

# I.A.W.S.

# newsletter



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**ON**

**THIRD NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN'S STUDIES**

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## **WOMEN, STRUGGLES AND MOVEMENTS**

Report

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The Third National Conference on Women's Studies sponsored by the Indian Association of Women's Studies was held at the Panjab University, Chandigarh, from October 1st to 4th, 1986. Under the broad theme of "Women, Struggles and Movements", fourteen subthemes, each lending itself to several discussion sessions, and three plenary sessions were organised. The subtheme sessions ranged from women's involvement in struggles in different economic spheres, their participation in political and religious struggles, and struggles in the domain of culture, and the relationship of these struggles to other democratic movements. Drawing in about 350 participants, it included women from different regions in the country, as well as from different vocations, all involved in one way or the other with the women's movement in the country. Two major issues of debate among the participants, though had been raised in the earlier conferences were raised more sharply. Perhaps much greater clarity on these issues are emerging, though not a consensus. These were the questions of autonomous women's organisations and their relationship with broader democratic movements. Autonomous is being increasingly understood as outside of any form of political aegis, without at the same time succumbing to any depoliticizing attempts. This understanding manifested itself at the time of

inauguration and at the subsequent General body Meeting: that in future, the IAWS Conferences should be free from the presence of political figures. Secondly the distinction drawn between activists and researchers, the group felt, had not only tendencies to lead to domination of one group (this was also an issue raised in the Trivandrum Conference) but was often found to be incorrect. The problem of identity of the women's movement and of the participants in it, is much more than a question of semantics or labelling. Increasingly it is viewed that the distinction between 'Theory' and 'Practice' would be more adequate than any other.

The theme of the Conference and the subtheme sessions were organized so as to facilitate the participation of both those engaged in practice and those drawing theoretical insights. Most sessions had wide ranging discussions on 'practice', emphasizing all along that the objective of the women's movement can be achieved only at the level of 'practice', with theory being a tool and a facilitator of understanding.

In what follows, a brief summary of the discussions held in each of the sub-theme sessions are presented.

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We wish all our members and readers a very happy and blessed  
New year.

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In the 4 sessions on Women in Agrarian Struggles we were lucky to face a strikingly wide range of themes. There was an interesting cross section of historical studies and analysis of current political struggles, of experiences of social workers and of women involved in militant protest movements, of different shades of radical critics commenting on historical and literary texts, often with conflicting slants.

Of a total of 9 papers, 3 studied the mechanism of mobilisation of women and forms of their participation in Gandhian movements in U.P. and Gujarat. All 3 papers dealt with areas which are relatively well documented in established historical works. Yet none of the mainstream historians had shown any awareness of the even conventional archival data which conveys a clear idea about the activism and militancy of rural women. An integration of this new material should lead to a major restructuring of the substantial historiography on U.P. and Gujarat peasant nationalism. A very interesting discovery was how, within the overarching frame of the national struggle, an independent and often problematic space was created by women participants who began to articulate their reflections on gender relations and occasionally formulate radically unconventional stands. Shireen Mehta's paper on Kheda and Gujarat struggles does not question the shaping hand of the Congress leadership. Dipti and Kapil's papers on U.P. Kisans on the other hand share a very different slant. More studies on the relations between women's initiative and Congress leadership should add a valuable dimension to the debate initiated by the subaltern studies project and open up new areas of complexity within autonomous subaltern movements themselves.

There were 4 papers on current rural struggles and women's organisation - at Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, the Marathwada region and 5 Tamilnadu districts. Struggles involved expropriation and redistribution of the land of a Bodh Gaya mohant; the politics of liquor licensing at Himachal Pradesh; struggle over acquisition of canal water and public lands by untouchable poor peasants in drought prone Marathwada villages; everyday struggle for self-respect, employment and justice among Tamilnad landless labourers. One very interesting point that emerged from Chetna, Fatima and Shailaja's papers is that even though all began work with mass level organisations and with

issues like land, labour, water and work after a certain point they all felt the need for separate women's organisations, while still sharing and actively fighting for their original concerns. In many ways these papers initiated very lively and wide ranging discussions. The intricate and highly scrambled lines of caste, property structure, gender relations, domestic politics and state power were concretised through vivid as well as highly theorised accounts of long and active struggles. Yet we had the impression that the flow of ideas was really one way; that Fatima, Chetna and Shailaja will not go away with any better ideas about the future of their struggles or the nature of their experience. The debates that they have initiated, however, will hopefully lead to more mature reflections about their problems. In future there may be more fruitful dialogues. It makes one uncomfortable to have to speak on these lines as they sound so much like the ritual and rather meaningless genuflection made by 'academics' towards 'activists'-yet this supposedly was the experience of this sub theme. Construction of an image of the peasant women as a sexual and militant person was the thrust shared by Suzie Tharu and Malini Bhattacharya in the final session. Suzie's paper was more concerned about the way in which the peasant women thus depicted, responded to the ideology behind such construction. Malini's paper about the class character of sexuality looked at the images of peasant women in Manik Bandyopadhyay's fiction of the 1940s and showed how Manik challenged the naturalistic depiction of the peasant woman's sexuality as that of 'birds and bees' for the consumption of the middle class. He shows how through militant struggles sexuality breaks its stereotyped boundaries, gets access to new dynamic potential.

Susie's paper presented a theoretical introduction to the writing of an oral history after interviewing some of the major women figures of the Telengana armed struggle and the way in which mainstream accounts have blotted out of existence the woman's question within it. Sundarayya's account, which does have a most sensitive awareness of the women's presence still considered the Party's failure to tackle questions of women's lives as a moral rather than a political lapse. Reconstructing history by bringing women into it, thus, opens enormous possibilities of discovering new sources and methodologies which enrich the entire discipline.

## Sub Theme 2 : Women and the Industrial Working Class Movement ; Coordinator : Maithreyi Krishnaraj

The panel hoped to examine the major concerns of women workers in the organised industry in recent years, the extent or manner in which women's issues have been or not been incorporated in the union struggles, the growth of women's consciousness, and the styles of participation that have emerged. A major concern of the sub theme was how to align gender issues within the working class movement, and whether the existing nature and structures of unions permit such alignment, and if they do not what alternative styles of struggles would become necessary. There were 9 papers in all, organised around 3 sessions and one joint session with subtheme 4.

In session 1 Padmini Swaminathan illustrated the patriarchal views of the State and male workers with respect to two important pieces of legislation : the Minimum Wages Act and the Equal Remuneration Act. She showed how these progressive laws do not eliminate discrimination because discrimination is built into the laws themselves, and it is necessary to challenge the assumptions underlying these laws.

Nivedita Menon examined the attitudes and policies of three national trade unions (INTUC/AITUC/CITU) towards women workers questions. She comes to the conclusion that woman as worker is not taken seriously by the male dominated unions. Though the left unions are more sensitive and have a structural understanding of women's problems, this is not reflected in their actions. While acknowledging that women's participation is constrained by household duties, nothing is done to lessen those constraints. Separate women's wings have devoted attention to women's issues at the work place after 1980's, but the party journal does not take cognisance of these efforts.

In the second session Vibhuti Patel's paper referred to the ongoing debate on whether separate trade unions for women would better serve the interests of women. It is generally felt that a separate women's union may be divisive and instead problems specific to women could be taken up in the general unions through women's groups acting as pressure groups. She cited several successful instances of such interventions in Bombay where the Forum intervened and expressed solidarity with women workers in Parle, Gluco, Sandoz, garment, pharmaceutical, Electronics industries. The issues were : change in shift timings, creche, separate toilets, transport etc. Santosh Sood presented an analysis of women work-

er's participation in trade unions in Chandigarh. Problems of women workers in Chandigarh are similar to women workers in general, except for the fact that patriarchal values are stronger.

The discussion in the group highlighted three issues (a) Women's participation in the sense of membership and participation in demonstrations is readily encouraged by unions but active involvement in decision making, in organising, and leadership is not encouraged (b) the need for autonomous women's groups to support women worker's struggle so as to exert pressure on male dominated unions (c) the need to educate women workers on the necessity to learn new skills (d) the need for left unions to take account of gender issues (such as family violence) as much as those of class and to recognise how caste and communal stratification have an impact on women worker's job allocation.

The second group of papers dealt with specific examples of women worker's struggles in different industries. The papers presented and discussed were : Ritu Dewan's "Nature of Unionisation of Women Workers in the Pharmaceutical Industry in the City of Bombay", Nishta Tombat's "Women in the Bombay Textile Strike" and Chhaya Datar's "Dynamics of Organising Bidi and Tobacco Workers at Nipani".

Ritu began with a short history of the struggles relating to four important issues affecting women workers in the pharmaceutical industry namely, the marriage clause, permanency, maternity benefits and crèches. Illustrations were given from Boots Drug Co. The peculiar characteristics of union struggles in this case was the decline in union militancy over time. She contended that the nature of unionisation of women workers must be perceived as the result of narrowly economic and short term goal oriented policies of union leaders that failed to link the issue of maternity benefits or removal of marriage clause to the general oppression of women in a patriarchal society. Their home life and work place were compartmentalised and women never talked to other women about their personal problems. Automation in the Pharmaceutical Industry was another important issue. While it did not do away with women's jobs, it increased their work load due to the pressure to meet the speed of machines and it did cut off future employment.

Nishta spoke on the participation of women in working class households in the Bombay Textile strike. Many women had to suddenly assume the bread winner role. In this they faced the resentment of their men who were ashamed to have their women support them. The impact of the strike on women workers was strong - they began discussing it, came to know of the world outside, began to articulate their views and opinions. However even when a woman worker died in police firing, the union did nothing to help her family. The strike cost many workers their jobs permanently. In the discussion, it was felt that a follow up study of the strike would be useful. It was also necessary to distinguish between the role of women workers who were wives of textile workers and women workers who were not.

Chhaya Datar's paper evoked considerable discussion around the issues of mechanization, automation, decentralization, the role of women's organization vis-a-vis the formal set-up of a trade union. It was pointed out that it is essential to probe into the conditions under which mechanization takes place, very often prolonged labour unrest could lead to mechanization. It was also felt that unions and managements collude on this issue add the first victims of such mechanization are invariably women. Very few unions have taken an independent stand on mechanization.

In the last joint session with sub theme 4 session, Rohini Gavankar's paper, presented a

case study of "Air Hostesses in Indian Airlines, Western Region". This group of women were earlier viewed as having the status of a glamorous occupation but the author traced the course of deglamourisation. Working conditions have become hazardous and several discriminatory clauses relating to grade, age of retirement, health conditions marriage clause etc are skill operative. These have led to airhostess's awareness regarding their plight as women workers. Their problems have not been taken up by the general union. As their problems are specific there is an attempt being made to form a separate cabin crew union. A separate women's union or women's wing will not be helpful, the women felt.

In conclusion only a couple of papers actually analysed in detail the specific process involved in organising women workers, the styles of participation that could be more suitable to women, and the difficulties of overcoming caste loyalties. Some important suggestions were that (a) women's groups outside the unions can act as pressure groups to activate the unions to take up women's issues (b) left parties must make a serious and concerted effort to educate male and female workers in unions by emphasizing long goals rather than purely short term economic goals (c) the importance of preserving records and documents about struggles, because unions do not preserve these, and any one doing some investigation has to depend on those who participated recalling them.

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### Sub Theme 3 : Women, Informal Sector and Forms of Struggle ; Coordinator : U.Kalpagam

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There were fifteen presentations grouped in four sessions. Substantively it was noted that the informal sector should be perceived in the context of the total economy and not as an independent or marginal activity, and that it could only be understood within the macro level development and industrialisation policies being followed.

The informal sector was a highly differentiated sector covering a wide range of occupations with women in the lowest rungs, and it was noted that different forms of occupations require different forms of organisations and struggles. It was necessary to understand the different types of occupations in their specificity. Various forms of categorisations were discussed. It was noted that significant differences existed depending on the relationship to the subsistence, petty commodity production or capitalist economy. Moreover, different forms existed within the same industry for example production remaining in the informal sector and marketing in the formal sector.

Questions were raised about the necessity to be clearer on what the role of informal sector should be in the economy. The bulk of informal sector workers were concentrated at a subsistence level, working long hours for low wages under extremely hazardous conditions. The issue of the effect of industrialisation raised the question of protection of informal sector work. The issue of reservation was debated. Reservation policy had protected work in some cases but had not in others. Various kinds of informal sector activity needed different types of organisations. Informal sector organisations have to tackle problems ranging from wages, credit, housing, marketing, raw material supply, child care and health. These organisations needed to work on **two** fronts - fighting for these services from the state, and organising these services themselves from their own resources.

Various forms of organisations have developed amongst women informal sector workers. The

process of developing such organisations, and the struggles they have taken up were described and analysed. These examples are too many to discuss here but include organisations amongst tobacco workers in Nipani, contract workers in State enterprises in Madras, domestic servants and vendors in Bangalore etc. Some of the issues discussed were: to what extent these organisations lead to empowerment or social control, to what extent can empowerment of women informal sector workers occur through self activity, are women's organisation a new form of exploitation legitimising the putting out system of large multinationals etc.

The relationship of informal sector women's organisations to other forms of struggle and organisation was also discussed. How could trade unions be involved in organisation of workers in the informal sector? Was there a conflict of interest between the two? How is the women's movement related to women's struggles in the informal sector? It was observed that communalism had severely affected informal sector women workers by fragmentation of the movement.

Different kinds of informal sector activity also needed specific types of policies, and specific policies for few occupations were discussed. Some general policies which could be considered for all sectors were

1. Social security/welfare scheme for insurance, health, housing, creches etc.

2. Employment guarantee scheme.
3. Credit.
4. Setting up of tripartite scheme of government, workers and employers for the major industries for example, construction.

The group felt an urgent necessity to set up an ongoing task force on women in the informal sector. It was felt, this was crucial today because the current policies being followed was severely affecting women informal sector workers. For example in the food processing industry where we are seeing the entry of large scale automated industries in traditional food lines. The task force would act as a watch dog agency and also do the research and net working amongst women's organisations in the informal sector to further the interests of women informal sector workers. Moreover, the government of India has set up two National Commissions on self employed and on unorganised workers. The group felt that it was crucial to ensure that the commissions be sensitised about the specific invisibility of women in the informal sector and that the methodology of survey and investigation be sensitive to this problem of invisibility, for example in most home based workers women do not identify themselves as "workers". The group felt that women organisations and researchers should be included in all stages of the commissions' activities to ensure that the needs of women informal sector workers were adequately represented.

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#### Sub Theme 4 : Professional Women's Struggles ; Coordinator : Vasanthi Devi

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The Professional class is of recent origin. In its present form it is a product of the colonial times. Women's entry into the professions is still more recent, coinciding with the spread of women's education and the rise of an educated middle class. Since independence women have started entering the professions like teaching, nursing, banking, different levels of government and private sector and recent fields like journalism management, medicine, engineering and so on.

Unionization in most of these professional sectors is growing recently with encouraging results. Service associations of employees have come into existence in each sector, some affiliating to central trade unions. Many of them have distinguished themselves with high levels of activity and have waged many struggles.

The group decided to pose the following issues for discussion :

- (1) Do the core studies presented establish the perceived low levels of trade union and str-

uggle participation among women in the professions? If so, what are the implications for the future of trade unions and for the larger democratic movements, when women are entering the professions in increasing numbers. If women form a passive and docile section of employees, that could easily yield to intimidation and harassment, is there not a danger of women being used as strike breakers?

- (2) Factors responsible for low levels of struggle participation among women. Are they mainly rooted in the class and cultural background of women in professions - educated, urban, middle class?
- (3) The instances when such limitations are overcome.
- (4) The factors that promote militancy.
- (5) Are these factors replicable?
- (6) What are our suggestions for strengthening trade union and struggle participation among women in professions?

- (7) Do women need separate unions ?
- (8) The issue of politicization of trade unions and its implications for the wider participation of women and women's reactions to it.

Fourteen papers, classified into three groups were presented touching professions as varied as school, teachers, airhostess, nurses and journalists.

The first group of papers dealt with trade union struggles and women's participation in them. They presented the two recent, major teacher's struggles, the 42 day long Tamil Nadu teacher's strike covering three and a half lakh school and college teachers and the 74 day long Delhi University teacher's strike covering over 5,000 college and university teachers. Three papers dealt with the struggles of the nurses in Maharashtra.

The second group of papers dealt with the low participation of women in trade unions and the extent to which women specific issues were taken up by trade unions. There was one paper on women bank officers in Gujarat and one on women employees of the banking sector in Gujarat at different levels.

The third group of papers focussed on the problems faced by women professionals. Papers in this group covered airhostesses, journalists and a few analysed problems faced by women professionals of different categories, at home and at work place.

The major factors identified as being responsible for the low level of participation by women in trade union and struggles were :-

The double burden of professional and family responsibilities ;

the role imposed on women by the prevailing value system and class morality, by the traditional division of labour and stereotyping of sex roles, which make them victims of authoritarian practices at home and at work and inhibit association with trade unionism ; the failure by trade unions to take up women specific issues ;

lack of information and awareness among women members ; the failure of trade unions to work out methods to break this information barrier. While the above factors are

powerful inhibitors there are cases where they are smashed. The experiences of the Tamil Nadu and Delhi University teacher's strike show how women could overcome these inhibiting factors and demonstrate great militancy and courage. In these instances, it was mainly due to identification with the issues of the struggle, the capacity of trade unions to take up women specific issues and to counter other inhibiting factors. It was clear that in some professions the working hours make the double burden of professional and family responsibilities more taxing. Yet even in such cases, as was demonstrated by the experience of the nurses, great determination is shown.

Some of the specific problems women professionals face include sexual harassment, arbitrary transfers which interfere with family responsibilities, discrimination in jobs which have traditionally been male dominated, etc.

A suggestion for separate trade unions for women in each profession was discussed but was rejected as it had dangerous implications for the unity of trade union movement and women would unconsciously become a party to the game of the ruling classes to split working class movements. Instead, women's wings' could be formed in each trade union.

One of the suggestions for strengthening the participation of women in the struggle was the formation of a forum to bring women of different professions together, where their shared experience in withstanding repression and in overcoming societal barriers would help in strengthening their active participation.

The group discussed the failure to implement existing provisions concerning support facilities to working women, like creches, maternity leave, working women's hostels, restrooms, toilet facilities, protection against health hazards etc. and demanded they be strictly implemented.

The question of politics in trade unions and political intervention by the government and political parties was also discussed. The debate, it was felt, should centre not on whether there should be politics, but on the nature of that politics.

The group registered its strong protest against the anti-women and anti-working class bias of the official media.

This subtheme attempted to examine women's participation in student and youth struggles at both local and regional levels. It also focused on autonomous women's struggles on democratic and feminist issues because these will provide much of the support for the women's movement. It hoped to examine the role of student wings of political parties to see how far they facilitated the emergence of a female leadership.

Four papers on student agitations at the regional level were presented. They were Saraswathy Rao's paper on the recent anti-reservation stir in Andhra Pradesh, another by Tanushree Gangopadhyay on the reservation stir in Gujarat, third by Niroj Sinha on the Total Revolution Movement in Bihar and fourth by Saswati Ghosh on the naxalite movement in West Bengal. A detailed and painstaking analysis on autonomous women's struggles in Delhi University and its colleges by Deepti, Vrinda and Madhuri was also presented.

On the political party front there was only limited response. Only one paper by Amarjeet Kaur who for ten years was the general Secretary of the All India Students Federation, the Youth wing of the CPI.

The main question that was sought to be addressed was on the nature of women's participation and leadership in these movements. To a large extent one failed to do so; and this was disappointing since this area is largely unexplored. Instead several presenters concentrated on detailing events and programmes in which women participated but did not follow it up with analysis.

In the paper on the anti-reservation stir in Andhra Pradesh, it is interesting that the struggle began in an elite women's college in Hyderabad and was followed by the involvement of professional and co-ed colleges. Women were very active in this struggle. Details of various programmes and activities, such as polishing shoes, cleaning streets etc, were given. It may be inferred from these activities that the upper caste students feared they would be reduced to such work, if the reservation policy continued.

The paper on the reservation stir in Gujarat pointed out that students were used by political parties which could not openly express their resentment against reservation for fear of eroding their mass base. Upper caste women swelled the ranks of the agitators but were not in the leader-

ship, which was controlled by proxy by the political parties.

The next two papers focussed on people's movements whose cadres comprised students. The paper points out that women were drawn into the J.P. - led movement when men were arrested and they appealed to women to carry on the campaign. The inspiration for most of them came from leaders like Guru Golwalker, Nanaji Deshmukh and Jai Prakash Narayan - all men. They had no female role models.

The paper on women students in the Naxalite Movement in West Bengal showed that Charu Mazumdar initially discouraged women students from going to the villages. Despite this, women participated in the movements in large numbers. Within the movement adherence to gender role typing prevailed with women having to cook and serve food at political meetings rather than participating in decision making. In the process of struggle adherence to social structures such as marriage was abandoned, with men and women living together with the sanction of the group.

Amarjeet Kaur's paper was a critique of the educational system, the decline of plan allocations for this sector, the neglect of primary education and the low literacy rate, particularly among girls. The lack of ideology based politics, she said, leads to diversionary and disruptive outbursts among students and the accompanying goondaiism discourages girl students from widespread participation in campus politics.

An interesting study of autonomous women's struggles emerged from Delhi University where in the past decade, particularly the past five years there has been considerable activity. The issue on which there have been several protests is sexual harassment which is common in buses, on the streets of the campus, outside the gates of girls' colleges etc.

There have also been anti-beauty contest agitations, protests against sexual comments on students through obscene rags brought out by fellow students, anti-dowry protests, hostel agitations for more freedom and agitation for affiliation of women's colleges to the DUSU. A street play Ahsaas on women's conditioning was evolved by students as a consciousness raising tool.

This paper also examined the concepts of male and female space, the hostility of male

students when a traditionally male college becomes co-ed, and the insecurity of women in co-ed colleges where all areas other than class-rooms, the library and the girls common room are considered male space and women feel they are breaking a taboo if they go to the canteen or any games room.

In this environment women students cannot participate in everyday college activities, let alone in political activities. In contrast women feel more free in women's colleges.

Women students, especially lower middle class students are also hampered by family pressures by having to get home early and by having to do housework. Finally, the paper commented on the fact that even feminist politics has not attracted the majority of D.U. students and the reason seems to be the divide between English speaking upper middle class women activists and the rest.

From the papers and the discussions, certain questions arise. It appears that in many movements women have been used, their presence in the movement is worthy of press coverage, and, during rallies, dharnas or gheraos they cushion male agitators from police repression. When male leaders are jailed women can be counted upon to keep the movement going. In the Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat movements it appears that women have been used to maintain caste dominance by

their own families and caste groups. The active involvement of mothers in the Gujarat stir can also be seen in this light. Their need to defend their children's particularly their son's career interests, indirectly perpetuates both caste and patriarchal dominance.

Other presenters, however, have noted that many women have had to struggle within the family for the freedom to participate in movements, example, in the JP and CPI (ML) movements. Even within movements women have to struggle to gain autonomy and participation in decision making, to be able to speak up at meetings etc.

We find that women have a greater need for a support structure if they are to enter struggles and political life. This support could come from the family or friends or women's groups but without it, it is difficult for women to sustain their involvement in political life. Even with some family support women eventually find that they have to struggle within the family and some succumb to these pressures but those who go through this process emerge with renewed strength.

There seems to be a correlation between involvement in broader political movements and identification with women's issues. When women go through a political struggle on democratic issues, the level of politicisation helps to sustain them through further struggles.

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### Sub Theme 6 : Women and Indian Nationalism ; Co-ordinator : C.W.D.S.

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The conceptual approach to the sub-theme was prepared by a planning group consisting of social scientists who have been studying different aspects of Indian nationalism, and women's studies specialists. The planning group also helped to identify names of persons in different regions who could be asked to prepare papers. Some papers were also voluntarily contributed.

The conceptual approach focussed on re-examination of Indian nationalism from the perspective of (a) women's participation, (b) the significance of the situation of women from different classes, castes, communities and the nature of their participation in these struggles, and (c) the articulation of the debates on the women's question at various levels and stages of these struggles which could provide an operational character and their eventual outcome in influencing the situation, the role and the participation of women in post-Independence India. Following this approach it was decided to organise the sessions under four topics :-

a) *Culture Consciousness and Social Liberation* with a view to explore the growth and articulation of consciousness of women and about women within the context of the socio-cultural processes which are manifested in women's exploitation, subordination and even forms of violence against women. To what extent did the cultural struggle embodied in the socio-religious movements during the 19th century look at these problems and formulate solutions? How did women perceive men-women relationships and their position in the family etc.? What were the socio-cultural imperatives which enabled women to participate in the national movement? Did their participation stem from a consciousness of the liberation possibilities?

b) *Nature of Women's Participation* - The actual roles played by women - overtly or covertly, examining their background, their perception and the way in which their roles were perceived by their own family, the neighbourhood, the community and the leadership. Specific case studies



were invited of institutions, organisations and movements which promoted women's activism.

c) *Development of Ideologies* - the aim was to explore various ideologies regarding women's position and roles in society that affected the articulation or non-articulation of the women's question and the impact of women's participation on these ideologies.

d) *Nationalist Historiography and the Women's Question* - this was intended to examine the social vision of historians whose writings contributed substantially to the nationalist movement.

The sub-theme attracted a lot of interest from a number of scholars from history, sociology and political science. A total of 23 papers were received. Two other papers were reported to have been completed, but were not received. Maximum interest appears to have been stimulated by topics (a) and (c). The regional studies on nature of women's participation provided considerable information on women's participation in the Non-Cooperation and the Civil Disobedience Movements. Unfortunately, most of them did not include in the coverage the other struggles by peasants, workers or different sections of the population. Practically all the papers indicated a gradual increase in women's consciousness which eventually brought them into active participation in these movements.

Two of the papers focused on regional variations in levels of participation within the same province and tried to relate them to the prevalent literacy and educational levels of women and cultural patterns. During the discussions, other participants admitted that it was important to examine such regional variations even within a province, and look for explanations not only in literacy and educational levels, but also in the agronomic situation, the work patterns and work load on women and the existence of consciousness raising/mobilising institutions or organisations in the areas. While most of the papers referred to the emergence of women's organisations and women leaders in promoting women's organisations and women leaders in promoting women's participation, some of the case studies on religio-reform movements in the Bengal region pointed out that while the educational thrust and promotion of women's organisations by these movements created opportunities for women to get together to develop some collective consciousness - which ultimately encouraged many of them to enter the freedom struggle, there were contradictions within the ideologies regarding women's roles in society within these movements, which remained unresolved. This contradiction was brought out sharply in the case of the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda order. On the one hand, the ideas of this group of thinkers, including the two women-

Sarada Devi and Sr. Nivedita - promoted the ideals of women's *shakti* and the need to create opportunities for them to fully develop their personalities and sense of service to the people and the nation. On the other hand, there was an emphasis on the mother-role and an underplaying of the problems of oppression of young women and widows. However, the order certainly promoted the ideal of one nation, one people-rejecting the caste and community barriers, that divided the people of different communities. The approach of the Brahmo Samaj, on the other hand, was found to be much more identified with those reformist views which rejected the institutions of child marriage, ban on widow-marriage and Purdah. They encouraged women's education and organisations to promote women's mental development. However, here too the emphasis on the familial role was predominant.

Some of the papers written for topic (a) critically examined these limitations of the 19th Century reform movements. Case studies from Gujarat, Bengal and Maharashtra found serious limitations in the thinking and behaviour of the reformers. While the Reformers believed themselves to be working for the advancement of women, most of them appear to have been oblivious of women's perceptions about their own position and roles, or the issues to which they gave priority. The case study from Gujarat brought this out sharply indicating how blind some of the reformers were to women's inner consciousness or their perception of their own dignity in husband-wife relationships.

Practically all the papers which focused on topic (a) found this limitation in the reform movements. Some papers found evidence of an undercurrent within the reform movements to impose what they described as the colonial or Victorian model of the family and women's role in it on Indian women. They found close inter-relationships between the nature of the colonial state, the values emanating from that state-which included a large section of the intelligentsia - and the cultural defence motivation that influenced many of the social reform movements.

British officials used the position of women in what they projected or saw as traditional Indian society as an indication of the latter's degradation and "barbarity". The colonial policy towards the status of women in India was "influenced by the Victorian idealisation of masculinity", but did not see any parallels between different cultural forms of male domination and female subordination in India and the West. This thesis was demonstrated through an examination of the use of the age of consent issue by the colonial power in the case of Bengal-where the intention was to downgrade Bengali men.

Such a colonial view was critically examined by another paper which sought to refute this notion of orientalism, from the perception of a few women's reaction to the new ideas being championed by the social reformers which included their husbands and other relatives, by re-examining some of the autobiographies or diaries left behind by these women.

While this methodological approach poses considerable difficulties, there was a consensus that much more attention has to be focused on re-examining available literature by women, especially biographies and autobiographies, to understand these issues and the undercurrents of this period from the women's perspective. Present scholarship on these reform movements (which adopted the status of women as a central theme) seem to have remained constricted by the boundaries set by the nature of the colonial state, the ideologies that it had promoted for its own interests and the ambivalent attitudes of many of the reformers, because they were attempting to defend Indian culture while being unconsciously influenced by the colonial ideology. Greater emphasis on women's perspectives could perhaps help liberate scholars from these restrictive boundaries.

These methodological issues also dominated the discussion on the development of ideologies. Two papers which concentrated on the ideology of the Gandhian movement also found the ideology of the latter as an alternative to colonial ideology which sought to create "a political, social and moral culture within the digits of which the rulers could control, manipulate and direct colonial society". The alternative offered by Gandhi preferred the value of *social responsibility* to social mobility or respectability, or notions of modernity created by the colonial culture, which, in turn, was internalised in different degrees by both the liberal or the left-oriented movements. According to this author, the Gandhian ideology deliberately adopted 'feminine' values of service to others, sacrifice and asceticism as opposed to individualism, competition and aggressive self-development which emanated from the colonial culture. Even revolutionary violence, in her view, was traditionally associated with a concept of manliness, power, military strength and solution, as against "the notion of non-violent, pacifist feminine power to move human hearts and minds". In her view, it was this emphasis on feminine values as well as the constructive programme set down by Gandhi that drew women in such large numbers to this movement. She also argued that Gandhi did not reject the realities of women's oppression, but sought to release them from the 'defeatist, slave mentality' and 'spiritual

paralysis', to assert themselves to promote 'mutual good'.

The second paper found in the Gandhian vision of Swaraj, women's "collective representation by means of which the superiority and inviolability of indigenous social tradition is demonstrated against the modern". In her opinion, the predominant patrilineal ideology, individual property rights and nuclear family householding systems-derived by the liberals from Christian or colonial influence - disrupted the "highly sensitive cultural balance of social integration worked out through the medium of women" in traditional society. She links this thesis with the diversity of social institutions in the sub-continent which permitted diverse codes of conduct for different groups, many of which came under sharp criticism as 'immoral' 'promiscuous' or 'barbaric' by the liberals.

These presentations generated a sharp discussion. Many of the participants emphasised that such analyses ignored differences in classes and social groups and exploitation of women as peasants and workers. Some participants criticised Gandhi for using women as instruments, and questioned why he emphasised the model of Sita and not that of Durga or Lakshmi Bai. One paper focussing on women in revolutionary movements posed the thesis that such women were, in fact, changing role models and values for women, from suffering, subordination and service, to heroism and sacrifice. Though one of the papers on Gandhian ideology was based on interviews of a number of women who had followed Gandhi, participants felt that much more work needed to be done on the less known women who had participated in these struggles. The issue was also raised that some distinction needed to be made between mobilisation strategies and the cultural symbols used for that purpose by Gandhi and other nationalist leaders including women leaders and their vision of the future society that they wanted to build after freedom. In this context, a suggestion was offered that the terms 'extremist' and 'moderate' used by the *Raj* to classify Indian nationalists have also imposed certain constrictive influences on the analysis of different aspects of Indian nationalism. These terms refer to methods of struggle, not the ideological foundations for the future society.

There was a consensus that the compulsions of overthrowing the colonial state and the need for an united front in the mass movement left many contradictions in ideologies and visions for the future unresolved within the nationalist debates, which now need to be examined afresh. The women's question and the implications of the principle of gender equality adopted in the Fund-

amental Rights Resolution of 1931 represents one of the most important of these unresolved debates. There was also a consensus that the women's movement today faces a similar situation, where the needs of joint action in the interests of wo-

men evoke ideological controversies and compromises which affect the quality of perspectives, strategies and methods of mobilisation or of seeking alliances.

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**Sub Theme 7 : Religion, Secularism and Women's Rights ; Coordinator : Susheela Kaushik**

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This sub theme had two sessions and took up five presentations. The first session dealt with the nature of women's participation in the anti-reservation issue. The two papers presented were : (1) "Women's participation in the Anti-Reservation agitation in Ahmedabad, 1985, by Sujata Patel, and (2) "Reservation Movement : The Reproduction of structural Inequalities by Suguna Pathy. One more paper was circulated on the theme "Women and antireservation stir in Ahmedabad" by Ila Joshi. Sujata Patel gave in brief form the major characteristics of the agitation in terms of its caste and class bases as well as the role of media and women's organisations. The discussions mainly centered around the role of organisations like SEWA and AWAG and clearly pointed out how often the intervening action taken by these organisations, against the atrocities committed against women, came to be interpreted as pro-higher caste in view of the political situation. Sujata Patel clearly pointed out in this context, the dilemma posed to women and men of the intellectual groups who are pro-lower castes and minorities, when the social situation is complex where often the question of women's rights get merged with the caste and communal divide. The necessity of the hour seems to be for one of more independent investigations of such events and developments by women.

The paper of Suguna Pathy posed another type of dilemma - Can we tackle women's problems and struggle insulated from the broader social realities which is one of structural inequality? She concluded that inequality make the reservation a privilege for the urban men and women, for the richer land owning and professional classes and that the reservation issue divide men and women equally along caste lines and thereby weakens both the class solidarity as well as the women's movement. The discussion that followed tried to grapple with this.

The second session took up three presentations - all of them in a way in three different spheres. The first one by L. Thara Bai dealt with "The Unknown Participants of a Regional Movement : A study of the Participation of women in the Anti-Hindi Agitation of Tamil Nadu". The main thrust of the paper was that while women

participated in great numbers in the Madurai area, their participation was not taken note of, and was mostly ignored by the media.

The discussions pointed out that often the causes for which the women participate get blurred or even obscured by the title of the agitations which tend to present a lopsided view of the aims and issues for which women and men participate in an agitation. Even while it was a linguistic agitation women mainly participated in it because they viewed it as a regional and cultural agitation.

The second paper was on "The Participation of Tamil Nadu Women in the Struggle against atrocities in Sri Lanka" by Saraswathi. The paper traced the historical background of the present liberation struggle in Sri Lanka and the imperative to take to arms as it was felt all others means had failed.

The group expressed its concern and solidarity with the women and men of Sri Lankan Tamils and resolved to bring this to the attention of all the participants in the conference by a resolution.

The third paper was of Sujata Miri on women and Khasipar Society of Meghalayan region. The paper challenged some of the popular myths about the rights of women in this matrilineal society by way of female Inheritance and focussed on the pattern of male domination particularly in the political and social spheres. The discussions which were interesting, mainly centred around the decline in the position of women as result of the so-called 'modernisation process'. The situation is complicated because of the role of religious dominations in this traditional society and the growth of modern professions through the influx of people from other regions of India. By and large the women have not yet organised themselves against this, though one can see the beginning of it in many young women opting to be single and rejecting marriage.

A paper by Neera Chatterji on the "Participation of the Lushai women in political struggles" was also circulated.

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**Sub Theme 8 : Religion, Secularism and Women's Right Co-ordinators :**  
**Uma Chakravarty and Sudesh Vaid**

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**I Issues**

We had 4 sessions and 13 papers, two sessions dealing with the contemporary situation and two with the social reform and nationalist period. The papers related to different religions and various regions.

In the sessions on the contemporary situation, the main issues taken up were the Muslim Personal Law, and the increased communalization in Ahmedabad, Punjab, Delhi and Hyderabad.

Discussion on the contemporary situation often tended to reflect the need to re-interpret religion for humanistic and egalitarian ends. In that sense, the intelligentsia is being forced into facing the dilemmas of the late 19th and early 20th intelligentsia, as seen in the papers examining the past. The problem of the idea of secularism as defined in the constitution and its role in the development of present communal forces also came up for discussion. The papers on the past brought out the ambiguities of the use of religion for secular ends and its role in constituting the new woman who would participate in the making of new India. Peformist ideals had no hesitation in incorporating revivalist beliefs, particularly in the late 19th and the nationalist movement. The discussion often tended to reflect the need to critically evaluate the ambivalent legacy left us by the emergent ideologies on women's role and status which simultaneously enlarged the public sphere of women even as it contained them through its "progressive" use of religion.

**II Group discussion**

There was a felt urgency about the question of religion due to the fact there has been severe communal violence in various places like Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Delhi. The emotional urgency came through in the discussions very vividly. This urgency was shared both by activists from organisations working in different cities and by those who were looking at past movements. The concern for the present was the motive force in all the presentations and the discussions. However, it was felt there was not adequate examin-

ed in some papers relating to the past and the present situation.

It was also felt desirable to look at the relationship between religion and patriarchy. Further, while religious manipulation of women had been stressed in the papers and discussions, what needed to be pointed out was the role of women in maintaining traditional religion.

Finally questions were raised as to the point at which religious identity becomes a communal identity, and the taking on of the latter even by those who may not be active believers or practitioners of the religious group they may belong to. Another area which needs to be explored is when the communal identity becomes primary how far does gender identity get subsumed within the communal.

**III Suggestions**

1. Time for sessions was too short so that the discussion at the end of the session could not be tied up. Time for presentation should have been limited to 20 minutes for each paper.
2. Different structuring of the sessions so that papers relating to the same topic or issue could have been discussed together rather than in different workshops under various sub-themes.
3. Since our workshop tended to focus on regional studies, it was suggested that similar studies on one topic should be conducted for several regions; e.g. the Catholic church in various parts of the country.
4. Various theoretical frameworks were being used by the paper readers as well as by participants. It would have been helpful if the theoretical frameworks had been spelled out and explained.
5. Since this was a conference of academics and activists, the papers should not be too abstract.
6. There should have been one or two sessions with the students of the host university as they did all the work without any opportunity to participate in the workshops.

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**Sub Theme 9 : Women and Violence ; Coordinator : Nandita Haksar**

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The first session in which there were five papers focussed on autonomous women's groups' perspectives of the problem of women and violence. Vibhuti Patel outlined some Feminist Critiques of the Theories of Violence. The four other

papers presented here by activists of four women's groups:- Saheli of Delhi Women's Centre Bombay, Chingari and AWAG in Ahmedabad respectively. Saheli and Women's Centre raised the question whether it was possible to organize

women around issues arising out of violence. Both organizations have over the years got enormous experience in dealing with cases and both are now facing the problem of finding ways to organize around them.

Chingari highlighted the problem of mobilising women by castes and communities in the midst of anti-reservation movement and communal violence. What was significant about the Chingari analysis is how the communal riots affected all women but affected them in different ways and also divided them sharply.

The discussion centred around the following issues: The problem of mobilizing women into action around 'strategic gender' issues. While women expressed great sympathy with activists, welcomed women's centre, they could not be organized for action. One person suggested, this is because they barter their real interests with practical interests like water, price rise etc.

But despite this all the autonomous women's groups felt that women could be organized around issues of violence if the groups were larger and could coordinate more effectively.

The other discussion was around the role of religion. There was a debate about the use of traditional symbols in a feminist movement. One of the participants felt that if she took on the garb of Santoshi Ma then maybe people would listen to her; another person felt that even symbols like burkha could be given new value. Some felt that the war was not against symbols. This was felt most keenly by women working in areas where there is increasing communal tension - namely Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat. They have seen how fundamentalists and anti-reservationists have managed to mobilize women on a large scale. On the other hand, some women - a minority - felt that traditional symbols could not be used to spread new ideas. Also, there was a need for a more rational approach.

Communal violence and riots, it was noted, push the issue of domestic violence into the background. There is a need for a widening of horizon to link with other democratic issues.

The second session was on the State's response to violence against women. There were five papers. Ishrat Shamin, a sociologist from Bangladesh shared her country's experience where rape cases were tried in martial law courts which imposed death penalty. The second paper by Ved Kumari surveyed the legal debates around the issues of rape and dowry. A controversial suggestion was that the prior history and character were relevant in judging the raped victim but not of the man accused in the rape case. Seema Skhare analysed the working of S 498A IPC

which was introduced recently and which makes it a crime for the husband or his relatives to treat the woman with cruelty. The other two papers were small but interesting. One by Rita Sarin was a case study of women prisoners in Tihar jail who were basically victims of family violence; the second by Anita Dhanda was on the underlying assumptions of the Indian Lunacy Act.

The third session focussed on whether women were drawn naturally into non-violent struggles or whether they participated in 'violent' struggles. Three papers were presented in this session.

The first paper was by Malancha Ghosh (of Nari Utpurin Virodhi Manch, Ranchi) had an interesting contention, that the Gandhian struggles were not really non-violent because people went into the movement knowing they will face violence. Chetna from Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini, questioned the manner in which the question was posed; she said the test of whether a struggle is violent or non-violent is whether the end aim/objective is to establish violence. In her experience women moved naturally into all struggles. She lamented that participation is judged only in numbers. She felt the real test was how far women were involved in decision making. She felt that political organizations needed to recognize patriarchal violence which perpetuates gender based inequality - both within the organization and outside. Ajitha spoke from her experience in the (CPI) M-L Movement. She said that if women did not participate in violent or non-violent movements it was because of patriarchal attitudes in society which inhibited their participation. There is need to detect patriarchal violence and fight against it politically. Dr. Baruah from Dibrugarh, Assam, made a short intervention. She made a comparative study of women's participation in both violent and non-violent struggles with particular reference to Assam and drew the conclusion that women give better response to armed struggles than to those using Gandhian methods.

Among the issues raised, debate centred around the problem of defining what was 'violent' and what was 'non-violent'. It was felt that there was need to redefine these concepts in the light of experience. For instance, when we talk of men facing torture we say he was brave, courageous and did not break down. But for women, her quality of endurance is praised. One person felt that the definition of violence had to be with reference to ideology.

The question whether women are naturally violent or non-violent was also raised. It was agreed that no such generalization could be made on innate qualities of men and women. Many activists expressed that women felt a sense of freedom during struggle.

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**Sub theme 10 : Ideology, Political Parties and Groups and the Women's Question in Post-independent India : Coordinator : Anjana Mangalagiri**

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This sub theme was organised keeping in perspective the women's movement in post-independent India that incorporated women's struggles at different levels; struggles emanating from broader political forums and those spearheaded by women's groups across the country. The major thrust of this sub theme was to examine the issues in women's struggles and the underlying ideological currents therein. Such a discussion, it was felt, would not only inform us of practical struggles and political programmes, but more important, it would outline the recent trends and perspectives on the women's question and the related strategies of mobilisation. The sub theme also focussed on the state and status of women's issues within the movement as also the structure of women's organisations themselves.

This sub theme identified grass-root women's organisations as vital agencies of social change. An effort was made to discuss how women activists related to political parties and organisations as also their ideological perceptions on women's struggles. In this regard the sub theme conducted a workshop of women's groups and activists on the problems and prospects of the women's movement, focussing on the question of ideology and the related strategies. It must be added here that this debate continues.

The issues that emerged for intensive discussion in the sub theme pertained to a critical examination of the nature of women's struggles, the existing state of the women's movement and the structure of women's organisations.

It was felt that the political perspectives with which the women's movement had started, had taken us a long way. There was a need now to reflect on the new political dimensions that had emerged in the course of the practical struggles. All of us collectively realized that the women's movement was one of the most articulate and sustained among people's movements in this half of the century. It has had its impact in many spheres of political life and social existence. A significant achievement had been the emergence of autonomous women's groups that questioned the role of women in the social and political arena and evolved alternate modes of organisa-

tion and styles of leadership for collective forms of functioning.

The women's movement was unique in that it nurtured an intrinsic commitment to open self-criticism, self-evaluation and political growth. It was reiterated that another distinctive contribution of the women's movement was the development of a political perspective and social consciousness that cut through caste, class and religion. This is certainly a very significant development in the political culture of post-independent India.

It was agreed that the women's movement had thus far drawn its sustenance from other existing ideologies (e.g. Liberal/Gandhian, Marxian) and had perhaps reached a point, wherein these perspectives were insufficient to adequately articulate women's oppression. The group realised in the course of the discussions that there was a need to understand the relationship between gender, age and power which the existing theoretical frameworks could not entirely explain. Perhaps the theory of patriarchy provided the possibility of such a framework for analysis. It was pointed out that such a framework must not only explain the exploitation in the social relations of production but also oppression emanating out of reproduction and power relations thereof.

Among the issues that came up for discussion were that of the process of articulation of knowledge and incorporation of experiences from below. The middle class and the urban-based activists openly recognized the importance of the existing experiences and the process of learning from women at the grass-roots and identifying their strengths. At the same time, the reverse process of sharing information (not handing it down) but personally participating in the process, was crucial to the empowerment of women.

Last but not least it was strongly stressed that there was today a real need to celebrate and reinforce the links that women's movement had made and must make with other people's movements (working class struggles, ecology movements, peace movements, civil rights movements anti-communal struggles etc). in the process of building a depatriarchized, humanist, socialist society.

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**Sub Theme 11 (a) : Women's Struggles for Education with special reference to Weaker Sections and Minorities** Coordinator : Sharada Jain

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This report is based on the discussions held in three formal and one open session. The fifteen papers presented had a wide coverage both in terms of regional representations as well as of

issues. The regions included Tamil Nadu, Kashmir, Assam, Rajasthan, Bihar, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Punjab and Delhi. What emerged centrally over the four sessions was that the issue of

women's struggle for education was basically linked to the larger and deeper issue of social justice. The struggle for education by women, particularly of the weaker sections therefore has to be seen within this larger socio-economic-political reality in which they exist.

The papers were in the form of both case-studies and theoretical analyses. They can be seen in three main categories : (i) providing the description of the present scenario via-a-vis women's education, (ii) a historical analysis of education for women, and (iii) future perspectives.

The set of papers which described and analyzed the present scenario via-a-vis women's education converged at the following points : (i) despite a good deal of theoretical attention and some sort of revision in resource allocation for women's education, the actual situation continues to be depressingly the same, if not worse. This was clearly perceived in view of the realization that whenever special inputs are brought in a situation of "inequality of conditions". they tend to be used by the more privileged in the context, whatever "extension" in education has taken place, it has in effect led to greater alienation and elitism even amongst the women. (ii) the educational system has been ineffective in initiating any process of reversing the power relationships in the society. This has hit women severely at all levels (iii) the problem of women's education could not be understood in terms of isolated factors. The neglect of women's education is in effect rooted in the internalised image of 'women' which is being continually perpetuated by various social processes. Hence an approach to counter the situation has to be evolved in a holistic manner taking full cognisance of the various factors interacting and moulding the dominant image of women.

The need to analyse the criss-cross pattern of the present situation led to a historical analysis of the growth of the educational system. It was pointed out that the system addressed itself mainly to the upper class and higher middle class in the society. Even in these classes, the neglect of women's perception has been glaring. The fact that most people found education to be unsuitable for women owes its roots to the design of education as well as the perceived role of a woman as a wife and a mother. To bring about any change it was necessary to revise both these factors. A time has come when what the society thinks at present as 'suitable' education for girls needs to be radically questioned and revised. A corollary to this position also emerged in the recognition that in all struggles that are taken up for and by the deprived groups, it is the man-woman conflict which comes up making women's subordination evident in some form or the other.

With respect to future perspectives there emerged two main strands of thought which were distinguishable, though converging. The field workers/activists felt that the issue of women's education has to be linked to the needs felt and perceived by the women themselves, in their immediate contexts. They saw a teacher as an overall 'worker' or facilitator working with them on larger developmental issues also. The education can, in fact, be initiated only by someone who is overall involved with and has a sense of belonging to the group, thereby involving the community to reflect the social processes.

Questioning the existing situation was seen as the first step in the educational process. It was felt that without this questioning the 'desire for change' does not arise which is the necessary base for the initiation of education.

While assistance towards economic freedom is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for achieving the major objective of education. The ultimate aim of education is an overall empowerment of women, though the prospect of economic freedom can be a strong motivational force in initiating an educational process.

The professional educationists made some strong observations regarding curricula, methodology and resource allocation in the educational system as projected for future. It was felt that the content of education needs to be changed to fulfil the needs of women as individuals and as conscious participants in the society. This, in effect, implied that a sense of identity and revised (non-stereotyped) roles need to be strengthened through what is taught. It was also mentioned that women's need and ability to deal with science and mathematics is equally important. The marginalisation of girls from the 'scientific world' has resulted in crippling women's development and thereby of the nation as a whole. The recognition that women's ability to receive training in new technology was the same as that of men, needed to be shared and translated into action to remove the 'fear psychosis' arising in women wherever new technology is concerned.

The sexist bias in the curriculum, text books and in the transaction of curriculum need a rigorous examination as well as revision. The fact that the bias extends in the attitudes of the teachers necessitates involvement of teachers in the revision of the curriculum.

The teacher's pivotal role in all systems (formal and non-formal) necessitates a very significant attention to the training programme. A change in attitudes towards women and women's issues through pre service and in-service teacher training is central to the possibility of any change in the existing state of affairs.

The group felt that a detailed discussion is required regarding the methodology of teachers' training. A decentralised and innovative pattern, allowing flexibility for contextual perceptions, was envisaged by the group as necessary for effective implementation of the New Education Policy specially in regard to weaker sections and minority.

A very strong point which came through in the open forum discussion was the distress which

the participants felt regarding the counter forces to education through media and commercial interests. It was felt that no amount of revision of curricula, training, methodology etc. can counter the damage which the media is doing through perpetuating the two extreme image of women : the traditional home-bound daughter and wife and the ultramodern, westernized women of the commercial ads. Some positive action is very necessary to curb the dissonance in values perpetuated through such potent educational tools.

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**Sub Theme 11 (b) Women's Struggles for Health and Nutrition with Emphasis on Weaker Sections and Minorities ; Coordinator : Padma Prakash**

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The first session was on the campaigns currently being undertaken by women's and other people's group campaign against aminocentesis and campaign against Net-En. The paper on Net-En Campaign by Vimal Balasubrahmanyam noted that Net-En is something of a landmark campaign. It is the first major women-and-health issue taken up in a concerted way by women's groups. Secondly this is the first example of preventive action, launched by the women's movement. Thirdly it highlighted the possibility of women and health groups forging links.

It noted that more doctors and nurses should be drawn into the campaign. Also they are seen as women-and-health issues which is detrimental. It stressed the need for greater awareness of family planning ideology and better informed about social and medical issues. To draw women who are affected is an important agenda of the movement. To that end women's groups should monitor family planning program and should establish a locus standi for acting as watchdogs in health centres.

The Aminocentesis campaign that first took off four years ago has now entered in a big way. In the intervening period however there has been an extensive spread of clinics.

This issue brought to the fore the feminist position that the method of science need to be critically examined. Not much discussion could however take place on it. Some of the issues raised was regarding the relative usefulness of aminocentesis, and the consequences of its banning. The Saheli group also put forward certain features of their campaign and drew attention to the fact that women's activist groups had not been responding to their repeated efforts to draw them into the campaign. Ishrat Shamim dealt with sterilization campaign in Bangladesh, particularly to misuse of family planning at certain points.

The possibility and feasibility of including doctors in the campaign of promoting informed

consent and the preservation of medical ethics was discussed.

Organisation such as SEWA has found that many health problems of women are directly related to their living conditions such as shortage of toilets and water. The fact that women have to go great distances to defecate and at only particular times has caused urinary tract infections and diahernal diseases, SEWA also highlighted lack of welfare measures by government such as maternity benefits for informal sector workers. There were also occupational health problems such as low back pain, deteriorating eyesights, miscarriages, high material mortality.

"Women's Voice" highlighted the atrocities perpetrated in the name of family planning and how they organised against it.

Sakiya Khan's paper emphasized the need for communication strategies. Discussion centered around the need for communication links between the activists in various parts. The fact that women's health problems are neglected both by the women themselves and the health care facilities was also discussed. Struggles for women's health must go hand in hand with other struggles

The next session was on contraception and women. The paper by Manisha Gupta put the issue of women and contraception within the perspective of women's role and location in patriarchal class society. The changing role of the family determines the reproductive potential of the woman. In the existing context birth control abortions or even good maternal health care in the absence of basic questioning of a women's role in society would end up merely replacing an old set of traditions with new ones. It is necessary also to question how and why these reproductive technologies are developed at all? Who decides on the priorities and research?

It was noted that there is a need to counter the point of view that contraception leads to sexual availability in the existing anti-women



milieu avoiding unwanted conceptions becomes the women's second best line of defence.

The current trends in family planning appear to be more progressive - they have coopted many of our slogans and demands as for instance child survival MTP. The scope for struggle in this changed content was discussed, It was noted that there should be more campaigns about issues such as Net-En, Aminocentesis and redistribution of resources.

It was also felt that sufficient attention should be given to local practices among tribals - their ideas about pregnancy and contraception. Another important issue raised was the alternatives to Injectible contraceptives, as none of the barrier devices are even available.

Meenakshi Shukla's paper on nutrition was mainly on anaemia. She noted the fact that this is a major cause of maternal mortality and ill-health, and is due to the poverty and nutrition-vicious circle. A second paper by Rajini Jain was based on a study of 92 mothers in Hissar which revealed the different pattern of food intake in different caste and income groups. Shantha looked at Lambini's in Karnataka, in particular how changes in their life style have

often led to the deteriorating health of women. The discussion took off at the level of taboos and dietary practices.

The issue of fast foods was raised and it was pointed out that there was need to provide alternatives. These alternatives could be like what Sukhatme is doing in Pune. Another alternative was that there could be urban cooperatives which could sell these.

The fact that the thrust was seen to be on things like nutritional supplements and not food, water filters and not clean water, was also noted.

It was also pointed out that the psychology of women has been defined by men. There is need for redefining these by women. In particular it was important for issues of female sexuality. Mental hospitals were noted to be male oriented and patriarchal.

One paper highlighted the sexist ideology in medicine. It talked about the expression of the cohesive framework in medicine which is sexist and race and class biased. It was pointed out that the expressions of this ideology was seen at the level of practice, in terms of defining problem areas (e.g.) wife battering.

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### Sub Theme 13 : Sexist bias in Media ; Coordinators : Kamala Bhasin & Kali for Women

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In this sub theme 5 sessions were organised, each of which had 30-60 men and women participating. The sessions looked at one area where women have been trying to create an alternative, and that is the area of media. The attempt was to get women and women's group from different parts of the country who have been working on this issue i.e. analysing media and creating their own alternatives - songs, posters, films and audio-visuals, theatre, magazines and books. It is significant that the women's movement has understood the importance of media and seized the opportunity to gain control over it - if not its resources - then at least its messages.

The attempt was to have women come and share their experiences and their understanding of this issue, and the session had examples of their work in all these media to illustrate the presentations. There were posters that women's groups had made, cassettes they had recorded, films and audio-visuals they had made, plays they had enacted and books they had written and published.

The sessions began with the assumption that all media are guilty of sexist biases, that they have become powerful manipulators of images and creations of distorted realities, and that their reach and impact are now staggering. The link

between mainstream media and patriarchal economic and political structures was established at the very outset.

Relatively less time was given to analysis because it was felt that a fair amount of this has already been done and has been discussed at other meetings, conferences, discussions groups. There was however a brief introductory session that analysed the portrayal of women in Tamil women's magazines, the image of women in folk songs sung in a village near Delhi and a perceptive analysis of women painters in modern India and how women have been painted by men. In the analysis session, an extremely revealing video and TV programmes was presented. This was the outcome of an analysis of all TV programmes over a one-month period. It looked at the portrayal of women in news, farm programmes, art and entertainment, films, sports, development, children's programmes etc. The study found that blatant and sustained negative biases existed in all programmes in this Government-controlled medium that is supposedly a medium for social education. It found that all figures of authority are men, that 77% of newsmakers are men (accompanied sometimes by their wives), that women are predictably shown as submissive, dependent, slavish - and brainless. This particular presentation evoked spontaneous response from

the participants, and there was considerable discussion on how women could (a) counter this assault by film and TV, and (b) systematically create our own alternatives that will not only reflect a truer reality, but will energise our work; will create not only alternative images and messages, but alternative uses of media. It was felt that the evolution of the women's movement over the past ten years and the issues it has raised, the process it has adopted and the values it has tried to live by, have been critical in determining the way women have used media and the objectives it has tried to achieve. In the session on songs the group of Chipko activity shared their songs, which were like easy lessons in ecology, and which are being used to mobilise people.

It was clear that the media most used by women were songs, posters, and street theatre, primarily because they were used (a) in situations of low literacy, and (b) to strengthen and emphasise the interpersonal and interdependent relationship of those who were creating the alternatives and those for whom they were being created. This was expressed again and again by all speakers who stressed the value of this experience and recognised its importance in both mobilising women and carrying the struggle forward. The involvement of ordinary women in creating their own songs, posters, theatre has brought out their hidden creativity, given them self-confidence as well as exploded the myth that only artists make posters, only poets write songs and only professional actors act.

It was emphasised that while creating these alternatives, the collective process of creation

helped to articulate the messages more clearly, sharpen the focus, and importantly clarify our own perception of the issues being dealt with. The common thread that ran through all the presentations was the exhilaration of creation itself, and of then using these songs, posters etc in our work.

In the session on films, videos and audio-visuals it was said that earlier the women's groups hesitated to use these media because of their esoteric nature and high cost and the fact that hitech had a tendency to create hierarchies, but now women feel that it is necessary for women to control the electronic media also considering the impact these media have in our countries. A critical issue raised was that of disseminating and distributing films and audio-visuals, because once alternatives have been created, their accessibility should also be ensured.

At the conclusion of the session, the question of defining alternatives was raised and some discussion generated. What is a woman's film, for example? In creating new images, are we simply replacing old stereotypes with new ones? Are we trying to alter the language of these various forms in any way, and if so how? How do we reconstruct after deconstructing and demystifying? How relevant are our alternatives and how can we ensure that they penetrate the mainstream media and mainstream consciousness. All participants strongly felt that it was easy enough to speak to an initiated audience like the one present but that clearly the task of reaching out to a far wider audience and radically altering perceptions still lies ahead of us.

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### **The Third National Conference on Women's Studies also issued an appeal through the Press to the women of Punjab**

We, women from different parts of India have come to Chandigarh for the Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies.

These days you have been much in our hearts and minds

As women, we understand that besides the every day struggle of your lives you have had to find the strength to cope with the increasing violence, tension and despair. We want you to know that we share your agony and your tears. So many of you have experienced so much pain in this turbulent time in the history of Punjab.

As women who would like to see a peaceful society for the people of Punjab, we are deeply convinced of the urgent need to consider the forming of a Peace and Human Rights Commission comprised of women from all over the country. We would like to see the Commission intervene

for peace in Punjab and also to undertake similar work in other parts of the country.

We write to each of you and to the several existing women's organisation to join us in our appeal to the State and to its agencies to conduct an earnest search for a long visible political solution in an atmosphere of peace for the various issues in Punjab.

We appeal to all the protesting groups particularly those who have chosen the path of arms not to tear asunder the fabric of Indian society. We appeal to all women and men in India to generate an atmosphere of peace where we are without fear in the words of Tagore

"Where the mind is without fear  
And the head is held high .....  
Into that haven of freedom  
Let my country awake".

## The Conference adopted following Resolutions :

1. The Third National Conference on Women's Studies condemns the inaction of the Government of India and the Indian Medical Council on the issue of misuse of amniocentesis. The practice of using amniocentesis with the sole objective of reducing female births, through gender-specific abortions has become a profiteering industry and is increasing despite repeated appeals by the women's movement to prevent this practice, and keep amniocentesis restricted to its proper use for genetic research, and service in cases where it is medically desirable. The promises in this regard since 1983 have remained unimplemented and the Medical Council has taken no heed of our appeals. This is symptomatic of the continuous devaluation of women in this country. If the government of India wishes to demonstrate its concern for women as genuine and match its rhetoric with action it must immediately ban the private practice of amniocentesis. We again urge the Indian Medical Council to take stern action against doctors who are responsible for this practice, and appeal to all medical professionals and the Indian Medical Association to devise suitable measures to eradicate this practice which reduces medical ethics to a mockery. We also request the media not to accept advertisement about Amniocentesis clinics.

Moved by : **Vina Mazumdar**  
Seconded By : **Lucy Jacob**

2. This conference is shocked at the alarming incidence of female infanticide in certain districts of Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. It is all the more shocking that this horror is of recent origin and is fast proliferating due to mounting dowry demands, commercializing of the whole value system and a distorted developmental process taking place. This conference demands that the Government of India and the Government of Tamil Nadu direct urgent and massive efforts to curb this abomination, to identify and eliminate its root causes and to generate effort to open up considerable economic opportunities for women and the mounting of a relentless campaign against it, involving women's and other democratic organisations and educational institutions in the locality.

Moved By : **Vasanthi Devi**  
Seconded By : **Ananti**

3. We strongly protest against the introduction of and experimentation on NET-EN and Norplant two long acting, invasive, hormonal contraceptives which at present are being tested on poor and uninformed women. These contraceptives have dangerous side effects on women and their

progeny which are being ignored. They take the control of reproduction away from the women.

We demand that the government immediately stop experimentation with these drugs and ban them.

We also demand that the government implement a people oriented health policy devoid of a sexist bias which promotes contraception not in isolation but as an integral part of a maternal and child care programme.

Moved by : **Nandita Gandhi**  
Seconded by : **Kalpna Mehta**

4. The Third National Conference on Women's studies condemns Muslim Women's Protection of Rights on Divorce Act that keeps Muslim Women out of the perview of Sec 125 which gives the right to maintenance to a divorced wife.

It also demands, the formation of a non-sexist secular family law for all citizens of India irrespective of their religious background.

Proposed by : **Vibhuti Patel**  
Seconded by : **Ritu Dewan**

5. The Third National Conference on Women's Studies demands the inclusion of the right to employment as a fundamental right in the constitution. Employment and economic independence for women is a necessary condition for their emancipation and equality. The promotion of self employment and home-based production by the Government of India without adequate legislative protection or recognition of the structural constraints on women's employment concerns us deeply. We urge the Government of India to frame a comprehensive legislation for the protection of all labour in the unorganised sector in consultation with Trade Unions and other organisations which have been struggling for such protection of this section of workers.

Moved by : **Rajni Palriwala**  
Seconded by : **Vimal Balasubramanyam**

6. The participants of the Third National Conference on Women's Studies view with grave concern the atrocities committed on Tamils in Sri Lanka. They condemn them vehemently and demand that all acts of state terrorism perpetuated on innocent Tamils should immediately be stopped.

They urge the Indian government to accord recognition and support to this struggle of the Tamils for their traditional home land identity and self-determination.

Moved by : **Saraswathi**  
Seconded by : **Susheela Kaushik**

7. The Third National Conference on Women's Studies condemns the brutal state repression of the struggles of the peasantry in various states particularly as brutally revealed in cases like the recent Arwal massacre and in the suppression of the democratic protests made in Bihar and elsewhere against it.

Proposed by : **Malancha Ghosh**  
Seconded by : **Meena Menon**

8. Nursing being a profession consisting of 99.9% female members, must get its significant role in decision making in health matters.

Health for All by 2000 AD is only possible if we have 7 million of nurses by 21st Century. Hence separate budget or even Ministry to develop hundreds of more colleges and schools of nursing all over the country would help all the sections of society.

Today we have only 1½ lakhs of nurses which is like a drop in the ocean and who are on breaking point bearing the pressures of work.

9. Taking into consideration the increasing number of dowrydeaths, the Third National Conference appeals to all Women's groups, educational institutions and government bodies to make a concerted effort to combat the evil of dowry.

Proposed by : **Seema Sakhare**  
Seconded by : **Vibhuti Patel**

10. This house notes with concern the growing communalism in the state of Punjab, Gujarat, in the Union Territory of Delhi and several other parts of the country. The house condemns the suppression and repression of human rights by the state in the name of fighting terrorism and the acts of the terrorists in the name of religion.

We feel that while communalism divides people and affects the poor, it *divides us as women further* into our communal, caste and class factions. Women of this house *condemn* communalism as it takes our struggle for emancipation

backwards by centuries as the burden of maintaining our religious and community's identity will be placed on us.

The rising religious fanaticism is cementing patriarchy further and strengthening the perpetration of religious and personal laws which are anti-women to say in the least.

We have found that the state and the Indian polity has through acts of omissions and commissions helped communal forces whether it is through legislation or communalization of the state apparatus which weakens and makes a mockery of the secular foundations of the Indian state.

Proposed by : **Sangeeta from 'Chingari'**  
Seconded by : **Nandita**

11. The Third National Conference on Women's Studies expresses its concern at the escalating nuclear arms race and the growing threat of nuclear war. Besides being a threat to peace this armsrace is diverting large sums of money and resources away from development. Women and children in the Third World are the major victims.

This Conference sees in the aggressive plans to extend nuclear militarisation into space as represented by the Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI) the newest and greatest threat to world peace. It expresses its shock at the rejection by the USA, of all peace initiatives in terms of reducing existing arms concentrations, complete stoppage of further production and creation of nuclear free zones.

This Conference expresses its solidarity with the struggle of women and men all over the world against the growing threat to peace. It calls upon women in our country to intensify this struggle by joining it actively and in ever larger numbers.

Moved by : **Shaswati Mazumdar**  
Seconded by : **Madhumita Pal**

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