

Indexed

CWDS LIBRARY

13/3/92

# **Indian Association for Women's Studies NEWSLETTER**

**Nos.14,15**

**December, 1991**

**Special Issue  
on  
Report of the  
5th National Conference on  
Religion, Culture and Politics  
at  
Jadavpur University, Calcutta  
from 9-12 February, 1991.**

## EDITORIAL

Religion, Culture and politics was the broad theme of the V, Biennial National Conference by IAWS which was held at Jadavpur University, Calcutta from 9 to 12th of February, 1991. More than a thousand academicians and activists from every corner of the country attended the conference. There were also delegates from neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

The timing of the event was significant coinciding as it did with a decade of Women's Studies in India. To commemorate the decade the Association had brought out a special issue, tracing the genesis and development of women's studies and highlighting landmarks.

Five National Conferences have so far been organised by IAWS focussing on issues and concerns relevant to women at that point of time. The Fifth National Conference took up the theme that had become a matter of urgency in the context of rising communalism and its advocacy of separate identities. Religion, culture and politics had assumed an importance, previously not recognised in an overwhelming preoccupation with economic matters alone. The most of the politics of religion could reverse the many gains won by women.

The association was fortunate having Qurratulain Hyder, a renowned literateur and Gyanpeeth awardee to inaugurate the conference. The welcome address was given by Prof. S.K. Sen, the vice Chancellor of Jadavpur University. Prof. Kamalini Bhansali gave her presidential address on "On the way to gender justice; a

Decade of trial and achievements".

There were three plenary sessions. The first one was on relevance of the theme, the second, on "Women's self identities in the West Bengal" and the third was on "Comparative perspectives". Dr. Veena Muzumdar, Ms. Nirmala Banarjee and Dr. Kumud Sharma were co-ordinators for the plenary sessions.

The main theme was divided into nine sub-themes and a good number of delegates were represented in each. An informal session on "women and religions fundamentalism / communalism" was attended by 60 odd delegates.

The valedictory session on "What needs to be done" was co-ordinated by Dr. Susheela Kaushik. This had a immediate relevance to IAWS which has completed a decade of its existence and needs to evolve new directions. The special number of the IAWS News-letter presented at the conference carried a review of major events during this decade.

The Editor and her committee members are happy to give a brief presentation of the discussions held in various sub-theme and panels and the resolutions that were adopted. Our special thanks to Ms. Usha Lalwani for proof reading of the IAWS newsletter. The editorial board of this report is as follows:

Dr. Shivani Banerjee Chakravorty (Editor)  
Professor Jasodhara Bagchi  
Dr. Subha Dasgupta  
Sm. Sarbani Goswami  
Sri. Abhijit Sen.

*Dr. Rohini Gawankar*

# Report of the Fifth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies held at Jadavpur University, Calcutta - 700 032, 9-12 February, 1991.

The Fifth National Conference of the Indian Association for Women's Studies was hosted by Jadavpur University in Calcutta from the 9th to 12th of February 1991.

The broad theme of the conference was "Religion, Culture and Politics", the main objective being to assess the contemporary interaction between religion, culture and the economic and political processes and rights of women. In contemporary India, populist religious movements are cropping up in the name of preserving cultural and ethnic identity. These movements need to control women's behaviour and values resulting in a weakening of women's rights and claims to equality. Hence it becomes critically important to document women's own perceptions of these trends and movements and their roles. This conference selected this particular theme with this object in mind.

This was the first time such a conference was held in the eastern region. Calcutta with its long tradition of responsiveness to all new challenges was a befitting venue for such a conference, and Jadavpur University with its anti-colonial past, appropriately opened its portals to this occasion in which local scholars and activists interacted creatively with delegates from all over the country and neighbouring countries.

The School of Women's Studies, the youngest of the University's twelve interdisciplinary Schools, organised the Conference. Its organizing committee was formed by the faculty from all disciplines of the University, as well as the faculty and research staff from the Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University, the State Planning Board, and the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences. The local organizing secretaries were Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi, Director of Women's Studies, Prof. Nirmala Banerjee, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, and the Treasurer was Dr. Subha Dasgupta, Dept. of Comparative Literature. A large number of student volunteers provided invaluable support to the organizing committee.

About six hundred delegates – scholars, researchers, activists, social workers – attended the Conference, which was spread over four days, each day packed with activity. The Conference opened on a festive note with the inaugural ceremony on the 9th of February. Four plenaries were held: the first on 'Relevance of the Theme', the second on the 'Emerging Self-identity of Bengali Women'; the third on 'Comparative Perspectives', and the fourth, a valedictory session on 'What Needs to be Done'.

The general theme was sub-divided into nine sub-themes which were held simultaneously,

each sub-theme taking up one aspect of this multifaceted problem of 'Religion, Culture, Politics and Gender Justice'. The sub-themes were on the demographic context, family and socialization, mass media, economic context, state policies, legal systems, education, political use of religion, rise of fundamentalism.

One special attraction of the Conference was an exhibition of rare books on Women's Studies, organised by the National Library, Calcutta, and held on their premises.

Another highlight of the Conference was an exhibition and sale (on all four days) of handicrafts and snacks by women entrepreneurs, mostly from the grass-roots level. This exhibition also included a display and sale of books on Women's Studies by Women's Studies research centres, women's activist groups and commercial publishers.

The cultural programmes held every evening included folk songs of eastern India presented by Prayasee; a dance drama inspired by the Chipko Movement, 'Aranye Amrita' presented by Smt. Manjusri Chaki Sarkar and her Dancer's Guild; 'Nirnoy', a Bengali play on amniocentesis presented by the Jadavpur University Drama Club; a special show of Satyajit Ray's film "Devi" at Nandan and a play "Bama" presented by Usha Ganguly, and her troupe 'Rangakarmee'.

The Conference ended with a tea hosted by Prof. Bharati Ray, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Calcutta University, and the Research Centre for Women's Studies, Calcutta University.

### **The Inauguration Ceremony**

The Conference began with a colourful

ceremony which was inaugurated by the eminent Urdu writer, winner of the Jnanpith Award for 1990, Ms Ourratulain Hyder. The ceremony opened with a song in Bengali composed for the women's movement by Jadavpur University's activist scholar, Dr. Malini Bhattacharya of the Dept. of English, and sung by members of the Geeti Sangsad of the University. Prof. S.K. Sen, Vice-Chancellor, gave the welcome address on behalf of the University and said that the Conference, with its focus on the complex pattern thrown up by religion, culture and politics in contemporary India may be seen as a fitting climax to the Calcutta tercentenary celebrations. He also stated that Jadavpur University with its anti-colonial swadeshi history, was the appropriate venue for such a conference and congratulated the School of Women's Studies for the spirit of teamwork and dedication generated through the organization of the Conference.

Prof. Sen was followed by Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi, Director, School of Women's Studies, who said a few introductory words. After welcoming the delegates, Prof. Bagchi spoke of the unflagging spirit of Calcutta and the sincerity of the effort behind the Conference and hoped that these would help the delegates to overcome the difficulties that mark the everyday life of Calcutta.

She expressed her pride in having amidst the group Qurratulain Hyder, whose sensitive chronicling of our times left a deep impact on our cultural scene. She lauded Ms Hyder's depiction of women as survivors and said that the strong themes of the Conference called for powerful personalities like her.

Prof. Bagchi added that these themes of religion, culture and politics appropriately matched the city of Calcutta on which the socio-political experiments that accompany the so-called modernization of Indian society took place with the women's question at the heart of their agenda. The history of women from the perspective of this city in the last 150 years has been extremely powerful.

Prof. Bagchi went on to talk about the world of grim reality and the relevance of the theme in contemporary India, particularly the trend in the last decade to revive religion and culture in the name of politics and to push women into the folds of the most blind control of religious fundamentalism. However, the struggle, women have been waging all over the world is validated by conferences of this kind and the inclusion of Women's Studies as a critical component within the University curriculum. Their hard earned spaces must not be lost due to the machinations of some manipulators who use the gender-oppression built into the hegemonic culture; on tolerate the appropriation of these spaces by religious forces for narrow political gain.

Prof. Bagchi was followed by Prof. Kamalini Bhansali, President of IAWS. Prof. Bhansali's presidential address was titled "On the Way to Gender Justice: A Decade of Trial and Achievements". She hailed the city of Calcutta with its political, social and cultural achievements and upheavals, and strong Bengali women who have excelled in diverse fields, giving lead to the women of India. After welcoming the delegates and Ms. Qurratulain Hyder, and expressing gratitude to Prof. Sahkar

Kumar Sen and Jadavpur University, Prof. Bhansali went on to talk about IAWS and its achievements in the past decade.

She reviewed of the role of IAWS, which began as an awareness generation programme, and through the decade has grown wider and deeper in range to combine research, documentation and action with teaching. And Women's Studies, which started as an exercise to make women analyse deeply the complexities of the status of women in the changing social pattern is today an academic exercise where people from different disciplines contribute to making it an interdisciplinary area and an act of transformation.

The IAWS has thus been able to acquire a status as an important body representing women's interests, its opinions valued by policy makers. In 1990, the Association collaborated with academic institutions and non-governmental organisations and made recommendations to remove the anomalies in the National Commission on Women Bill. Women's Studies scholars are included in policy recommendation bodies. Further, IAWS has maintained links with international women's movements and has collaborated in conferences, panels and workshops on feminist issues.

Prof. Bhansali ended her address with the Association's appreciation for all those who had contributed to the building up of the IAWS, for the cohesive working of the Executive Committee, for the work put in by Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi and her supporting team, and hoped that through concerted action, vigilance and joint effort "we can take up new

challenges and strengthen our strengths”.

After the presidential address, Ms. Qurratulain Hyder inaugurated the Conference with the following words:

“The main themes of the Conference also happen to be the underlying themes of some of my novels — that is, the subtle and not so subtle victimization of women at various levels of society. I also wrote a novel about the women revolutionaries of Bengal. Right now, we meet at a time of great distress and anguish. We have all seen the newsreel — a shot of a Iraqi women with a bruised forehead, standing in front of her house destroyed in the bombardment, too distraught to speak, merely asking “Why?” That alone sums up the contemporary world situation vis-a-vis women. They are at the mercy of power brokers of global policies, specially if they belong to the Third World.

Here in India, the government has mostly ignored women in policy making. We still have bonded labour and child labour and still we go on harping about the injustices of the pre-independent regime. We have got accustomed to all manners of violence against women and also to the double standards prevalent. We continue to call ourselves non-violent, while our constant riots reveal that we are one of the most violent people on earth. Nowhere else are young women burnt alive or hanged for the sake of consumer goods. We have stopped caring.

In passing, I must tell you of an incident. Some years ago, on a journey, I met two ladies — teachers in a North Indian University. They told me that they had asked their

students to organise a protest march against a particularly gruesome bride burning. None of them turned up for the rally. Later they told their professors. “Ma’am, you never married, so this problem doesn't concern you. But we don't want to get involved in anti-dowry demonstrations and lose all chances of getting married.”

About six hundred years ago, there lived in Delhi a remarkable man, a Sufi poet and musician called Amir Khusrao, who wrote a song which is sung even today in North Indian weddings. It says, “Why are you sending me away to an alien environment, oh my illustrious father? We are birds of your courtyards and cows of your fields, and can be shoved away or driven off wherever you like. You have given my brothers double-storeyed mansions. To me you have given a strange country.”

Now, after long centuries, the birds and the cows have acquired University degrees and even doctorates, but their fathers cannot drive them away if they do not have the required cash.

So what happened to our hopeful reformers' struggles, efforts, achievements of the last two hundred years? “You must use this face cream, it will make your skin fair and you will get an excellent match.” Scene after scene of gorgeous wedding ceremonies attended by smug bejewelled women reveal how consumerism has gone haywire in a poor country. And now the very poor are desperately trying to buy TV sets and other gadgets for their daughters' dowries. The advertisements are exploiting the latest political fads and dangerous trends ....

As for religion, women are more conservative in the matter of faith even in Catholic and less industrialised countries of the West. Here, in South Asia, religion has been linked with politics in a big way. And most women, even the educated section, can be swayed by rhetoric and media manipulation.

Let us take the case of 'purdah'. In the colonial period, the Eurocentric attitudes equated all eastern cultures with medievalism. Modernity meant westernization. Therefore, in the 1920s, a royal decree unveiled the women of Iran. Their grand-daughters around 1978-79 took up the 'chaddar' as a symbol of their fiercely anti-West and anti-Shah struggle, and as a symbol of their returning to their roots. But came the new dispensation, the chaddar stayed put and now they can't get out of it. At the fundamentalists' call, in many countries of North Africa and North Asia, many young women adopted the Islamic purdah. In India, purdah has always been a status symbol for the well-to-do and the middle and lower middle class women. No clergy has ever asked the women who were the drawers of water and heavers of wood to put on the 'burqa' for the simple reason that the female 'have-nots' do all the manual work along with their men and serve the society of their 'haves.' Today, women can become presidents, but not the supreme pontiffs of their respective religious communities.

Since religious symbols and rituals carry a strong emotional appeal women can be easily influenced, and through them the future generations. The roots syndrome has become very obvious in our country as well. In a different context this syndrome had appeared

during the Gandhian days in a positive and peaceful manner. Today, it has acquired another dimension. Religious and tribal loyalties often go hand in hand, even in modern times. They often lead to violent conflicts. Tribal war-cries appeal to the modern civilised men and women. Pacifists are called cranks. How can women be attracted to the cult of violence? Obviously, they can. Look at the lot of mush which continues to appear in print and on celluloid about women being the invincible custodians of culture and tradition, self-sacrificing models of valour and nobility, etc. The cinema has perpetuated the image of the 'adarsh mahila' and the 'nek parveen'. 'Modern woman' is portrayed as the cigarette smoking vamp. However, slowly, respectable modern educated women begin coming into view. Now she has dissolved into this smug matron, buying luxury goods. Such ostentatious and brash displays of affluence is an affront to the billions of women viewers who can only look and yearn. And so, in the next riot some of the urban unemployed (regularly called the 'goonda element') set the shops to fire and loot their goods.

This has become a set pattern of our bizarre lives. So, the women consumers, voters, readers, have all become the target of a three-pronged multi-purpose attack. It is systematic and has all the ingredients of a tried and tested principles of marketing advertising and public relations. The latest media technology has come to include the world "disinformation". It is a frightening word in its implication. Whatever may be discussed or researched or written or presented as fact has become

suspect in the public mind already in a few months. Video-cassettes have already played havoc in the minds of the human psyche. So, where do we go from here? Except try for the best, and count our blessings, one of them being this get-together of people who care, Thank you!"

After Ms Hyder's rousing inaugural speech, Dr. Surinder Jetley, General Secretary IAWS, concluded the inauguration ceremony by welcoming the delegates to the conference and giving a vote of thanks to Ms Hyder, to the organizing committee, to the Jadavpur University community and to the donor agencies.

### **The First Plenary: Relevance of the Theme**

This session was planned primarily to define the theme of the Conference focussing on its significance in the contemporary Indian society.

The session was co-ordinated by Prof. Vina Mazumdar (Director, Centre for Women and Development Studies, New Delhi).

The first speaker was Flavia Agnes (Forum for Oppression Against Women, Bombay), who spoke feelingly of her painful personal experiences as one of a minority – a Christian woman, and a feminist – in India. She deplored the double – standards prevalent in Indian society – and even in the mainstream women's movement, where the minority women's perspective was undervalued, ignored or simply rendered invisible. She appealed to mainstream feminists to include the variety of symbols and range of experiences of

minority women which would eventually enrich the movement, and enable it to counter the fundamentalist forces threatening us. Flavia said that unless these challenges are met, minority women would have only two choices – to remain in the periphery, or be assimilated into mainstream culture – both equally painful.

Flavia's speech was followed by another rousing presentation. The speaker was Razia Patel (Mahila Front Jaiprakash Narain Chhatra Yuvol Sangharsh Vahini, Aurangabad). Razia too shared her personal experiences as a minority women and an activist. She posed a challenge to the mainstream women's movement for excluding the Muslim women's perspective from the movement. She deplored the issue of the Muslim Personal Law and Muslim women being constructed as symbols of Islam. She repeated time and again that the oppression of Muslim women was a national question and had to be forcefully brought out to the forefront and be integrated into the feminist movement. She appealed to the gathering to give the feminist movement a militant political perspective and fight the communal forces.

The third speaker at this session was Dr. Sharda Jain, of the Institute of Development Studies, Jaipur, who briefly deliberated on certain crucial issues raised by Flavia and Razia and linked these to issues of under-privileged rural women.

Prof. Mazumdar concluded the plenary session reiterating the need for a commitment to the values of social responsibility. She said that this was the most powerful instrument for national integration and the creation of



a new Indian identity. And the chief objective of the Conference was to come out with some clear parameters on which to collectively struggle for the achievement of this new identity.

### **The Second Plenary: "The Emerging Self-identity of Women in West Bengal"**

The second plenary, was focussed on women in West Bengal, the host state, as per the conventions of IAWS. The session was co-ordinated by Prof. Nirmala Banerjee of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, and presented very vivid images of women in Bengali society and their use and abuses by the latter. Some of the speakers were also women who had challenged these traditional images and were striving to construct new ones in their place.

The speakers in this session were:

- i) Smt. Shobha Sen (Theatre and Cinema Personality) who spoke on "Women in Creative Arts".
- ii) Prof. Bharati Ray (Pro-Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University, and Director, Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University) who spoke on "Middle Class Women During the First Half of the 20th Century".
- iii) Prof. Malini Bhattacharya, (Dept. of English, Jadavpur University and Member of Parliament) who spoke on "Tradition of Political Participation Among Bengali Women."

- iv) Dr. Bina Majumdar (Basanti Devi College, Calcutta) who spoke on "Images of Women in Traditional Popular Culture."
- v) Smt. Aloka Kandar (Social Worker from People's Institute for Research and Action, Howrah) who spoke on "Awareness Through Work."
- vi) Smt. Malati Mitra (Swadhikar) who spoke on "Helping Women to Help Themselves".
- vii) Representatives of the Bankura Nari Samiti who spoke of "Women as Independent Workers".

### **The Third Plenary : Comparative Perspectives**

The third plenary session dealt with the relevance of the theme from a comparative perspective. Delegates from our neighbouring countries spoke on the issues from the perspective of their cultures and communities. Dr. Kumud Sharma, Treasurer, IAWS, co-ordinated the session and the participants were Dr. Meena Acharya from Nepal, Dr. Mahmuda Islam, from Bangladesh, and Dr. Kate Young from the U.K.

### **The Final Plenary: Valedictory Session**

The valedictory session was co-ordinated by Dr. Susheela Kaushik, Director, Women's Studies and Development Centre, Delhi, University, and chaired by Dr. Kamalini Bhansali, President, IAWS. The participants were Kamla Bhasin of the Food and

Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, Dr. Surinder Jetley, General Secretary, IAWS, and Director, Research Centre for Women's Studies, Banaras Hindu University and Dr. Zarina Bhatti of the Asian Centre for Organization Research.

This session looked at the Conference in its totality and discussed the issues thrown up in the different sessions, focussing on the dangerous rise of communalism in contemporary India and its relevance to the women's movement. The chief objective of the women's movement being to bring about a widespread social change and to fight against the forces of fundamentalism, it was imperative that the minority women's issues were integrated into the mainstream movement, and research projects and programmes focussing on these issues be immediately started. The movement's commitment to pluralism, diversity and differences within the movement, which was the unifying force and strength of the movement was asserted at this session. This included an understanding of the factors of class, caste, ethnicity and religion and how these determined the status, power and privileges of individuals. It also included resisting all efforts by fundamentalists within each community to define women in a way that renders them powerless and invisible and attempts to undermine the very efforts of feminist struggle.

## Sub-theme Sessions

The main theme of the Conference, "Religion,

Culture and Politics" was sub-divided into nine sub-themes, each focussing on a different aspect of this multi-faceted theme. The nine sub-theme sessions were held simultaneously.

Sub-theme 1 was "*The Demographic Context and Patterns of Women's Relationship to Religion, Culture and Politics*". The objective of this sub-theme was to explore the demographic background against which established religious, cultural and political dimensions affect women's lives. The large variations across regions and different population sub-groups and the relationship between population dynamics and ideological constructs were to be the focus of this sub-theme. Dr. Ilna Sen of Rupantar, A Research and Study Centre, Raipur co-ordinated the sessions.

There were around nineteen papers submitted for this sub-theme of which about twelve could be circulated. The papers covered a wide range of topics like the girl child, tribal women and gender bias, childbirth, migration, female infanticide, agrarian movements, religious practices, female education, marriage age, mortality and fertility rates, widowhood, etc.

A broad trend that emerged from the discussions of these papers was that as a women's group we need to question both the categories of population analysis and the crisis in data availability and presentation. On the one hand statistics and averages were deified and on the other demographic data was tabulated by broad categories of population without reference to caste and religion. This added to the homogenizing tendency in the population which by

definitions adopted the majority group mores, ignoring the minority perspectives. The group deplored the role of media in high-lighting this tendency and fuelling communal/caste discord, and demanded that demographic data should be made available with proper interpretations to counter this tendency. The misuse of reproductive technology and the use of women to promote these was deplored and the group stressed the need for a perspective that health and not just safe reproduction be recognized as a basic right for women. The role organizations like the IAWS and Women's Studies research centres could play in this was highlighted, and the group decided to begin an information network to exchange ideas, knowledge and news of struggle on these issues.

## **Sub-theme 2: Family and Socialization**

The focus of this sub-theme was on the inter-relationships within the family and their specific impact on women. Generally identified as an institution where people related by blood or marriage live together sharing space, material goods and large goals, the family may be a cushion against the trials of the outside world or it may act as a restrictive force generating conflict, in the name of transmitting culture. How the family operates against women's effective functioning and status were explored in the sub-theme sessions.

The sub-theme was co-ordinated by Dr. S.

Anandalakshmy, Dept. of Psychology, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi.

Around eighteen papers were presented, of which about six could be circulated. The broad trends which emerged from these papers, covering various aspects of family, and gender-based socialization are as follows:

1. The supportiveness of the family is often a myth. Analyses from Marathi and Bengali literary sources provided insights on this.
2. The collusion of science and technology with family proves a threat to women's existence rather than liberating them – for example, how amniocentesis becomes a conspiracy to female foeticide.
3. Socialization of the girl child is determined by the internalised gender division within the family. Just like a systematic denial of opportunity to girls is carried on in rural settings, so gender biases remain unchanged with urbanization and apparent modernization.
4. Middle class employed women internalize traditional value systems and play multiple roles.
5. Contemporary violence in society leads to atrocities on women within the family.

On issues of research and methodology, time, location and scale of the study had to be considered with reference to women. The tendency to dichotomise objective and subjective findings were seen to be a barrier against reconstructing the totality of women's

roles in the family and in society, and the group were unanimous in their conclusion of evolving a more holistic methodology to study gender subordination in Indian society.

### **Sub-theme 3: Mass Media**

This sub-theme session explored the power that media exerts on popular consciousness in contemporary India by appropriating cultural expressions and acting as the reinforcement of the dominant forms of socialization. The sessions were planned as a series of questions on the power of mass media, gender stereotyping and political economy; its operation at different levels – national, regional and local – through television, cinema, theatre, popular literature, advertisements, etc. the reinforcing of class and caste domination through the use of gender in mass media; religion and family in mass media, the role of the state in empowering mass media, women as producers versus women as consumers; popular forms and counter media; the policies of mass media and strategies of intervention.

The joint co-ordinators of this sub-theme were Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and Smt. Ella Datta of The Economic Times.

The range and variety of presentations in this heavily attended sub-theme did not lose sight of the focus on providing a critique of the complex ways in which women relate to the mass media. There were about twenty-one presentations, including two documentary films (on the Girl Child and the other on communal violence) and a photographic exhibition of portraits of women. Some five more papers

were submitted for circulation only. On the whole, about seventeen papers could be circulated.

The discussions were divided into four major sections. The first section was on print media which dealt with periodicals, old and new, mainstream and alternative women's and general magazines. The second section was on television medium which reinforces stereotypes and traditional role expectations of women. The third section was on visual and performing arts which explored the web of representations in which the image of women in modern Indian society is caught which makes it so vulnerable to manipulations by the communalist forces among the majority community. The final session on Film was held jointly with sub-theme 7 (The Role of Education in Religion, Culture and Politics) and focussed on challenging the myth of the so-called freedom of the mass media and the dynamics of the images of Indian femininity in the mass media. Apart from these four sections, there was a panel discussion on "Alternative Media" chaired by Susie Tharu with Kamla Bhasin, C.S. Lakshmi, Ritu Menon, and Kalpana Sharma as speakers. The exhibition of photographs, the two documentaries and the use of posters (by Kamla Bhasin, who also sang old village songs to convey feminist messages) added to the range and depth of this sub-theme.

Instead of taking a short cut into treating mass media as a simplistic instrument of women's oppression, the sessions tried to critically analyze the so called 'modern' Indian women packaged for the national market. The historical process coming down from

colonial times was traced as having constructed the Indian women as the grand signifier in the mainstream mass media and the social hegemony within which it operates has to be fought against by the women's movement, was the general consensus of the group. This would help us to develop a counter media that can avoid patriarchal stereotypes.

#### **Sub-theme 4: Religion, Culture and Politics: The Economic Context**

The sub-theme explored society's perceptions regarding women and their significance in determining cultural attitudes regarding women's socio-political rights, privileges and responsibilities. Given the nature of development taking place in India, its impact on women has often been negative, and women's role in the labour market as well as the rigidity of taboos limiting them to specific occupations can be traced to prevailing cultural practices, which was the focus of this sub-theme.

Prof. Nirmala Banerjee of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, was the co-ordinator of this session. About twelve papers were presented, and eight circulated, covering issues of women from a wide range of social strata-domestic servants, rural women, migrant labourers, politicians, entrepreneurs, workers from different industries, women from minority communities.

The different themes discussed were that of the experiences of women as beneficiaries of developmental programmes designed to

assist women's economic activities; changes in women's attitudes through work; and the problem of discrimination faced by women.

Problems raised in the sessions were that of the charting out of alternative paths of development where women's concerns, skills as well as role in the economy would be integrated with an active politicization of women's issues. Past development programmes neglected important issues like the traditional ideas of sexual division of household tasks, traditional control on women's mobility, traditional patterns of male authority which remain unchanged. The conclusion of the group was that these standard perceptions of women's roles need to be questioned and reformulated before developmental programmes can be wholly beneficial to women.

The discussions of papers at this sub-theme were followed by a panel discussion of "Dowry and Bride Price". The participants were Nirmala Banerjee, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, Suraj Bandopadhyay, Indian Statistical Institute, Calcutta, Amiya Kumar Bagchi, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, and Himani Banerjee, Toronto University, Canada. There was a lively discussion on the significance of these concepts in different contexts, and how both change their character in the process of economic development. For instance, with increasing commercialisation and increase of male incomes, dowry becomes a major issue. On the other hand, in a labour scarce situation, bride price becomes a way of enslaving women as unpaid labour.

The group traced the roots of women's economic deprivation and exploitation to the obsessive fear of women's sexuality which has necessarily to be channelled through the institution of marriage. The restrictions of women's access to employment and productive assets dictate that marriage alone can possibly provide women with a secure and comfortable life- a carefully constructed patriarchal myth that has to be shattered by the women's movement.

### **Sub-theme 5: State Policies and Their Implications**

This sub-theme intended to probe into the dynamics of formulations, functioning and changes in the state-policies with all their ambiguities and contradictions vis-a-vis women. The Constitution of India which guarantees equality and liberty to all its citizens irrespective of class, caste, language, race and sex, simultaneously perpetuates discrimination and injustices to women by giving Constitutional guarantee for continuing family laws based on religion. In the recent increase of communal tension, women are the worst sufferers as each community labels women as custodians of cultural heritage and forces them to adhere to obscurantist values. The objective of this sub-theme session was to examine the role of the state in terms of support structures it has evolved for women. Issues also taken up were reconstructing 'secularism', state policies for 'upliftment' of minorities; family laws; role of state during communal riots; cultural under-currents in the rape laws; and the Constitution

of India.

Dr. Vibhuti Patel of the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Bombay and Dr. Manu Bhaskar of the Dept. of Sociology, Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram, were the joint co-ordinators of this session.

The thirteen papers presented for this sub-theme were on the reconstruction of secularism, laws on rape, family laws, cultural revivalism, electoral reservation, reform, developmental policies, impact on schedule castes and minority communities. Seven of these papers were circulated.

The discussions centred around the issue of 'secularism'. The group felt that secularism can be defended not by suppression of differences, but a co-existence that accepts diversity and pluralism and questions subordination of women in everyday life. The secular potential of the women's movement was highlighted, which could delink the state activities from religion. Women's struggles at political and personal levels can change the existing culture of intolerance, and eliminate the upper caste values which have been the main guiding force of state policies. The double-standards of sexual morality; the communalization of army and police; unequal property rights; patrilocality; inherent contradictions in the Indian Constitution, etc. were other issues discussed. The group stressed on the need for equal rights, economic rights, education, legal awareness and affirmative action.

## **Sub-theme 6: Religion, Culture and Politics: The Impact of Women's Rights and Legal System**

The existence of a plurality of legal system essentially based on religion, and how these systems discriminate against women, was the focus of this sub-theme. The debate on the desirability of a common civil code versus the minority communities demand for a right to protect their minority status was also explored, with the objective of constructing a plural thematic foundation for the existence of law for women, by highlighting the conflict between the Constitution and the plural legal system.

Ms. Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court, co-ordinated sessions for this sub-theme. About fourteen papers were presented and eleven circulated. The discussions centred around the respective personal laws of each community — Muslim, Christian and Hindu. Islamic law and the Shah Banu case, Christian law and legal reform, divorce in Hindu law were discussed. Other topics covered, ranged from dowry and domestic violence to legal literacy.

Participants felt that personal law were being increasingly used as tools by fundamentalists which should be strongly condemned. The strong sexist bias of several Family Court judges was criticized, and the group unanimously resolved to work towards evolving a uniform family law applicable to women regardless of their religion, with protection of the rights of women being its principle objective.

The following recommendations were made at the final summing up of the discussions

held at this sub-theme session. The group resolved to set up a task force to –

- (a) formulate a draft regarding amendment and secularization of the Special Marriage Act,
- (b) formulate new laws regarding property, right to matrimonial home and domestic violence,
- (c) lobby in the Parliament for the adoption of these and implementation of the two Law Commission Reports recommending –
  - (1) the removal of the upper limit of maintenance and
  - (2) the joint guardianship of children
- (d) amend the Family Court Act to provide adequate legal aid to women,
- (e) lobby for extensive legal literacy programmes to educate women about their exploitation, and finally
- (f) form a women's platform for struggle against communalism and raising consciousness within communities regarding patriarchal personal laws.

## **Sub-theme 7: The Role of Education in Religion, Culture and Politics and Gender Justice**

The objective of this sub-theme was to explore the gray areas of interrelationships between education and cultural, religious and political socialization and identity formation, focussing on their particular understanding of and contribution to social perception of change in women's rights, roles and participation. The emphasis would be on the responsibility of the education system to provide 'education for

women's equality' rather than become "an instrument of the sanskritization process which aggravates social divisions of class, caste, gender and religion".

Prof. Vina Mazumdar, Director, Centre of Women's Development Studies, New Delhi and Dr. Aparna Basu, Dept. of History, Delhi University, were the joint co-ordinators of this sub-theme.

This was another widely attended sub-theme session. Around twenty-five presentations were made, covering topics of education for gender justice, education for development and social change, and need for vocational training, the low literacy level among tribal and rural women, the Women's Studies programme, etc. Fifteen of these papers could be circulated.

These presentations largely focussed on women who had received higher education, attempting to assess the extent to which their education was responsible for –

- (i) awareness and positive self-image;
- (ii) shaping cultural beliefs and religious practices; and
- (iii) creating sensitivity on issues of social justice.

The discussions highlighted the need for a holistic approach which could encompass the various interactive spheres like family attitudes, socio-economic background, age, formal education, etc. which shape an individual's and a group's thinking, values and behaviour.

The various themes discussed were that of education becoming a mechanical skill-formation process and neglecting character formation; the eagerness for literacy among

illiterate women; how education, depending on its orientation, could further or hinder the cause of gender justice; the explicit and implicit biases in our syllabi, which reinforce stereotyped roles of women; the concept of relevant education which perpetuates inequalities based on class, religion and gender.

The group strongly felt that education should equip us to critically examine existing cultural and social norms and accept or reject them on the basis of their merits, rather than blindly replicate them. The experiences of women from different castes, tribes, classes, occupation should be integrated into the curriculum instead of projecting an urban, upper-class Hindu picture as a general picture.

About Women's Studies, the participants felt that it should not be limited to a particular socio-economic group which alienates women who don't belong to this group. Its language and orientation must be restructured to enable meaningful collaboration between all sections of women and men, between grass-root activists and academicians.

Other recommendations made by this sub-theme group were that courses and text books must be restructured so that they do not perpetuate existing inequalities, but work against injustice and oppression. Training modules should be developed for sensitizing various groups of people to women's issue so that this may be reflected in their respective work environments. Teachers particularly should be sensitized through orientation workshops and students should be encouraged to work at field level. Work on universalization of legal literacy must commence as part of compulsory course material. And finally, course in appreciation and critical analysis must be organized to



counter the adverse impact of the media.

### **Sub-theme 8: Political Use of Religious/Cultural Idioms**

This sub-theme dealt with the 'myth' of Indian womanhood constructed through the use of religious/cultural idioms exploring and analysing the political power of these idioms, which had adversely affected women's position in the contemporary reversal of the secular forces and a revival of fundamentalist ones. The sessions were co-ordinated by Dr. Nirja Mishra and Dr. Prathibha Jain of Kanodia College, Jaipur.

The eight or so papers presented here ranged from the role of women revolutionaries in the Indian freedom struggle to the contemporary sati incident in Rajasthan and the emerging women's movement in India. Five papers could be circulated.

The sub-theme group looked at the issue historically and traced the present political one of the religious idiom to the Nationalist Movement. Specific political movements were discussed, covering a wide range of topics from Gandhi and the National Movement when the religious idiom had been used only to fragment India, and women freedom fighters were marginalised; the reversal of secular forces and revival of fundamentalist ones leading to sati; and the upholding of the Muslim Personal Law in the Shah Bano case; the inter-relationships between the Dalit movement and the women's movement, each subsuming the other; the issue of Christian women's identity and their expectations from the mainstream women's movement which failed to question their personal laws; the

poetesses in the Bhakti Movement who used the religious idiom to create space for themselves and redefine their lives; the reinterpretation of Hindu myths with their patriarchal ambivalences. Through the discussions the need to restrict the political use of religious symbols was strongly felt by the participants.

### **Sub-theme 9: Religious Organizations and Institutions, Fundamentalism and Reformism**

The major concern of this sub-theme was fundamentalism as a politico-social ideology and programme of action as related to women. Women are simultaneously struggling for identity collectively and being controlled by world market forces through increasing levels of state, community and family violence in contemporary India. It consequently becomes imperative to develop and strengthen a women's liberation perspective on the theocratic institutions, cultural norms and state laws that back fundamentalist sanctions to keep women subordinate and promote invisibility of their socio-economic role and politically dependent existence. This sub-theme intended to explore—

- a) the religio-cultural and material construction of women's subordination and its systematic transmission through familial relations and state institutions,
- b) the stronghold of religious organizations of all communities and the complexities of women-specific fundamentalism; and
- c) various theoretical approaches and existing programmes that have supported women's resistance to patriarchal control.

The joint co-ordinators of this sub-theme were Dr. Govind Kelkar, Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi and Ms. Vasantha Kannabiran, Hyderabad University. This sub-theme session included about thirteen papers, of which only two could be circulated. The papers covered the origin of dowry, the Devadasis, colonialism, reform movement, nationalism, and contemporary communalism and fundamentalism. Linkages between class and patriarchy, the state and religion were seen as colluding against women. There seemed to be a kind of generic link between patriarchy and identity politics and patriarchy and democracy.

The various themes discussed were the complex ways in which women entered the heart of fundamentalist and traditionalist politics; the role of rights in the contemporary feminist struggles and the limits of law in its role as an agent of social transformation; women's complicity in communal violence caused by the internalisation of patriarchal and communal values; the role of community in gender construction and women's resistance to subjugation by the State, family and community; the politicization of gender issues in the rise of communal tension.

Summing up, this sub-theme group came to the conclusion that religion in contemporary India addressed the needs of the people and seemed to offer concrete solutions in a way in which 'secularism' had not succeeded, and entrenched itself more firmly in the social psyche.

An informal session in *Women and Religious Fundamentalism Communalism* (attended by a large number of delegates) discussed the general themes and came to the conclusion that the question of religious fundamentalism and its impact on women, particularly women from minority communities can be answered at the following levels:

1. The women's movement has taken a strong position against religious fundamentalism and communalism at the time of anti-Sikh riots, Muslim Women's Bill, the sati incident at Deorala and Ramjan-mabhoomi-Babri-Masjid issue. Our solidarity with all women who believe in communal harmony has to be established by strongly condemning communalism.
2. We have to affirm our commitment to pluralism, diversity and difference as a strong unifying force within the women's movement. However, the factors of class, caste, ethnicity, religion which determine our status and power have to be questioned by the majority community to understand the way we dominate or marginalise minority women.
3. Finally, we need to continue the struggle against discrimination within our respective religious communities and challenge any communalism we find, particularly the active complicity of women in fundamentalism practices. We have to resist being defined by fundamentalists as powerless, invisible, and the undermining of the feminist movement.

## Statement prepared at an informal session on women and religious fundamentalism/communalism, attended by 60 odd delegates

In this conference the question of religious fundamentalism has been raised by concerned women, in particular women of minority communities. Women have spoken about the insecurity they have been feeling in society generally and more specifically within the women's movement.

How do we propose to respond both to the broader issue of religious fundamentalism, and more specifically to the concerns of women in minority communities? It is perhaps possible to respond to this question at three levels.

1) How does the women's movement as a whole respond to religious fundamentalism?

The women's movement has taken strong positions against religious fundamentalism and communalism at the time of the anti Sikh riots, the Muslim Women's Bill and the sati incident in Deorala and the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri-Masjid issue. It is time once again to reassert our position against religious fundamentalism and communalism in all its manifestations and our solidarity with all women who share a belief in communal harmony. The patriarchal nature of this ideology threatens all women and we condemn this ideology and will have no part of it.

2) We strongly affirm the existence of and our commitment to pluralism, diversity and difference within the movement. This is a

unifying force and therein lies our strength. However we also recognise that our diversity does not place us in identical positions of power and privilege to one another. The factors of class, caste, ethnicity and religion determine our status, power and privileges vis-a-vis each other. In today's environment, religion has come to be experienced very differently by each of us. For some of us atleast in the current environment, religion is an experience of privilege and security. For some of us it is an experience of oppression, insecurity and powerlessness. But we also recognise that this patriarchal, militant, hierarchical and casteist ideology harms all women. At the same time those of us who belong to the majority community need to question the ways in which we may dominate, oppress or marginalise any women.

3. Finally, we need to continue the struggle against discrimination within our respective religious communities. More importantly, today, we need to challenge the existence of fundamentalism and communalism in our communities, and in particular, the active complicity of women in furthering the fundamentalist cause. It is essential that we resist all efforts by fundamentalists within each of our communities to define women in a way that renders us powerless, invisible and attempts to undermine the very efforts of feminist struggle.

## Resolutions Passed at the Fifth National Conference of the IAWS

1. The Fifth National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies strongly condemns the increasing number of rape cases, molestation, physical torture and other atrocities committed on women including minor girls by military and paramilitary men during the President's rule in Assam, and demands exemplary punishment of guilty persons.  
– Resolution moved by Renu Debi.  
Supported by Usha Kanhere.
2. It demands also complete rehabilitation of affected women and girls and their families by the government with assistance of long standing nature, covering educational and maintenance needs.  
– Resolution moved by Renu Debi.  
Supported by N. Sarmah.
3. The Conference expresses grave concern at the non-release of grants to Women's Studies Research Centres or different Universities by the U.G.C. and recommends the immediate release of such funds to activate the work of these centres.  
– Resolution moved by Renu Debi.  
Supported by N. Sarmah.
4. We are deeply concerned at the scale of destruction unleashed by the Gulf War, and the massive bombardment of civilian population. We declare our solidarity with the antiwar movements in many of the belligerent countries. The association strongly recommends that the government of India should play a leadership role in the immediate cessation of war and peace effort.  
– Proposed by Nirmala Banerjee.  
Seconded by Suma Chitnis.
5. The Association has adopted as its long term objectives the enactment of a common Family Code covering rights to property, divorce and custody of children. It calls for a review of all personal laws being practiced in India in the light of the Constitutional guarantee of equality, irrespective of caste, class and gender.  
– Proposed by Gangotri Chakraborty and Zarina Bhatti  
Seconded by Smita Tewari.
6. We the members of the IAWS are deeply concerned and anguished at the rampant destruction of our land-water-forest resources and with that the lives, livelihoods and culture of the people in the Narmada Valley. We extend our support to Medha Patkar, who has stood out as a symbol of women's strength and courage.  
– Anandlakshmi and Neera Desai.
7. For effective participation of women in politics necessary steps should be taken to decentralise the political machinery, women should be appointed to examine socio-economic problems in all important committees, commissions or delegations. The Conference recommends a special cell should be created within the Ministry of Labour and Employment at both Central and State levels under the direction of a senior officer to deal with the problems of women.  
– Proposed by T. Prenuta.

### Sub-theme - I.

The first sub-theme session was co-ordinated by Dr. Ila Sen of Rupantar, A Research and Study Centre, Raipur. The following papers were presented in the sessions:

1. Jayasree Banerjee: "The Selective Disadvantage of Being a Female in a rural society.
2. Sabita Guha and Swati Maitra: "Accepting a Girl Child" A case study in Urban West Bengal.
3. Nita Mawar, A. Verma, D.C. Jain, A. Karmahe and M. Kaushik: "The Status and Role of Tribal Women: A study of the Gender Bias Among the Gond Tribals of Madhya Pradesh".
4. Malini Karkal: "Demographic Pattern of Women's Development".
5. Sumati Nair: "Rising Christian Fundamentalism and the Anti-Abortion Movement in the USA: Consequences for women".
6. Supriya Guha: "Defaming the Dai: The Medicalizations of Childbirth in Colonial India".
7. Sunila Singh: "Socio-economic and Political Development Among Women Workers in Tea Plantations of Nilgiri District in Tamil Nadu".
8. Ila Pathak, Achala Desai and Sophia Khan Pathan: "The Gender Dimension in Migration from Drought Prone Areas in Gujarat".
9. V. Vijayalakshmi "Socio-cultural Practices and their impact on Women".
10. V. Vasanthi Devi: "Socio-economic context of Female Infanticide: A Study of Usilampatte Taluk in Tamil Nadu".
11. U. Vindhya: "Gender Issues in the Contemporary Agrarian Movement in Telengana".
12. Lakshmi Lingam: "Migrant Women, Political Affiliations and Interests: Some Observations".
13. Chitra Ghose: The effects of Quasi-religions Practices and Customs on Selected Groups of Women in Nepal and India - Primarily Based on Hinduism".
14. Kumudini Dandekar: "History of Female Education with Census Data as the Base (1881-1981)".
15. A. Ramanamma: "Age at Marriage of Girls in India."
16. V.T. Padmanabhan and K. Nandini: "Sex-wise Mortality and Fertility Pattern in Fisher-folk villages of Kanyakumari and Kollam Districts".
17. Mohd. Salim: "Gender Ideology and Population Dynamics in Bhil Society: An inferential Analysis".
18. Rangulal Shah: "The Use and Misuse of Demographic Data in Communal Politics" (in Hindi).
19. K.S. Umamani: "Socio-economic and Demographic Aspects of Widowhood in Karnataka".

### Sub-theme - II.

This sub-theme co-ordinated by Dr. S. Anandalakshmy, Dept. of Psychology, Lady Irwin College, New Delhi. The papers presented in the sessions were as follows:

1. Sudha Kulkarni: "It is a Myth that Family Plays the Role of a Support Systems".
2. Kuntal Agarwal: Women's Perception of Women".
3. Neela Dabir: "Shelter Homes: Need to Develop New approach for women in Familial Distress".
4. S.D. Heblkar: "Family and Socialization".
5. Madhusree Banerjee: "Law and Mores".
6. Shivani Banerjee Chakravorty: "Carving a self: Feminist Consciousness, the Family and the Socialization Process in Ashapura Devi's Trilogy".
7. Kunja Medhi: "Family and socialization: An Assamese Perspective".
8. Parul Dave and Dhruvi Mankodi: "Self-Other Perception of Aging Women in a Tribal Area of Gujarat".
9. Sharada Rath: "Family and Political Socialization of Women Elites in Orissa".
10. Usha Kanhere: "Patriarchal Culture and Socialization of Girls".
11. K. Satyavani: "Intra Household Food Distribution - Women's Status".
12. Usha Singh and M.S.L. Saxena: "Family Structure and Maternal Anxiety".

13. Aparajita Chowdhury: "Working Mothers and Family".
14. A. Violet: "Stress and Coping Behaviour of Parents of Girls and Boys".
15. Farida Z Companiwala: "Family and Socialization in Village Community".
16. P.V. Manoranjitham: "Family Role in social security of women.
17. S. Anandalakshmi: "Towards conceptual Clarity and Methodological Diversity".
18. Anuradha Bhoite: "Crisis in sex-role socialization".

### Sub-theme - III

The Joint co-ordinators of this sub-theme were Prof. Jasodhara Bagchi, Director, School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and Sm. Ella Datta of The Economic Times. The presentations at the sessions were as follows:

1. Vaidya Bal: "The Role of Women's Magazines".
2. Gita Wolf: "Women in Popular Tamil Magazines: Construction of Gender Identify".
3. Sonal Shakla: "Gujarati Women's Journals during the 19th Century".
4. Ipshita Chanda: "Terrible Beauties Being Born: Feminisms and The 'Women's Magazines'".
5. Himani Banerjee: "Social Reform, Social Subjectivity and Agency in women's Magazines in Colonial Bengal: An assessment of Essays on Construction of Women and Home in Bharati, Bamobodhini and other Magazines for and by Women".
6. Chandra Iyengar: "Development and Women: Role of Feminism".
7. Ruby Maloni "Image Imperfect: The Projection of Women by the Television Media".
8. Kanwar Chauhan: "Television Advertisements and the Commercialization of Female Sex".
9. Shuddhabrata Sengupta: "The Sexual Politics of Television Mythology" (not Presented, but circulated).
10. Shraddha Singh and Purnima Srivastava: "The Impact of Television Programmes on Female Students" (in Hindi).
11. K. Subbammal: "Self Concept of Girls Through Television" (for circulation only).
12. Minakashi Panda: "Television and Rural Women of Orissa."
13. Uma Chakravarty and Shohini Ghosh: Projection of Class and Gender Issue in the Alternative Media".
14. Ratnabali Chatterjee: "Gender in Bengali Popular Painting".
15. Tapati Guha Thakurta: "Real Life Goodsses and Mythic Beauties: The making of the 'Calendar Art' Stereotype in Colonial India".
16. Arundhati Banerjee: "Actresses in Group Theatre Movement Today: Gender Discriminations" (Could not attend paper not presented, abstract circulated).
17. Neera Adarkar: "In search of women in the history of Marathi Theatre 1843-1933".
18. Kakali Das: "Variation on Film Medium and Impact on Women".
19. Ila Pathak, Neela Shah, Niranjana Patel, Rashida Cutlariwala, and Sophia Likhandwala: "The Demeaning Images and the Nauseating Themes in Feature Films and the Role of the State".
20. Ila Pathak: "Regional Cinema in Gujarat: A Record of Protest".
21. Tejaswini Niranjana: "Present Continuous: Cinema, Femininity and the Economy of Consumption".
22. Rajani Majumdar: The Dialectic of the Public and the Private. The Representation of Women on Bhoomika (The Role) and Mirch Masala (The Spices).
23. Godavari D. Patil, Madhumita D. Patil and D. Sunil Kumar: "Women and Development: The Role of Media".
24. Deepika Kar: "The Exploitation of Women by the Mass Media" (for circulation only).
25. A.K. Jaysree: "Politics of Mass Media and Strategies of Intervention" (for circulation only).
26. T.K. Anandi" "Renaissance and the Namboodiri Brahmin Women in Kerala."
27. Shikha Jhingan and Ranjani Majumdar "Prisoner of Gender" (A documentary on the Girl Child in India).
28. Mihir Bhattacharya: "People Against Terror" (A documentary on resistance against communal violence in West Bengal).

29. Sheba Chachls: "A photographic exhibition of portaits of women".

#### **Sub-theme - IV.**

Prof. Nirmalà Banerjee of the Centre for studies in social science, Calcutta, was the co-ordinator of this session. The papers presented were:

1. Farida Hussain: "Economic Development in India and its impact on the Weaker Sections of Women of Minority Communities with Special Reference to Muslim Women".
2. Dhanalakshmi Subramony: Women in the Informal Labour Market: "A case study of Domestic Servants in the Thiruvananthapuram City".
3. Subhadra Patwa: "Women Workers in the Diamond Trade and Industry".
4. V. Bhavani and V. Jyothi: "Women Politicians and Women Entrepreneurs - Why are they Rare? And Analysis".
5. Namita Choudhury: "Women's Role in Agriculture with special reference to north Bengal".
6. Manjari Acharya: "Family Life of Working Rural Women".
7. Sengupta: "Women as Borrowers from the Commercial and rural banking for rural development in Malda District.
8. Manika Nag: "Changing Pattern in Cultural Behaviours among women: A study of Economic Reasons".
9. K.S. Umadevi: "Women in the Unorganized Sector: The Socio-economic Nexus".
10. Samita Sen: "Work and Migration: Women Workers in the Jute Industry of Calcutta, 1890-1939".
11. Rupali Ghosh: "Women, Culture and Technology: A Study of Rural Women's Economic Activity in District Bankura, West Bengal".
12. Nirmala Banerjee: "Dowry and Brideprice".

#### **Sub-theme - V.**

Dr. Vibhuti Patel of the Research Unit on Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University, Bombay and Dr. Manu Bhaskar of the Dept. of Sociology, Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram were the joint co-ordinators of this session.

The following papers were presented:

1. Swatija Paranjpe and Chayanika Shah: "Reconstructing Secularism".
2. Maitreyi Chatterjee: "Reconstructing Secularism".
3. Chhaya Datar: "Reform? Or New Form of Patriarchy? Devadasis in Border Region of Maharashtra and Karnataka".
4. Ujwala Patil: "Cultural Undercurrents in the Law on Rape".
5. Ehavna Mehta: "Family Laws vis-a-vis women".
6. Anuradha Dutta: "A Critical Study of Rape Cases in Assam during the last decade".
7. Flavia: "Sexist Biases in Rape Judgement".
8. Ila Pathak, Ami Patil, Rama Parmar and Lalita Parmar" "Victims of Customary Law: Women of Sweeper Community in Gujarat".
9. Neera Desai: "Role of State in Cultural Revivalism".
10. Nandita Shah and Nandita Gandhi: "Reservation of Electoral Seats for women".
11. Ila Pathak, Ami Patel, Sarala Druv and Vanita Damor: "State Policy for the Scheduled Castes and its Aftermath in Terms of Developmental Programmes".
12. Nandita Shah, Nandita Gandhi, Swatya Paranjpe, Chayanika Shah and Flavia" "Towards a Uniform, Secular and Non Sexist Civil Code".
13. Vibhuti Patel: "Patriarchal Prejudices of Personal Laws in India".

## Sub-theme - VI.

Ms. Indira Jaising, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court, co-ordinated the sessions for this sub-theme. The papers presented were:

1. Dr. Muniza Rafiq Khan: "Reactions to the Shah Banu Case Among the Muslim Women in Eastern U.P. - An Empirical Study".
2. Sarvadaman Acharya: "Politics, Religion, Culture: Women's Rights".
3. Mridul: "Woman Between Religion and Law".
4. P.K. Saru: "Women under Islamic Law".
5. Ishrat Shamim: "Women's Rights and Legal Strategies to Empower Women" (Could not attend: Paper not presented. But circulated).
6. Vandana Dube: "Political Patronage and Religions Revivalism: The Shah Bano Case".
7. Mary Roy: "Women and Law Striking Down a Succession Act".
8. Flavia: "Christian Women: The Struggle for Legal Reform".
9. M.M. Patnaik and M.K. Sadual: "The Problem of Dowry Domestic Violence and Legal Literacy in India."
10. Gangotri Chakraborty: "Divorce in Hindu Law: Realm Revisited".
11. G. Themozgi: "Women and the Legal System".
12. Indira Jaising and Kirti Singh: "Religious Trends in Family Law as Reflected in Legislative Policy".
13. K. Uma Devi: "Personal Laws: Discrimination Against the Rights of Women".
14. S.K. Kuba: "The Principles of Sex Equality as laid down in the constitution and its implementation by State Organs".

## Sub-Theme - VII.

Prof. Vina Mazumdar, Director, Centre of Women's Development Studies, New Delhi and Dr. Aparna Basu, Dept. of History, Delhi University were the Joint Co-ordinators of this sub-theme. The papers presented at this sub-theme were:

1. Reba Majumdar: "Education for Equality of Women: Reflection on Selected Psychological Parameters".
2. Pratima Chaudhury: "Higher Education and Gender Justice: An Analysis of Views of Educated Girls towards Female Children".
3. Niroj Sinha: "Education and Gender Justice in India".
4. Kavita Panjabi: "Some Reflections on a Women's Studies Programme".
5. Jaba Guha and Piyali Sengupta: "Education for Women's Equality - A Sectarian Issue?"
6. Aloka Parasher Sen: "Perception of Women in History Text Books".
7. Yuthika Mishra: "The Role of Educational Background in the Formulation of the Hindu Code Bill".
8. Swati Shipwadkar: "Education for Development of Women and its Cultural Political Connections".
9. Bharati Dewan: "Concept and Dimensions of Women's Education in Hindu Fundamentalist Thought".
10. Charu Mahajan: "Education and Social Change among Punjabi Women".
11. Ila Pathak, Neela Shah, Nalini Trivedi and Sophia Lokhandwala: "Role of Education in Gender Justice: A Study of Syllabi of the Universities in Gujarat".
12. Usha RamKumar: "Vocational Training as an Experience in Development of Values".
13. Malini Bhattacharya, Mihir Bhattacharya, Anindya Ghosh, Nandini Guha, Debarati Mukherjee and Partha Mukherjee: "Higher Education and Acquired Prejudice: An Exploration of the Social Roots of Sexism and Communalism among University Teachers and Students."
14. Mala Khullar: "Socialization and Education in India: The Interface between Macro and Micro Process".
15. Marzia Mukhi and S. Acharya: "Socio-Academic Conditions of Shia Ashnashiri Muslim Women of Kanodar Village of Banaskantha District of Gujarat.
16. Nandita Sarma: "Towards Gender Justice - An Educational Approach" (For Circulation only).



17. Krishna Govind Singh and Kanhaiya Lal: "Impact of Education on Religions Beliefs of Rural Hindu Women" (in Hindi, for circulation only).
18. Lakshahira Das: "Causes of Low Level of Tribal Women's Literacy in Assam and Suggestions for their Removal" (for circulation only).
19. M.D. Ushadevi: "Research in Women's Education - A Trend Analysis" (for circulation only).
20. J. Chandrakantha: "Value-oriented Educational Programmes Utilizing Women: Team Participatory Concept in Planning, Motivation and Leadership".
21. G.K. Lieten: "Literacy and Policies: The Case of Rural Women in West Bengal".
22. Usha Jain: "The Role of Education and Gender Justice".
23. Kameshwari Jandhyala: "Teacher, Text and the Gender Issue".
24. Mina Sen: "The Role of Education in Religion, Politics and Gender Justice: A study on Culture Changes on two groups".
25. S.K. Poornima Devi: Legal Education for women as related to Gender Justice: A case study of Legal Literacy Course for women conducted for three colleges in Bangalore for six months". (not presented)

### Sub-theme - VIII.

The sessions were co-ordinated by Dr. Nirja Mishra and Dr. Pratibha Jain of Kanodia College, Jaipur. The papers presented were:

1. Tirtha Mandal: "Women Revolutionaries of Bengal in India Freedom Struggle".
2. Ila Pathak, Sara Baldiwala, Rashida Cutleriwala and Tasneem Panchorwala: "The opposition of the Religious Heads to Politicians to Women's Awareness Raising".
3. Divya Pandey: "Rise of Religious Fundamentalism in Secular India".
4. Rohini Gawankar: "National Movement and Emergence of Women's Movements".
5. Razia Patel: "Women's Duty: Culture and Politics". (in Hindi)
6. Godavari Patil: "The Sati Incident and Ethnic Identity in Rajasthan".
7. Pratibha Ranade: "Role of Religion and Government as Lawmaker."
8. (No name): "The Relationship between women's movements: A case study and conceptual analysis".

### Sub-theme - IX.

The joint co-ordinators of this sub-theme were Dr. Govind Kelkar, Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi and Ms. Vasantha Kannabiran, Hyderabad University. The following papers were presented:

1. Uma Chakravorty: "Religion, Nationalism and women's Rights".
2. Vidyut Bhagwat: "Tarabai Shinde and Her Critique of Patriarchal Culture".
3. Kalpana Kannabiran: "Colonialism, Reform and Problem of legitimate Religious Practice in Madras presidency".
4. Chellamma Jayal and Champak Lakshmi: "From Prostitution to Destitution: A study of religious-culture practices of Dedicating girl child to goddess vellama".
5. Ranjana Sheel: "On the origin and Development of Dowry".
6. S. Muthulakshmy: "The Impact of Religion and Society upon women".
7. Radha Kumar: "Contemporary Feminist Experience of communalism and fundamentalism".
8. Ratna Kapoor: "The role of Rights in Feminist Struggle for Social change".
9. Urvashi Butalia: "Some Questions on Women and Partion of India".
10. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin: "Surviving Violence: Women's Experiences of Partition".
11. Sumangala Kutty: "Women and Religious Fundamentalism in Kerala".
12. Mabel Koilpillai: "Religious Ceremonies and Gender Discrimination".
13. Tapati Chakravorty: "Religion, Culture and Power: Women's status in Bengali Fiction".

## The Conquest of IDARIO\*

We will conquer Idario fort –  
The Mountains are rumbling with a quiver of anticipation;  
As we seek a pathway.

Let the towering mountains loom over us,  
Let there be hurdles insurmountable on our way;  
We will carve our own way.

The darkness deepens  
We are the flaming torches,  
Come to dispel the gloomy silence.

We are not afraid of the dark shadowy tunnel,  
and we will conquer Idario fort  
We carve our own path through the rugged mountain  
We are our own guiding light  
We even cast our own shade.

The Mountains are rumbling with a quiver of anticipation;  
Ours will be the strife  
Ours will be the sacrifice untold –  
Sisters awake: we will make a new sun rise.

– Dr. Swaroop Dhruv  
(In Gujarati)

(Translated into English by:  
Ms. Veena Poonacha)

FN\* Idar was a historically important fort in Gujarat which was considered unconquerable. 'Idario Fort', thus metaphorically represents the insurmountable. In the garba tradition 'Idario' refers to the winning of the bride by the groom's party. By adapting the traditional motif of Idario into the feminist garba, Dr. Dhruv refers to the ultimate success of the women's movement.

## For Articles please contact:

The Editor,  
Smt. Piyalee Sengupta,  
ZO-A Parasar Road,  
Calcutta - 700 029.

## For Membership forms please contact

Dr. Zarina Bhatti,  
17, Zakir Baugh,  
Okhla Road,  
New Delhi - 110 025.

Dr. Zarina Bhatti  
New Address of IAWS:  
Indian Association for Women's Studies  
'ACORD' C-126,  
Greater Kailash-1,  
Delhi - 110 048.

## Membership

All those whose membership has expired by March 1991, kindly renew your membership by writing for forms to the Treasurer, Dr. Zarina Bhatti, 17, Zakir Baugh, New Delhi - 110 025.

Categories of Membership and subscription rates:

- a) Ordinary Members : Rs.25/- per annum.  
Rs.100/- for 5 years
- b) Life Members : Rs.250/
- c) Institutional Members: Rs.300/- per annum  
or  
Rs.1,000/- for 5 years.
- d) Corporate Members : Rs.2,500/-  
(Institutions only)
- e) Student Members : Rs.10/- per annum
- f) Associates : Rs.250/- for 10 years.