming issue and our team prepared report on atrocities committed on Dalits, she suggested my name to several social organizations and journals so that our report got due publicity.

In 1979, when I was staying at Borivali, we had an acute problem of water and transport, we invited Mrinaltai and we started getting supply of water and later on bus service also. She was always sure of herself and her action. She made rapid appraisal of the ground reality, surveyed pros-n-cons of the scenario, collected documentary evidences and acted after doing lot of homework. Her demand of community based day care centers for working women's children was preceded by survey of working women who reported that it was extremely difficult to carry infants in overcrowded suburban trains.

CHAMPION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Since 1977, every year women's rights activists of all hue choose a common theme for commemoration of March 8. Mrinaltai was always there. Now we will miss her the most on International women's day. Whether it was in 1980-Anti rape struggles, in 1981-movement against domestic violence, in 1982-solidarity and starting of community kitchens for Textile workers who were on strike, in 1983-Ant dowry movement, in 1984-Dharmandhata Vi-

rodhi Mahila Kruti Samiti (women's Front against Communalism), in 1985-Campaign for Housing rights (Nagari Nivara Sangharsh Samiti), in 1986-fight against draconian population policy, in 1987-campaign against Sati, in 1988 introduction of bill for Regulation of Pre Natal Diagnostic Test Act; Mrinaltai took active interest in the discussion and participated in action along with her colleagues. At times, she invited us to discuss the technical details of new issues such as amniocentesis, legal reforms, and harmful contraceptives so that she could effectively argue the points in the legislative assembly.

The 1980s found her working with the emerging feminist groups and participating actively in protests against rape and dowry, caste atrocities, sex selection and communalism. A natural organiser, Mrinaltai employed a large spectrum of protest action to get the issue across - from street marches to sit-in and fasts. Not only did she set up a support centre for women survivors of domestic violence, she founded a workers' association - the Shramjeevi Mahila Sangh - expressly for women employees and played pivotal role in getting 65 acres of land for building housing complex for evacuated pavement dwellers during 1980s.

Till late 1980s, she used to commute by local train in women's compartment. If trains were crowded, she would stand quietly in train without making fuss. Once, I saw her boarding the train in which I was sitting with my 5 year daughter in my lap. Out of respect for Mrinaltai, I got up. My daughter, Lara asked me, "Why are you getting up? I told her, "We must give seat to Mrinaltai." Lara said, "Is she your sister?" I told her, "Mrinaltai is every woman's elder sister." All women

in the compartment started smiling.

The first ever bill in the country on sex-selective abortions of female fetuses was moved by Mrinaltai as MLA in a Nagpur session of the Maharashtra Assembly in 1987.

I received Citation and Memento from Mrinaltai in a huge function of social activists on 2nd April, 2010. For me, it is most valuable award in my life.

SECULAR HUMANISM

While talking about secular humanism of Mrinaltai, Ramlath, a feminist activist states, "I had met Mrinal Gore few years ago in her house for a photo shoot. Since she always had a few activists by her side, I asked would it be possible not to have anyone in the room while doing the photo shoot. She laughed and took me to a room upstairs and asked me to close the door. I must have spent some 45 minutes with her....She became a lot more relaxed started talking about less serious stuff.... asked me about photography/lighting, wanted to know about the light-meter I was using and of course, some personal questions...during our conversation I mentioned about the problems women like me face while finding a house in Bombay because of my Muslim identity, she said she had no idea brokers in Bombay had started asking for passports /pan cards and other documents in order to establish one's religious identity. She immediately called someone and asked whether he could help me find an apartment to rent....one could see pain in her eyes when she talked about the greed and hatred in this city..."

The huge Nagari Niwara Parishad Project in Goregaon East is a living memorial for Gore and her work. She persuaded the state government to offer land it had acquired under the Urban Land Ceiling Act to the really poor and needy. Local politicians who feared that Gore will get a readymade vote bank delayed the project. Yet, when the homes were ready after two decades, they were still the most affordable. They were not big flats, but self-contained spacious units built neatly atop Dindoshi Hills. While the younger generation may not remember this, their parents will remain grateful that they could finally own a home in Mumbai, thanks only to Gore.

REVERENCE OF FEMINISTS FOR MRINALTAI

Veteran feminist Ammu Abraham (of Women's Centre-Mumbai) who, like Mrinaltai, gave up a promising career in medicine to plunge full time into organising the poor and the marginalized in the 1970s, has this to say about Mrinaltai, "I remember her with affection. As one of the activists in Mumbai who met her at vari-

ous meetings at the office near Mantralay, I interacted with her quite a lot, on March 8th leaflets, Maharashtra State Women's Commission and other campaigns. While there was a lot of common ground between us, we did not always agree entirely on issues, but she was never one to take that personally. One of the most generous spirits associated with the women's movement in Mumbai and Maharashtra has passed away. Hard to say goodbye."

I had known Mrinaltai from my college days in the early 1970s and she inspired us, social activists of Vadodara to start Anti Price Rise Women's Committee I 1974 when I was an undergraduate student. When I relocated to Mumbai in 1977 and was active in the united front of women's organisations, I had to visit Mrinaltai's residence-cum office regularly for preparation, translation, cyclostyling, posting of circulars, resolutions and leaflets. She always welcomed me with warm smile. While working, if I told her that I wanted to go out for short time; she would immediately retort, "I know, you are hungry." And she would announce, "Make poha, Vibhuti is starved." And I would get poha and sometimes Jebebi also. I was so touched by her hospitality, sensitivity, generosity of heart, open door policy and decent sense of humour.

Mrinaltai always respected collective wisdom of women's movement. She invited young feminists to discuss contemporary issues and introduced best practices of new groups in her organization. To provide institutional support to women in distress, she started Swadhar in mid 1980s at Keshav Gore Smarak Pratishthan formed by her after her husband who was a socialist leader and died at a young age. Here she provided child care centre, library for poor students, counselling centre and meeting place for all progressive forces. She was the first one to launch struggle against sexual harassment of nurses in hospitals and formed trade union of nurses under leadership of Kamalatai Desai.

Prof. Lakshmi Lingam, Deputy Director, TISS and member of Consultative Committee of Sophia Centre for women's Studies and Development avers, "Mrinaltai is a truly powerful inspiring woman. She came across as a person with determination in thought and tenderness in the heart. She spoke in feminist meetings whether it is the sex determination tests, violence against women, 73rd & 74th amendments, women's policies of the Government or the support for working women, with so much of clarity and sense of humor. She truly represented to many of us a person who had the ability to strad-

dle the old and the new and reach across generations with since of sisterhood and modesty. I did not have any personal rapport with her, but met her in various meetings and shared a hand shake or a glance of acknowledgement. These are impressions that will stay with us for a life time and also provide a beacon as to how we conduct ourselves with fellow sister travelers in the movement. Long live Mrinaltai and her like!"

LEGENDARY LEADER WITH MASS APPEAL

In 1988, her sixtieth birth anniversary programme attracted thousands of social activists, trade union workers, women activists with their children. By then, her health had deteriorated due to cancer and all of us who supported her work had made contribution to purchase a car for Mrinaltai.

In 2002, we invited her to inaugurate Workshop on Sexual Harassment at workplace and Round Table on Women Empowerment Policy, 2001. In 2003, Mrinaltai invited me at Swadhar to conduct a session on Gender Audit of Budgets. In 2007, when she came for Mahila Milan programme at TISS, Mrinaltai had become really weak. But she was as spirited as ever. She attended rally of women's organizations in solidarity with the victims of rape and massacre of Dalit girl, Priyanka Bhootmange and her family members in Kharalanji.

Mrinaltai was a principled politician, honest to the core and great organizer. She stuck out her neck in the midst of adverse circumstances because courage of conviction. Her name was synonymous with any fight for justice and social accountability in public life. She provided her visionary leadership in the area of political struggles, civic amenities, dalit rights, women's rights, housing issues, Narmada Bachao and innumerable social movements of the marginalized and voiceless sections of society. She was a politician with genuine concern for masses. Her towering personality became more affable due to her humility and love for humanity.

The chairperson of the Greenpeace International, Lalita Ramdas avers, "Mrinal Tai epitomised a generation of feminists who were able to mobilise around an extraordinary range of social and political issues, and thus command attention in mainstream debates. As women and feminists we need to be far more vocal and visible in the public, and political domains and dialogues than we are today."

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ENGENDERING PHYSICAL infrastructure

A National Consultation on "Engendering Physical Infrastructure via Prime Minister's Gram Sadak Yojana" was organised on 8-9 April 2012 by the Centre for Gender Economics (Women's Studies), Department of Economics, University of Mumbai, with the support of United Nations Women. This conference – the first of its kind in the sub-continent – focused on gender mainstreaming in physical infrastructure specifically transport, as well as the need to recognise that differential infrastructure constraints exist on men's productive roles, and women's economic, domestic & community management roles. A hugely transformative and potentially impactful scheme like PMGSY also assumes special gendered significance especially in the context of the increasing feminisation of the agricultural sector.

The major concern was to incorporate a gender perspective into rural road connectivity at several levels – the objectives of PMGSY, the process of fulfilment of objectives, broad evaluation of impacts, etc. The paradigm within which the National Consultation was planned included and integrated heterogeneities and specificities relating to the concrete reality of women located in several demarcated regions and situations – Hill States, Desert Areas, Tribal regions under Schedule V, Conflict Zones, Coastal Zones, and Border

Regions.

Gender mainstreaming in rural connectivity implies identifying and addressing of gaps in gender equality that impact sector policies, design, planning, and provision. Transport-based gender differences include Intensity of Transport Usage, Trip Purpose, Trip Patterns, Distance of Travel, Frequency of Travel, Mode of Transport, and Mobility Constraints. Women-specific needs are Transportation of especially Primary Products as Head-load, Local Markets, Inter- and Intra-village Roads & Paths, NMT (non-motorised transport), Walking, Pedestrian & Sidewalk Use, and Security.

The consideration of gender in rural road connectivity is essential to ensure that transport and other physical infrastructure facilities are equitable, affordable and that they provides access to resources and opportunities required for both growth and development. Additionally, access to social infrastructure is deepened due to the enhancing of physical infrastructural facilities, as connectivity and related issues form the foundation.

Nonetheless, the systematic inclusion of gender concerns at the policy and project levels has not yet been achieved as many infrastructure projects still ignore gender and other societal dimensions. Successful mainstreaming of gender in particularly rural infrastructure will require the removal of institutional and physical bar-

riers and the enhancement of incentives to increase the accessibility of women to all transport opportunities.

The Keynote Address was delivered by Hon'ble Jairam Ramesh, Union Minister for Rural Development, and Drinking Water & Sanitation, who was quite intrigued at the 'newness' of the issue of engendering physical infrastructure, and stated he would take into account the resultant recommendations. Four thematic sessions were held, with a total of 13 papers, representing several related aspects both internationally and nationally, including specific evaluations of the states of Jammu & Kashmir, Kerala, Rajasthan, Goa, Gujarat, and Maharashtra. The major themes focused on included Infrastructure and Inclusive Growth; Gender Perspective on Rural Roads; Mobility, Work, and Human Development; International Research on Women and Roads; Engendering PMGSY and Geographic Diversity; Gender in Planning, Maintenance and Monitoring of Roads; Gender and Goan Transport; Gender, Conflict, and PMGSY in Kashmir; Deserts and Rural Road Connectivity; Connectivity and Coastal Kerala; PMGSY Policies in Maharashtra; Gendering Indicators for Evaluation of Physical Infrastructure.

Ritu Dewan, Professor and Head, Centre for Gender Economics (Women's Studies) Department of Economics, University of Mumbai.

WORKSHOP ON CONCEPTS, DEBATES AND METHODS IN FEMINIST THEORY

Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension
School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam
(16-17th August 2012)

FORTHCOMING

Nirmala Banerjee, Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan edited, **MAPPING THE FIELD: GENDER RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA**, vol 1, is the first of four readers for students of women’s studies, particularly for Masters’ level courses in women’s studies, and more generally across undergraduate and certificate courses as the concept ‘gender’ has been introduced at all levels of curricula. The reader reflects many of the concerns that have come up in women’s studies across two decades. This first volume focuses on some of the major economic and social debates in women’s studies; the second volume will trace the trajectory of more recent theoretical shifts in the field.

Delving into history, the first volume provides a discussion on women’s studies, accompanied by reflections on the women’s movement, which may be said to have been behind its very conception. It tackles some of the main elements of the ‘women’s question’, which have informed scholarship on the subject. Thus, what does it mean to say that women are workers or not workers? How is their work to be measured and why despite being an immensely heavy burden, is it still invisible and not given its due status? Two chapters by Nirmala Banerjee on this very topic, Aruna Kanchi on women in agriculture; and Jeemol Unni on the nature and measurement of work in the informal sector introduce the student to the complexities that lie behind this central issue. Raising the question of the education of girls in contemporary India, Manabi Majumdar analyses the social constraints that give it lesser priority as compared to boys. Women’s health and their rights to health are taken up by Krishna Soman.



VOLUME 2 OF MAPPING THE FIELD: GENDER RELATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA, together with its companion volume 1, is the first reader of the four prepared for students of women’s studies, particularly for Master’s level courses, and more generally across undergraduate and certificate courses now that the concept of ‘gender’ has been introduced at all levels of curricula. The reader reflects many of the concerns that have come up in women’s studies across the last two decades. Volume 1 focused on the major economic and social debates in women’s studies; this second volume traces the more recent political and theoretical debates in the field, such as questions of caste and community, sexuality and governance.

Volume 2 includes an insightful and influential essay by Kumkum Sangari which analyses the interlocking of multiple patriarchies and the structures of women’s social, legal and cultural subordination in India. Flavia Agnes and Archana Parashar write on the different approaches to law within feminist scholarship; Anupama Rao explores issues around dalit feminism. The new debates around sexuality and feminism are taken up by Nivedita Menon; Janaki Nair raises questions on the reservation of women in elected local bodies, a subject on which considerable scholarly writing now exists. In writing on women and environment, Sumi Krishna explores new concept of gender-scapes to re-think women’s access to resources. Together, the two volumes provide a collection of writings on significant debates around various gender issues in contemporary India. Readers will find problems and contexts, theoretical and historical analyses, as well as comprehensive surveys of specialized fields within

women’s studies.



WOMEN CONTESTING CULTURE: CHANGING FRAMES OF GENDER POLITICS IN INDIA by Kavita Panjabi and Paromita Chakravarti is the second of four readers for students of women’s studies, particularly for Masters’ level courses, and more generally across undergraduate and certificate courses now that the concept of ‘gender’ has been introduced at all levels of curricula. Also aimed at scholars and activities, highlights the dialectical nature of culture as a site of women’s oppression as well as of feminist resistance and transformation. The editors introduce the volume by focusing on both material and symbolic dimensions of cultural politics and its changing significance in relation to gender, community, caste, class, borders sexuality and disability.

In this volume, Part I ‘Cultural Expressions’ has contributions by Susi-etharu and K. Lalita on the exclusions of classical literary celebrations of female desire from later canons; Amlan Das Gupta on women singers in the early music recording industry Rosie Thomas on Nadia, the ‘stunt queen’ of early Bombay films; Anjum Katyal on Sabitri Devi and Manipuri Theatre; Uma Chakravarti on the staging of resistance in the Indian women’s movement; and Nabaneeta Dev Sen on humour. Part II, ‘Institutions, Canons and Feminist Cultures’ focuses on women’s expressions and representations in textbooks, publishing and art, with essays by Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Urvashi Butalia and Paromita Chakravarti. Part III ‘Sexuality and Body Cultures’ has Ruth Vanita writing on same sex desires in Rekhti poetry; Sibaji Bandyopadhyay on pornography;

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ECOFEMINISM REVISITED: Introduction to the Discourse

Author: *Chhaya Datar*

Published 2011, Rawat Publications: Jaipur, New Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Guwahati

Ecofeminism Revisited is timely in the present climate of scepticism of ecofeminism as a valid or viable discourse, particularly within feminism where a host of easy criticisms are in place – ecofeminism is essentialist, politically regressive, takes away from the gains of feminism towards women's liberation. Ecofeminism – in this representation – is seen as undermining feminism's legitimacy in academia as well, at a time when both visibility and acceptability of the field is higher than before. This is also a question for ecological sciences – likely allies of ecofeminism – that are moving into the mainstream from the margins of the hard sciences, and where ecofeminist 'talk' is a step backward. This book places squarely on the agenda of feminism in India, of Women's Studies courses, and of environmental movements in general, perspectives on women-nature that have hitherto appeared either mysterious, essentialist, even anti-woman.

This work is particularly important in the context of feminist critiques of science in India that are now increasingly being incorporated into women's studies courses. A comprehensive discussion of ecofeminism at such a time will enable a fresh appreciation of the epistemological basis for introducing the axis of nature to the already accepted axes that help 'see' oppression. Further, it reviews environmental activism involving women, and builds an excellent timeline of the contexts within which these struggles develop[ed], including the subtle differences of context that drive such movements in

India and the West.

This comprehensive survey of ecofeminist discourse is organised into chapters that examine the relationships with feminism, the history of emergence of ecofeminism within environmental movements, the changing nature of relationships between woman, man, nature, the changing representations of the women-nature connection and the findings of disciplines like archaeology or anthropology that contribute to the debates, the impact of environmental degradation on women in India, the critiques of industrialism and technology that collaborate to marginalize women, the hegemony of reason and the invisibility of women, coming finally to questions of ethics, alternative technologies, successful sustainable practices, and the critiques of ecofeminism.

Datar stresses the link binding all ecofeminist approaches – the nature-women relation, traces the history of this relation and its increasing instrumentality through pastoral and industrial societies, accessing work in primatology, prehistory, and archaeology to do this – the change in perceptions of female productivity, that was once reciprocal with nature, subsistence-based, and the precondition of male productivity. Hunting then becomes the basis for different dialectical relations, followed by domestication, forced surplus creation. Later, in capitalism, men's proletarianization and women's housewifization takes over. By the time of industrial societies, mechanism has displaced organicism in human relations with nature. This of course is accompanied by science seen as a value-free

form of knowledge built by observing nature as 'out there'. Critiques of industrial pollution, nuclear energy, chemical wastes, that emerged through multiple movements that were seen to particularly affect women and milestones in international women's movements that marked alternative strategies like the Appropriate Technology movement, are discussed. Datar speaks of the re-entry of women via feminism and environmental movements – a re-entry that is necessarily non-organic, ambivalent (after feminism has rejected the woman-nature association as reflective of sexual hierarchies) and cognitive. A feminist may now ally with an environmental activist to campaign for a national park, but as co-oppressed, not by citing organic connections between women and nature, or its inherently feminine characteristics.

Towards the end of the book, Datar takes on the critiques of ecofeminism – essentialism, universalism, methodological confusion, biological determinism, idealising of heterosexuality, that according to ontology an essential rather than contingent character. Throughout the book, Datar has attempted to answer some of these charges; in her own writing, she actually offers proposals against some of these charges, referring to the metaphorical quality of some of Vandana Shiva's and Maria Mies' writings, and to their abstractions as ways forward. Part of the strength of this book is its inter-disciplinarity, its summoning of disciplines and fields other than feminism to consolidate the alternative proposals being made in ecofeminism. Datar does this in the larger

background of debates on evolution, eugenics and population control, as also moral agency. More than anything else, this helps set up ecofeminism in whatever capacity in academic contexts, forcing a more than polemical debate around issues.

The annexures at the end of each chapter provide adequate background information, making this ideal also as a text book

for Women's Studies courses. There is some tendency, however, to clump other feminist positions as instrumentalist, and while this charge is somewhat justified, it does sometimes miss the nuances that they are trying to arrive at while still remaining sceptical of the ecofeminist route. The author, however, highlights reasons why ecofeminism, though still in its infancy as large-scale experiments, still

has to be seen as a 'holistic' and yet decentralised, intensely 'local' exercise in the face of which some feminist takes on agency or liberation are bound to look instrumentalist.

*Asha Achuthan,
Centre for Women's Studies,
Tata Institute of Social Sciences,
Mumbai*

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Mary John on conjugality and eroticism; Supriya Chaudhuri and Anita Ghai on gendered bodies in sport and disability. Part IV, 'Political Cultures and the Culture of Politics' analyses women's activism and political cultures, with essays by Jasodhara Bagchi, Krishna Bandyopadhyay, V. Geetha, Purushottam Agrawal and Flavia Agnes. Part V, 'The-

oretical and Methodical Approaches' uses inter-disciplinarity as a critical tool with essays by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, Kavita Panjabi and Kumkum Sangari. Part VI, 'Bibliographic Essay' by Modhumita Roy analyses feminist scholarship of two and a half decades.

ABOUT AUTHORS:

Nirmala Banerjee retired as Professor of Economics, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta; Samita Sen is Director,

and Nandita Dhawan is research coordinator, both of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University. Kavita Punjabi is Professor of Comparative Literature and Coordinator of the Centre for Studies in Latin American Literatures and Cultures, Jadavpur University; Paromita Chakravarti is Associate Professor, Department of English and Joint Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

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THE INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES (IAWS)

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

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