

IAWS

INDIAN ASSOCIATION
OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

Newsletter

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Readers will recall that the last issue of the *Newsletter* carried articles on the relationship of the women's movement with the State, in anticipation of a workshop organised by the IAWS on the same subject.

The workshop took place in Delhi in October 1994. It was attended by twenty-five feminists who met for three days and discussed strategies for interaction with the State and redefining the agenda of the movement. Participants came from different backgrounds, with diverse experiences of the movement and of working with the government. The workshop Report has been written and will be brought out separately by the IAWS for circulation among our members.

We are happy to announce the IAWS National Conference, its general theme and sub-themes. There is some tentativeness regarding the venue and coordinators for sub-themes and workshops, but the Preamble and write-ups on the sub-themes will give a fair idea to participants for paper presentations. We will soon be putting out a brochure with full details and membership forms.

Finally, this *Newsletter* issue carries some information on the Fourth World Conference on Women to be held later this year in Beijing, and a critique of India's Draft Country paper for Beijing, by Vimochana, a Bangalore-based women's organisation.



THE VII NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

"LOOKING FORWARD-LOOKING BACK: IN SEARCH OF FEMINIST VISION, ALTERNATIVE PARADIGMS AND PRACTICES"

DECEMBER-1995

In the past few years, the Indian scene — the economy, politics, political groups, social movements and State response to them — has changed so rapidly that fifteen years seems like something long ago. The contemporary phase of the women's movement was at its peak then — it had dramatised issues like sexual violence against women, dowry murders and pornography. Some within the movement voiced their dissatisfaction with the prevailing development paradigm, our destructive, unsustainable economy and the feminisation of poverty; others condemned the coercive family planning practices of the government and focussed on the reproductive rights of women. The women's movement's critique of the existing socio-political system highlighted the invisibility of women, their marginalisation, discounting of their issues and the systematic perpetuation of patriarchal controls.

The women's movement re-introduced concepts like patriarchy, feminism, sexual division of labour into its language and analysis. It started looking at and articulating issues in broader terms and moved from talking about women's issues to developing a feminist perspective on all issues. Activists and academicians aided in the development of women's studies and made inroads into development planning, census enumeration and government schemes. Along with critiques and debates emerged some alternative policies and practices. Women's studies experimented with an interdisciplinary approach, a different methodology, looked afresh at women and issues and stubbornly attempted to influence entrenched disciplines. The Indian Association of Women's Studies was born of this churning of activities. Among others, women's groups used different ways of organising, of non-formal education, health care, counselling women in distress, and developed a creative use of media and structures for group functioning. Some tried to fuse theory and praxis, beliefs and lifestyles. The women's movement called for a trans-

formation and creation of a just, democratic and equal society.

The fifteen year period of struggle has yielded some noticeable changes, some failures, hopes and many grey areas of complexity and confusion. A brief stock-taking would make an impressive list of achievements. This is true especially for the State which has come up with many legal reforms, policies for women, a National Commission for Women, and reservation for electoral seats. Women's studies has now been accepted as a distinct sphere and women's studies cells are to be found in different parts of the university network. The response of women to the movement motivated the growth of many small groups, rejuvenated older ones, and political parties co-opted women's issues on to their agendas.

Today, we need to recapitulate our earlier critiques, analyses and strategies. How have the alternatives which we had proposed and experimented with, fared? How have the schemes, legal reforms, family courts, etc., which we had struggled for helped women? What sorts of changes have women's groups undergone? Some earlier campaigns have withered — e.g., the pornography one has reached a dead-end. How do we now look at this issue in the context of satellite and cable T.V.? What is the relationship of the State to the movement? How do we understand the rising fundamentalism of women and their active participation in communal riots? New trends have been introduced in industry, agriculture and fisheries as a result of globalisation and liberalisation; what effects will they have on women's domestic and paid labour? Has the presence of women's studies cells sensitised the various disciplines of the social sciences? Has the feminist debate on methodologies been carried into each discipline? What has been the effect of institutionalizing women's studies?

During the last fifteen years, women have participated very actively in other people's movements and

campaigns — the campaign against big dams, against religious fundamentalism, for secularism, civil liberties, democratic and human rights, etc. Have we developed a feminist perspective on these issues and has that been integrated into these movements? What has been our experience of relating to other mass movements? We need an honest critique of our past actions, programmes, alliances, which will provide us with a concrete basis for evolving our future strategy.

Our understanding of women's oppression has led us to strategise, devise alternatives and programmes and in that process, evolve a vision of a better society. We need to once again articulate these visions. The first phase of the women's movement hoped for a society in which all backward social practices would be eliminated. From European liberalism, the movement veered towards a more socialist vision of a society free of class, caste and gender oppression. However, today this vision is slowly evaporating under the glare of globalisation and new technology. How have these new social, political, economic forces influenced our vision? Do we, today, have one or many visions? The environment and green movements have put forward a plea for sustainable agriculture, curtailed consumerism, and decentralised political structures which would entail a different lifestyle and use of natural resources. Some others have revived the Gandhian vision of a

decentralised, technology-free, self-sustaining society. How do we in the movement relate to these visions? Does the women's movement need to join other people's movements to evolve a common vision?

The VII National Conference of Women's Studies will focus on:

- a stocktaking of the women's movement's many programmes and alternatives, and a review of how the new trends in our economy and society have influenced women and men and the movement;
- encouraging analyses and critiques of our programmes, projects and experiments;
- unfolding our visions and our hopes;
- developing strategies for the future.

Every day will have one plenary session on an important theme in the form of a panel discussion with four to five speakers on each panel.

During the afternoons (three in all) there will be a number of parallel workshops on sub-themes which have been identified and described in the following pages. Caste and class concerns will be interwoven in all sub-themes. The scope of discussion in each sub-theme will be finalised in consultation with sub-theme coordinators and others interested in and knowledgeable on the subject.

Opening Session

Voices of Resistance and Struggle

"As we resist and struggle we sow seeds of hope."

It has been the usual practice of the IAWS to invite an eminent personality or expert to address the Conference on the opening day.

In keeping with the main theme of the Conference and the spirit and tradition of the women's movement, it was decided that this Conference would be inaugurated by five working class women representing different movements, resisting injustice and different forms of violence, inching their way towards more just, democratic and ecological ways of being, knowing and doing. Examples of these are women working in the informal sector, in the anti-liquor movement, the movement

against big dams, the dalit and tribal women's movements, deserted and single women's struggles. The IAWS will invite some of these women to share their experiences of resistance and struggle, their mobilisation strategies, their aspirations towards a better future for all. (Since these stories will be told in their own languages, English translations will be arranged.)

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Panel I: STATE PANEL

A panel Co-ordinated by the host institution for the Conference, focussing on the state in which it is being held.

To be decided after venue/state is selected.

Panel II: WOMEN'S VISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR A PEACEFUL AND DEMOCRATIC SOUTH ASIA

In 1989 a group of South Asian feminists stated the following in a declaration: "As women, our lives are subject to control through predominantly patriarchal structures and family laws and institutions, often justified on the basis of religion. The onslaught of capitalism and imperialism in the post-independence period has led to increasing restrictions on our space and access to resources and a destruction of our traditional skills and knowledge systems.

"Along with other marginalised communities we have been subject to increasing levels of State, community and family violence. Our voices are not heard as we are excluded from the political process which projects class-privileged dynastic rule, whether by men or women leaders. The disintegration of civil society, the increasing centralisation of authority in the hands of the State, often backed with fundamentalist sanction, leaves us vulnerable to constant attack inside and outside our homes. Growing statistics on rape, dowry deaths, incidents of acid-throwing, the stripping of women as acts of revenge, the concerted attack by religious fundamentalists to keep us propertyless and resourceless, the continued denial of our contribution to subsistence and reproduction, are part of a campaign to keep us forever silent, invisible and sub-human."

However, women in the region have not remained silent in the face of different kinds of violence within each country of South Asia, and between them. They have resisted and challenged family violence, violence unleashed by the fundamentalists, violence in and by the media, State violence, etc. Although tentative, women have also expressed their dreams and visions for a peaceful and democratic South Asia. They have stated, in different fora, that because of geographical, historical and cultural interconnections, the future of South Asian countries is a common one. Therefore hostility and tensions between South Asian countries must end, if the region is to move ahead.

This panel will bring together five or six women from different South Asian countries to share stories of resistance and struggle against one particular kind of violence and their vision of just, democratic, peaceful and sustainable communities, countries — and a region.

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Panel III: RESURGENT PATRIARCHIES

Patriarchy as a system of male domination, exists, appears and reappears in different ways and forms. The forces of fundamentalism have resurrected new and old patriarchal structures. In some communities, women are being encouraged to enter politics and armed conflict, in others they are told to return to secluded domesticity. New economic policies are creating conditions which are either pushing or pulling women into or out of their homes and the labour market. Right-wing economics and right-wing politics are simultaneously working against women's democratic and secular rights, their access to resources and to mobility, while at the same time, reinforcing a patriarchal culture. Values, totally at variance with feminist values, like competition, individualism, centralisation, hierarchical leadership, etc., are once again gaining ground in an ideology-less world. A different culture/cultures is taking over — of consumerism, of religious intolerance and prejudice, of the mass media, the patriarchal family. Institutions like the education system, the market, political structures, the judiciary are all affected.

This panel will try and anticipate the concerns of the sub-themes, and ask well-known women writers to speak about the interconnections and trends they foresee.

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*Sub-theme 1***Family and Women's Sexuality**

In the standard language of the social sciences, the family is regarded as a basic, but innocuous, building block of society. There are debates on its forms and changes within it, but rarely on its internal politics or its objective functions. The State accepts the family's authority on its members even at the cost of inroads being made on the constitutional human rights of women and children. Feminists, especially in South Asia, have highlighted the deeply hierarchical nature of the family. They have argued that the family socialises women not as individuals in their own right, but as a family resource to serve its numerous functions in the interest of patriarchal authority. The State does not question this authority because it has made the family responsible for many social security functions, such as care of the young, the old, the sick and the unemployed. In order to accomplish this the family needs to have complete control over women's productive and reproductive labour. As the new economic policies lead to further limits on State expenditure on welfare activities, the latter is likely to lend further support to family control on women.

Women's sexuality is similarly placed entirely at the disposal of the family, making all expressions of it outside the family, illegitimate. On the other hand, the use of women's sexuality outside marriage in prostitution and sex tourism benefits male controllers as well as the State in its new emphasis on the tourist trade. Whether a community permits the remarriage of widows and deserted women or not, there are strong taboos on women indulging in any sexual relations outside marriage.

Whether or not there were traditional outlets for women's sexuality in any other form, modern South Asian society is still unprepared to acknowledge other forms of alliance between men and women or between women themselves. This has inhibited the growth of alternative support systems for women when they are outside conventional marriage and family structures. In this workshop an attempt will be made to conceptualise the feminist understanding of the politics of family and of 'legitimate' sexuality. Special emphasis will be placed on explicating the contradiction between women's rights as citizens, and the State's endorsement of family authority. Lastly, an attempt will be made to visualise alternative alliances and support systems for women, which can find a space in our society.

*Co-ordinator***Nirmala Bannerjee****Tel: [O] 0091-33-766472/765477****Fax: 0091-11-33-766958****31, Maha Nirman Road****Bali Ganj****Calcutta - 700 029***Sub-theme Two***Women and Media**

The media scenario in the country has undergone cataclysmic changes since the beginning of this decade. It is obvious to even casual observers that the implications for women are grave. However, it is impossible to analyse the impact of these changes on women or to think in terms of interventions and alternatives without seeking to first understand the changes, how they have come about and what exactly they mean.

It is therefore proposed that the first session on women and media be devoted to presentations aimed at examining the context in which changes have taken place and understanding their political, economic, legal, social and cultural implications. Among the phenomena to be investigated in this regard are : Star TV invasion, the ZEE TV success story, Doordarshan's response and changing mandate/role, the status of cable operators, the Supreme Court judgement on air waves and, tangentially, ISRO's rationale for a dedicated transponder/satellite for development related, interactive communication.

The second session will highlight certain aspects of the changed media through some case studies. Among these may be the following: the Phoolan Devi/*Bandit Queen* controversy; the Anjali Kapur brouhaha; the media hype over beauty contests; the Jayalalitha phenomenon; media reporting on Kashmiri women; media reporting on women's anti-arrack agitation in Andhra Pradesh; media coverage of the controversy over women poets in A.P.; reporting on the hysterectomies performed on mentally handicapped women in Maharashtra; the training of women elected to gram panchayats via satellite; the celebration of the middle class via regional language satellite programmes; the implications of the Santa Barbara cult; and what market researchers are uncovering about "the Indian woman".

The third session will focus on interventions and

alternatives in this new context, wherein the very nature of cultural production has undergone considerable change. Apart from documenting the ongoing struggles of existing alterantive media (like feminist publications), it is proposed that a serious effort be made to evaluate the alternatives created by the women's movement as well as to analyse the motivation, impact and possible future direction of feminist efforts to influence media representation of women.

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Sub -theme Three

**Culture, Identity and Women's Rights:
 Exploring New Directions in Feminist Praxis**

Feminist mobilisation and writing in India in the past ten years have been preoccupied with questions of culture, the increasing and violent polarisation of difference, and the emergence of a right-wing dominant caste and community hegemony. Several women's groups and individual scholars have attempted to grapple with this troubling phenomenon through a range of actions, from writing to providing relief to people trapped in violent situations. There is now fairly detailed documentation available of communal and caste riots, as also analyses from various viewpoints about how identity politics impacts on women from different castes, classes and communities. There is a fair degree of consensus for the view that, more often than not, the identity of a community is constructed on the bodies of women. It is also generally agreed among feminists from different streams, that there is an inevitable conflict of rights for women who are located both within communities as well as within the liberal democratic State, and although attempts have been made, that there is no easy or simple solution to this conflict.

With this framework in mind, this sub-theme will explore:

- The question of cultural nationalism, customary rights, the rights of indigenous peoples within the larger framework of the liberal democratic,

secular State. Specifically, explicating attempts, if any, to evolve feminist paradigms of culture in recent years, and discussing the specific ways in which deep contradictions arising from multiple identities may be resolved.

- Culture and discrimination, explicating efforts by dalit activists and scholars to confront and address discrimination through new frameworks of theorising, and radical mobilisation strategies. The aim here will also be to discuss and develop support and solidarity networks.
- Culture and expression, exploring the spaces women create for themselves in an oppressive environment. This section will discuss efforts in contemporary India, and will primarily be concerned with questions of spirituality, religious expression, and religious beliefs — areas that in an important sense, are 'womanspace' and yet have never been seriously thought through and discussed, but often dismissed, within the women's movement.

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Sub-theme Four

**Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge
 and Knowledge Systems**

Women have generally been excluded from mainstream knowledge production. The creation and use of most kinds of knowledge, including science, have been very much a male enterprise. Whatever knowledge women have possessed has not been acknowledged or given legitimacy. Technology as the handmaiden of science, has more often than not served patriarchal ends. In the beginning feminists demanded an entry into the male bastions of science and technology, but as their understanding of social processes grew, they saw that merely getting into mainstream science as it is practised would simply perpetuate the same biases — its anthropocentrism, androcentrism, elitism, and its value-neutrality.

This led to a search for alternative sources of knowledge, as well as alternative ways of practising science. A critical issue with regard to science, technology and education is the question of who has access to knowledge and who controls knowledge generation and dissemination.

It is here that the current threat posed by globalisation of production, technology and media has to be taken seriously. It reinstalls the hegemony of some countries over the rest of the world. Its consequences for international scholarship are severe — turning India into a permanent periphery dependent on the international centres for its research agenda. Knowledge is being rapidly displaced by information. Social sciences are undermined with the over-emphasis on technical education, skill acquisition and vocationalisation, geared to the needs of the market, bereft of any knowledge or ethical base. Another insidious effect is the way homogenisation is paradoxically accompanied by a promotion of cultural relativism that uses ethnicity to defuse the legitimate struggles of women and minorities to forge a more broadbased identity. In this scenario, the sub-theme seeks to take up women's responses to these challenges. It proposes to cover the following:

— Analysis of women's studies programmes: to what extent have they been successful in achieving their transformative potential; the achievement of women's studies in terms of content and direction of scholarship; methodologies in research and teaching; the connecting of theory to practice; impact on students, teachers and university culture; effects on the disciplines, on women's movement and on policy (e.g. through reforming data systems; through advocacy research; through research for gaining information on policy-related issues such as new reproductive technologies); the dissemination of this alternative knowledge to people at large (feminist literature, feminist publishing, the use of multiple media like posters, videos, theatre, music).

— What kind of interventions have been made through text books and other educational processes?

What kind of role can or have women played in people's science movements; in alternative technology; and in making a dent in the scientific establishment.

— What novel non-electronic media have been used and have scope in the future for conscientising, for empowering, for mobilising dissent, and for reaffirming basic feminist values?

— What part is played by alliances with feminist networks abroad?

Interventions can be made in the form of case studies of practices by NGOs or educational establishments, such as: production of material at primary school level; non-formal educational programmes; use of literacy missions; creative use of government programmes; participation in science and technology programmes to convert them into an opportunity for generating new knowledge; analysis of gender training programmes to understand their potential and limitations; a critical look at programmes of empowerment through knowledge by women NGOs and others.

The workshop will look not at critiques of science but at feminist efforts to overcome them.

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Sub-theme Five

**Women-centred Natural Resource Management:
Land, Water and Energy**

In the last few years, the degradation of natural resources has been quite apparent in India in many fields of production and its impact has been well documented. Poor and labouring women in rural areas as well as in urban centres are most vulnerable to these effects. They provide subsistence and contribute to the 'production of life', which is a precondition for the production and reproduction of any society. At present, the centrality of women's contribution is undermined all over the world, and women's labour is further subjugated and exploited to perpetuate the system. Globalisation contributes to the reconstitution of the international division of labour. More claims are made on natural resources from the Third World which is compelled to produce for northern markets, in order to repay its debts. Our search for a paradigmatic shift in resource use and its institutional management is grounded in this contemporary situation.

Our premise is that if poor people's, needs and especially women's, needs are placed centrally, the resource use pattern and, thus, the whole economy will be geared

differently. It will go beyond the debate of market vs. state-run, mixed economy and ground itself in principles of equitability, people's participation, and decentralisation. We realise that political decentralisation and women's participation in decision-making cannot become meaningful unless a decentralisation of the economy is carried out simultaneously. It appears that ecological sciences also prove that the best way of achieving productivity, stability and sustainability is through equitability. The most important question faced by the women's movement is how to achieve the idea of decentralisation, and what kind of alternative institution building should be visualised.

Against this background this sub-theme proposes to examine three sectors based on the use of three natural resources: land, water and energy. The exercise should pinpoint the linkages between the irdegradation and institutions such as the market, technology and management systems. The discussion will also indicate alternative institution building, on the basis of the principle of the centrality of women's contribution, decentralisation, equitability, space for traditional knowledge, and cultural practices related to the production process.

Papers are invited on three different aspects of the management of natural resources:

- In the colonial period changes in the property rights and entitlements were introduced by colonial rulers, asserting patriarchy in new forms. Today, the process of restructuring the world economy and the NEP regime, have brought about a new regime to enable multinationals to have access to natural resources, further depriving women of subsistence production and food security. This area needs to be investigated.
- While evolving a new paradigm it is essential to understand the ecological characteristics of a particular natural resource and the constraints imposed upon increasing its productivity, due to institutional arrangements of market and technology.
- Alternative institutional arrangements are being initiated by grassroots organisations or government departments so that women can assert their needs and participate in decision-making. These need to be analysed and the principles for alternative institution-building, discerned. This alternative material base will constitute one element in a feminist vision, and the principles provide rallying points for the women's movement.

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Sub-theme Six **Women and Health**

In the last decade and a half there has been a tremendous awakening of interest in women's health issues, women's relationship with medicine, and women's role in delivering medicare in the past, and in modern times. This resurgence of interest has made for a variety of activities and also prompted numerous enquiries.

To recapitulate, this experience has led to experiments in alternative health care delivery, where women-centred issues are given weightage, where the treatment of women's medical problems are informed by a feminist-oriented knowledge of the functioning of women's bodies and of their social and economic status. This, in turn, has given rise to a body of experimental knowledge which has so far remained outside the mainstream of medicare practice.

At another level this awareness has also intercepted and informed other campaigns such as the campaign for a ban on sex determination tests and its outcome in the form of legislation; the campaign against EP forte drugs; the public inquiry and subsequent ban on the production and sale of the drug. The campaign against injectible contraceptives, Depo Provera and Net en and later, other long-acting contraceptives was the high point of such campaigning in that it contributed greatly to a transformation of mainstream / establishment perspectives on contraception and helped to redefine women's needs.

At a third level, the deepening academic interest in women's health has also highlighted the tremendous gap in data and information on women's problems. The fact that much conventional health data does not capture the health status of women is now an acknowledged fact.

At a fourth level, it is increasingly obvious that new economic pressures will change the lives of women in dramatic ways. Will it be possible to assess the impact

of these changes on women's health, when there is hardly a reliable data base on women's morbidity, mortality, nutritional status, patterns of health care behaviour, survival strategy, etc. Even more important without a genuinely altered perspective, the impact of these changes will remain uncaptured, unrecorded; this in turn will make it difficult to devise strategies for action; to oppose these changes or to assimilate them with the least dissonance; and even perhaps to be able to utilise the opportunities which are opening up to the best advantage. The big lacunae in the last few years has been the absence of a theoretical formulation that could contribute to changing current medical perspectives on women and their health needs.

This sub-theme will attempt such a stocktaking and critiques for a coming together of the experiences of alternative movements, of campaign experiences in countering the medical and pharmaceutical industry and, hopefully, carry forward the discussion on alternative methodology and theoretical perspective.

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Sub-theme Seven **Work and Workers**

Several changes have been taking place in the labour market in India during the past decade or so. The economic reforms initiated in 1991 have generated new forces which have affected, and are likely to affect, the process of change in the labour market in future. Various problems and challenges therefore need the careful consideration of academicians and policy makers:

1. Modern industrial growth in India is likely to be labour intensive in nature, to promote flexible labour systems leading to informalisation of the labour market. Since female labour fits very well into this new environment, women will get more employment in diversified industries and activities in the coming years. However, with occupational diversification, the quality

of employment (including employment security and terms of employment) is likely to decline. The experiences of East Asia support this observation. The question before us is whether to accept poor quality employment as part of the development process or to work for improving it.

2. With increasing competition and globalisation some sectors are likely to adopt capital intensive technology which may result in employment reduction; frictional unemployment is likely to be generated now and then; and new employment opportunities will require better skills and education. For various reasons women workers will be in a disadvantageous position and they are likely to lose out. The relevant questions therefore are, how to protect workers in the midst of frictional unemployment; how to improve the skills and education of women to enable them to participate in high-tech industries; how to train/retrain.

3. Unprotected wage-earners and self-employed workers working in a large number of traditional industries, handicrafts, and other sectors need institutional support for credit, market, skill-training, etc. as well as infrastructural support. How to improve the organisational and managerial capacity of these workers, access to markets and capital; how to provide them with skill-training and knowledge; and how to enable them to participate in the new economic environment, are some of the questions which need to be asked.

4. Emerging trends in the labour market call for safety acts and social protection on the one hand and facilities for industrial restructuring on the other. The National Renewal Fund (NRF) has proved to be highly inadequate in this context. Again, unorganised workers in general and women workers in particular will be the worst sufferers. How to redesign NRF in a comprehensive fashion is an issue that deserves serious attention.

5. The above issues have implications for the speed and nature of the economic reforms. How do we globalise while keeping national economic interests at heart and give a human face to the reforms? Can we put limits on the race to globalise? Can we pass laws to keep some resources like forests or water, or agricultural lands out of the reach of large companies? Or get the State to reserve some products/raw materials for the small sector?

6. Some organisations and governments have been successful in getting answers to some of these questions. It will be useful to study their experiments and draw lessons from them.

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Sub-theme Eight

Women, Political Participation and Politics of Organising

The primary goal of the women's movement is the creation of a just, democratic and equal society. Despite the expansion and widening arena of the movement, women's impact on the formal political process has changed only marginally during the last two decades. To many in the country the symptoms of criminalisation, with the increasing use of money and muscle power, and violence against women as an instrument for political action, signify politics as "dirty". At the same time it is not possible to achieve any of our goals in any area of life without transforming political power relations, structures and processes.

While the movement has been debating its relation with the State, the rapidly changing global and national political scenarios force us to raise fundamental questions about the nature and strength of the present state structure. It is in this context that we need to examine the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which (a) promise to strengthen the democratic base of the Indian State; and (b) seek to expand women's participation in the formal representative process by providing one-third reservation for them in these bodies. To what extent can these changes contribute to transforming the present culture and structure of politics?

What has been the experience of women's organisations that have been involved in voter education, training for panchayati raj (before or after election), of women's fronts/wings within political parties/trade unions/other people's organisations? To what extent have they succeeded in getting the goals of the women's movement onto the agenda of these

organisations? How do we explain the participation of women in communal parties/movements which seek to impose a political identity by birth, and oppose gender equality overtly or covertly? Some people have been talking about starting a women's political party in India --would it help to get a women's perspective on to the political agenda?

The movement has all along used organising as a mode for bringing women's perspective into the political arena. We should question our own experiences of organising by examining the dynamics of this organising: have they remained static? Have they reduced, changed, or eliminated the gap between the organisers and the organised? Have we resolved the problem of hierarchy versus solidarity and movement for change? What has been the role of resource requirement, the source of such support and the methods of utilising it? What has been the role and use of autonomy in the aim of changing political structures and processes?

How are we to deal with the issue of identity? Who defines it and how? How do we relate the perceptions/priorities of the organised to the existing structures/processes in order to change the latter? Is protest enough?

Alternative experiments also generate political force and responses from existing power structures -- parties, governments, community organisations, funding agencies etc.-- which use methods of co-option/manipulation with differing degrees of sophistication. What are our lessons from the experiences of the last 20 years? What should be the warning signals to determine our strategies/responses?

Finally — how can the movement balance the three values of rights, responsibilities and accountability, their demands on our own consciousness, the movement's trends, and the rapidly changing local, national and global scenarios?

Coordinator

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FOCUSSING ON BEIJING

THE FOURTH WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

The buzz word is Beijing. There is plenty of literature floating around, many meetings and lectures are being organised nationally, regionally and internationally, and yet there is also confusion and questions.

In mid-September 1995, two global events will take place in Beijing, China: the Fourth World Conference on Women and the NGO Forum on Women. Both will serve as a bridge to the 21st century, as plans and recommendations on gender and development issues are forged for the future.

There have been three UN Conferences on Women over the past two decades. The first was held in Mexico in 1975, International Women's Year; in 1980, the UN convened a second mid-Decade Conference in Copenhagen; the third one was held in Nairobi, Kenya in 1985. Simultaneous with each of these conferences, there have been NGO gatherings — the first in Mexico was called the NGO Tribune, which hosted 6000 participants; the NGO Forum in 1980 was held in Amager University in Copenhagen; Forum '85 in Nairobi had 15,000 participants.

The NGO Forum '95 will be held in Beijing from August 30 to September 8. It is an event open to all and an estimated 30,000 participants will attend a host of workshops, seminars, discussions, media events, etc. The Forum is not designed to take formal positions: it has no fixed 'agenda' and does not adopt resolutions as a body. Instead it should be viewed as a mass meeting where women from different backgrounds and perspectives meet to discuss and strategise. It is a means of creating and exchanging ideas.

The UN Fourth World Conference on Women, in contrast, has a fixed agenda and will focus primarily on negotiating a Platform for Action. Assuming this Platform is agreed upon (as was the document known as the *Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women towards the Year 2000* at the Nairobi UN World Conference in 1985), it will serve as the major

policy document to which governments will be held accountable in the coming years.

The Platform for Action is divided into six sections. Section III lists the following ten critical areas of concern:

- (1) Poverty
- (2) Health and Education
- (3) Violence Against Women
- (4) Effects of Armed Conflict
- (5) Economic Structures and Policies
- (6) Inequality of Men and Women in Decision-making
- (7) Gender Equality
- (8) Women's Human Rights
- (9) Media
- (10) Environment.

The final NGO Consultation took place on March 13-14, 1995, in New York.

The Global Process

There are three main organisations directly involved in preparations for the World Conference:

- the UN Commission on the Status of Women (UN/CSW)
- the Division for the Advancement of Women (UN/DAW)
- the Conference Secretariat

UN/DAW serves as the secretariat for UN/CSW. The UN/CSW serves as the Preparatory Committee (PrepCom) for the Conference, and decisions made by UN/CSW regarding the Conference are referred to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC) and the UN General Assembly for final approval.

For the Beijing Conference, the Conference Secretariat, headed by Gertrude Mongella of Tanzania, is situated in New York, with its own staff and space. UN/

DAW has also moved to New York to work closely with the Secretariat. So far, the UN/ CSW has held three PrepComs to compile the draft Platform for Action.

Planning of NGO Forum '95

The NGO Forum is being planned and organised by an NGO Planning Committee comprising representatives of both the Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Status with ECOSOC (CONGO) and the newer networks that have emerged over the last decade. Sixty-three international organisations are represented on the Planning Committee and the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF), is also a member.

The Asian and Pacific NGO Working Group

In 1992, with preparations for the Beijing Conference underway, it was felt by various NGOs in the Asia and Pacific region that a mechanism was needed to ensure meaningful and significant NGO participation in the Conference and other important events leading up to it. As a result, the Asian and Pacific NGO Working Group was formed in March 1993 to influence the ESCAP process, and to serve as the focal point for NGOs in the region for the NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95. It collaborated with ESCAP in organising the Asia-Pacific NGO Symposium in Manila, Philippines in 1993 by setting itself three priorities:

- to set the agenda for the NGO Symposium;
- to facilitate the participation of as many NGOs as possible from the original 30;
- to ensure that the NGOs create their own Plan of Action.

The Working Group was also tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that the recommendations from the NGO Symposium were presented at the Asia and Pacific Ministerial Meeting in Jakarta, June 7 - 14, 1994. Initially the Working Group had 24 organisations and networks as members currently membership is being extended to 77 organisations. As regional preparations for the Fourth WCW are over, the Working Group is now undergoing a reorganisation to plan for Beijing.

The Asian and Pacific Symposium of Non-Governmental Organisations on Women in Development

The Asian and Pacific NGO Symposium was held in Manila from November 16 - 20 1993, as part of preparatory activities for the Jakarta and Beijing Conferences. The symposium was attended by 550 participants from 320 national, regional and international organisations working on women's issues, from 32 countries. In addition, around 100 observers, including representatives from seven UN agencies, two inter-governmental organisations, eleven donor agencies and six governments, attended the symposium.

The symposium discussed and reviewed the progress women have made since the Nairobi Conference in 1985 and decided the directions women wish to take leading up to the Beijing Conference in 1995 and beyond. Despite the diversity in culture, language, history, political system, and stage of economic development, many common concerns were found among the women in the region. These were discussed during the various plenary sessions and 48 workshops organised around critical concerns of women in 12 key areas. There were more workshops held on such themes as Women and Peace, Women and Aids and others.

The meeting culminated in a substantive document — the **NGO Regional Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women**.

The main objective of the symposium was to prepare NGO inputs for the Asia-Pacific Regional Preparatory Conference to be held in Jakarta in June 1994.

The Second Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Women in Development, Jakarta.

The Ministerial meeting was held in Jakarta from June 7 - 14 1994. It was the first regional preparatory meeting for the Beijing Conference and has resulted in the Jakarta Declaration for the Advancement of Women in Asia Pacific and the Regional Plan of Action. Convened by ESCAP and hosted by the Indonesian government, the meeting had 38 official delegations from member countries. Finalising of the Jakarta Declaration and the Regional Plan of Action was undertaken at the Senior Officials Meeting, June 7-11. During the Ministerial Meeting both the Jakarta Declaration and the Regional Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women were adopted by member governments of ESCAP.

Member governments decided to adopt the CSW format for the Platform of Action with some modifications, as the basis for the Regional Plan of Action. The final document has (i) the mission statement; (ii) global and regional overview; (iii) the issues of concern under seven headings:

- (a) poverty;
- (b) economic empowerment;
- (c) environment
- (d) power and decision-making
- (e) women's human rights;
- (f) health;
- (i) peace;

iv) goals, strategic objectives and action to be taken for the issue of concern; and finally (v) arrangements for implementation.

The Jakarta Declaration is a pledge by member governments of ESCAP to work towards the advancement of women in the region.

Non-governmental organisations played key roles in influencing the output from the meeting, through lobbying to have their recommendations included. NGOs were also represented on official delegations — an affirmation of their expertise on women and development issues.

International Publications on the World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995

Special Tribune issue '95 *Preview*, to be obtained by subscription (US\$22) from the International Women's Tribune Centre, 777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.

Reaching Out, to be obtained by free subscription from the Gender and Development Programme, Asian and Pacific Development Centre, Pesiaran Duta, P.O. Box 12224, 50770 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

WEP International Newsbulletin, to be obtained by subscription (US\$25) from ISIS International, P.O. Box 1837, Quezon City Main 1100, Philippines.

Women on the Move, to be obtained by free subscription from the United Nations Secretariat of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Division for the Advancement of Women, DFC2-1234, Two United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA.

International Forum '95, to be obtained by free subscription from the China NGO Forum Committee, 15 Jianguomen Dajie, Beijing 100730, China.

Infosheet, to be obtained by free subscription from the Office of the Status of Women, 3 - 5 National Circuit, Barton ACT 2600, Australia.

NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95 Bulletin, to be obtained by free subscription from NGO Forum on Women, Beijing '95 211 East 43rd Street, Suite 1500, New York, NY 10017.

UNIFEM News, to be obtained by free subscription from UNIFEM News, 304 East 45th Street, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10017, USA.

(Excerpted from *Issues in Gender and Development* No 7/August 1994, *Asia-and Pacific Development Centre* and *The Tribune* Nov. 1994.)

CRITIQUE

Vimochana is a Bangalore-based women's group which has been actively involved in campaigns against sexual violence, communalism, helping women in distress, setting up a bookstore, supporting women workers, etc, for the past twelve years.

The Need for a Dialogue *Vision is their critique of the Draft Country Paper written by the Department of Women and Child Development (Govt. of India), for the Fourth World Conference on Women in China. It has been included in this issue as it feeds into Part II which describes the Official and NGO meetings in Beijing in September 1995.*

The Central Government has involved several feminists in writing the Draft and has organised consultations with women's groups across the country. Many groups have taken an interest in this effort, attended meetings and written papers. Vimochana found that most meetings organised by the government were well attended. Does this indicate that women's groups are generally happy with the Draft? Some groups expressed their uneasiness with the Draft and its contents as well as with the perfunctory manner in which the government was organising the consultations. Here Vimochana puts forward some critical reflections on the process and the document.

THE NEED

The Politics of Language

"From the ultra feminism of the Sixties to the introspection on women's status in the Seventies, to women in development in the Eighties and gender in the Nineties, has been a bumpy but short ride. From women's problems to women's issues and finally to women's perspectives there has been a whole reshaping of paradigms of human development."

The language sounds familiar and the voice that of a chronicler of the women's movement. A voice that echoes fragments of a vision and wisdom evolved over time...wisdoms from the nether world of the "others", the marginalised, the excluded, the feminine

But while the words might sound familiar, the worlds — they vastly differ. And the world of this fragmented vision is to be found within the "official" pages of the country paper prepared on the status of women by the Indian government in preparation for the World Conference on Women to be held in Beijing in September 1995. It is a vision rooted in the worldview of the nation state that has its own logic and trajectory; a State that has taken upon itself to be not only the protector of the "rights" of its peoples but also the spokesperson of their life visions. Little wonder, when there has been so much of open dialogue between the women's movement and

the State. To the extent the country paper itself can say:

"A unique feature of Indian society has been the symbiotic and mutually complementary relationship that has developed over the years between the government and the women's movement . . . This is a tribute both to the maturity of thinking within government and the movement and to the deep-rooted democratic psyche of this nation."

And therefore the country paper can wax eloquently and with feeling on the "ideology of patriarchy and the accompanying culture of silence that needs to be challenged and broken if development is to touch the other half."

The words have all the right passion and the promise. But as the country paper unfolds itself what becomes obvious is that in the process of this "symbiotic" relationship, the State has in fact taken the language from the movement and given it back to us totally bereft of the vision.

But before we complain or cry co-option we have to reflect on what has become of "us" in the process of dialogue. For not only have many groups and individuals from and related to the women's movement participated in processes that have led to the preparation of this country paper but, in the dailiness of our struggles, as a short term "strategy", we ourselves have repeatedly

gone back to the State and its might to give voice and face to the women who have been silenced and rendered invisible over time. Little did we realise that we were being given a voice that is not speaking our pain; a visibility that is not reflecting our strengths.

And so somewhere in this dialogue we have allowed our own strategies to subsume us. And somewhere along the way it has become more comfortable to learn to speak the language of the State that has borrowed our passions but betrayed the promise.

For Equality, Development and Peace may have been a shared dream. But there is a difference between the dreamers. And that makes all the difference.

The Myth of the Economic Woman

The discourse on development that forms the core of the country paper has little in common with people's pains, women's visions or the dreams of the damned. Globalisation of the economy, liberalisation or the creation of the open free market, are setting the agenda for progress and social transformation. Women's empowerment is sought within the terms of this discourse and vision.

The roots of this myopic vision can be found in the core documents being produced in the temples of universalism like the United Nations; in the covenants, treaties and documents that are being generated at the various international forums of the supra states — the Nairobi *Forward Looking Strategies* for instance, CEDAW, the Draft Plan of Action for Women in Asia and the Pacific being prepared for Beijing, or the women's human rights agenda drawn up in Vienna. As the Draft Plan of Action reiterates:

“The end of the cold war era has coincided with a near universal trend towards privatisation, liberalisation and structural economic change. The women of this region as women elsewhere should equally participate in the process as men, both as agents and beneficiaries of such transformations.”

Homo Economicus is the new god. And with “the emergence of gender as one of the key issues of human progress”, women who have been identified as a disempowered and therefore a “non-productive” sector are today sought to be brought into the mainstream of development. And therefore in the era of gender sensitivity is born the new goddess — the economic woman. And this new economic woman is being groomed to be

the protagonist in a play scripted by Darwin's own descendants. A play in which “development” is equated with economic growth, and an integration into the economy that is based on values of individualism, competition and an aggressive enlightened self-interest; “equality” with equal opportunities for women to participate in mainstream development, not with their own strengths and capacities but with the skills they need to acquire to become “productive” beings; and “peace” with the absence of war. This is a play in which the curtain is made to drop skilfully just before the climax in which economic growth has been achieved by a minuscule minority and that, too, only at the cost of impoverishing the majority — economically, politically and culturally; in which the chimera of equal opportunities has subsumed women into a malestream that celebrates consumerism and the commodification of womanhood; in which the cold war idiom has given way to the cold-blooded construction of a military-industrial complex that has transformed war into a business of economics — not even that of ideology.

A play that has skilfully drawn a curtain over the horrors of development; a development that basically seeks to universalise the gender issue. And the only common denominator by which it can be universalised is economics that flattens out all diversities, that homogenises all differences, that subsumes all dissensions into a “flatland called modernity”. And modern development is the new universalism which has its roots in a eurocentric, liberal, economised, androcentric worldview, is destructive of all cultures, civilizations and societies that have lived and flourished outside it.

One Step “Forward” is Two Backwards: The Partial “Gains”

Undoubtedly, however, the country paper to a limited extent also reflects the gains of the women's movement insofar as it has reflected and attempted to resolve, even if partially, some of the concerns related to the violence in women's lives and their silencing in the public arena. Women's knowledge, for instance, is acknowledged when it relates to preserving the environment or helps in evolving alternative medicinal systems; or in the recognition of the fact that women's presence has not been strongly felt in structured decision-making institutional settings: or that education for women should mean empowerment and not merely enhancing literacy levels; or that the subordination of women has a cultural and

material base. Therefore the need for a social orientation that would create a gender-just society and imply a radical transformation of all existing structures and institutions; or that the girl child experiences discrimination throughout her life and the socio-cultural practices make it difficult for her to overcome the handicaps posed by her unequal status; or that violence against women is not only a personal issue but a public crime, and that the “existing tools of evaluation and measurement are inadequate to capture the essence of what is being advocated as development with gender equity” . . . and then the grand finale — “instead of just adding a gender agenda to a development plan drawn up by the gender insensitive, the goal is to redraw it from the women’s perspective.”

There can apparently be little quarrel with some of the perceptions and analyses of specific issues. The problem lies in the limitations of the overall framework of progress and social transformation that the country paper is totally committed to. Within this frame, therefore, the sincerity of its intentions to develop the hitherto violated, marginalised and disempowered sector of womankind is unmistakable. But whether womankind needs this kind of development that is, in fact, breeding new forms of violence, exclusion and silencing, is the question. For the costs of this development are heavy. If women are being “given” a new voice it is at the cost of being silenced and giving up their own words. If they are being given new eyes, it is at the cost of sacrificing their vision. And in this process of being “empowered” and “educated”, the inherent strength of their wisdom and knowledges is being eroded.

Apart from economic poverty what is also being perpetuated is a scarcity that lies in the non-monetised realm and is therefore rendered invisible and immeasurable. This country paper, despite all its progressive rhetoric, can never give voice to women who do not fit into the model of the economic woman. It can never reflect a vision that lies outside the arena of economic growth. What does remain visible however are the debilitating conditions of economic impoverishment that are being created by state sponsored policies. But the irony is that it cannot even begin to speak the language of the victims of this development vision.

Through the Blinded Eye: Reading the Country Paper

In the section on Poverty and the New Economic Policy that sets the tone for the following sections, the country paper states, “It is an accepted fact that women at large and especially poor women have been a disadvantaged group, trapped in a system that is unjust and inequitous — socially, economically, politically and culturally.” And again, “economic insecurity, large family size and domestic violence, all combine to make the situation of women such that it requires special attention since extreme poverty by definition implies low absorptive capacity for development programmes”.

The underlying presumptions are blind to the real causes for modern economic poverty. They take for granted that the earlier socio-economic political context was disempowering and that the current paradigm will be “empowering” and lead to economic, social, cultural prosperity. Poverty is understood only in terms of “access and of constraints to access” of productive resources. The onus for conditions of poverty is conveniently put on to the poor who are large in number, inherently violent and less able to “absorb” development programmes. Women are the poorest of the poor only because they have less access to productive resources because of social factors like “illiteracy, poor health and malnutrition”. The panacea to poverty comes either in the form of placebos like poverty alleviation programmes (Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, IRDP, DWCRA) that address the symptoms and not the root cause; or in the form of a drastic drug called “development”, a drug composed of a strong chemical like the NEP that consists of both “stabilising measures” as well as SAP under an overall umbrella of liberation and greater reliance on market mechanisms, a drug whose side effects are partially acknowledged — “women might bear the brunt of the projected increase in unemployment” — or making a passing reference to “the uncertainties imposed by unequalising market structures” and the fact that “women may increase their labour contribution with little effective control over cash income” or that “there has been an expansion of international migration of women from many countries undergoing SAP, to the Middle East to work as domestic helpers . . .” These “minor” side effects are sought to be countered through measures like the National Renewal Fund or the Social Safety Net . . . palliatives that make little meaning when faced with the enormity of the

impoverishment that is being perpetuated by the suicidal and homicidal path of integration into this model of economic growth; homicidal for the stockbrokers in the great universal share bazaar where the West, the North, the West in the East and the North in the South, the strong, the powerful, are setting the rules of the game which is loaded in favour of the economic man — all others are systematically sought to be annihilated or absorbed. Tribal world-views, women's knowledges, community patterns of life and living . . . all other cosmologies and life patterns are either naturally eliminated as obstacles to growth or sought to be museumised and exoticised in the exclusive galleria of modernity.

This vivisectionist world-view is reflected in all the sections of the country paper — environment, health, education, decision-making processes, constitutional and legal rights for women, social reorientation, gender sensitisation and advocacy, the girl child or violence against women.

Violence: The Silent Zones

And the violence that can never be spoken about in the section on violence against women . . . women from Manibeli, Garhwal Himalayas, Jharkand, whose fractured and fragmented lives stand as mute testimonies to the horrors of this macro project of development that has destroyed and decimated their communities and cultures; women's bodies battered in a flesh trade legitimised by the market and tourism policies and commodified in the media market; women victims of dowry, battered and brutalised within the home by this dominant culture of modernity that is devaluing them further; women defined and desacralised through the new religions of communalism, fundamentalism and chauvinism — the underside of the fragmented nation state's identities; Muslim women raped in Surat, Tamil women sexually terrorised during the Cauvery riots — women who have no roles, no voice, no lives in the drama that unfolds in the country paper. A script into which some lines have never been written; within which some roles have been rendered invisible, in which some characters have not been allowed to evolve. Violence is spoken about but the cause is conveniently ignored.

When a girl child is killed in Uslampatti a furor is raised about the "ignorance" and "poverty" of the people that lead to this crime. What is never revealed is that this is happening in a community that has traditionally valued women as repositories of knowledge related to

agricultural practices and seed cultivation and were therefore seen as an asset, never a liability. What will never be spoken about is that with the advent of the green revolution and the dominance of the cash crop economy this knowledge has become redundant and with it, the women. This process of impoverishment will never find articulation in the country paper.

Women being burnt and stoned as *dayans*, or witches in the tribal communities of Jharkhand and Maharashtra will be seen as victims of barbaric medieval tribal rituals. What will never be disclosed is that the *dayan* of development is distorting their cultures and world-views to fit them into modern civilization, is in fact setting off this violent implosion against the weak and vulnerable within communities that are struggling to redefine notions of evil and good in times when their structures of faith are collapsing.

Other Fragmented Truths

The paper speaks of women needing "control over their fertility, sexuality and life situation in order to be able to exercise responsible choices in the matter of parenthood" and, better still, highlight the need not to see them as merely "targets" in the family planning programme. But it is totally silent on the violence of a population policy born in the west that reduces women's bodies to a site of demographic control and manipulation, apart from making them unwary victims of harmful contraceptive techniques; an inherently racist policy seeking to control the growth of peoples, especially in the poorer worlds, who are seen as the major cause of poverty and therefore a hindrance to a development, the benefits of which can accrue only to a few — the strong, the powerful, the ones able and equipped to compete. The rest become an unnecessary burden to carry and are therefore dispensable.

The paper might acknowledge the traditional wisdoms of communities, especially women, in helping to preserve the environment and its resources or it can even speak of "environmental destruction arising from inequitable access to necessary survival resources", but such a fragmented approach to conservation again, serves only to preserve the raw material requirements of a productive economy. Such a vision cannot be the basis on which to preserve the vitality of living ecosystems, living cultures and socio-cultural biodiversities.

And these are but some of the partial truths that seek to be consecrated as the truth and nothing but the whole truth.

Human Rights: The Women's Visions

While the country paper seeks to address itself to all issues from a gender perspective there are some vital issues that there is total silence on. Women's human rights, for instance, that find no resonance in any of the wide-ranging sections, perhaps because it is comfortable to address the issue of the rights of women in a fragmented fashion and speak of women's rights to protective laws, to productive resources, to education, to health... ad infinitum. For couched in the language of individual rights these are rights that can and are protected by a nation-state that has set itself up as the arbiter between its individualised citizens. And who can question the right of the State to don the garb of a protector when it itself turns violator of the rights of its people? For the nation-state today has turned violator — in the name of development, in the name of national security, in the name of a scientific rational world-view that is in fact breeding newer and more grotesque forms of violence. Women victims of the Bhopal gas disaster, women whose bodies can never be whole again after being exposed to low-level radiation in and around the IRE plant in Alwaye, women raped by the security forces in Kashmir, a violence justified in the name of curbing "terrorism" and secessionism . . . These women have found no voice and their victimhood no space in the country paper.

And their victimhood is the final indictment of a State that has ceased to be a repository of its people's faiths and aspirations.

In this context the country paper is also silent on the issue of the increasing militarisation and nuclearisation of our State and our societies. Even as the end of the cold war may have led to an arithmetical reduction of arms between the super powers — in an increasingly unipolar world where the machine-gun has been replaced by the market, the conflict zones that have always existed in the South and the Third World have now acquired a new legitimacy in "ethnic" strifes, civil wars, fundamentalist and communal assertions of identities that are eroding and destroying their societies and economies. The reality that these conflicts are being sustained and fuelled by a military-industrial complex that knows no ideology save that of hard profits is another casualty in this global enterprise of universalising

truths. What meaning does peace hold in this process? And where is women's right to peace, let alone their being part of creating conditions for peace?

Refinding our Language of Victimhood

The country paper and its counterparts the world over locate the victimhood of women in the fact that they have never been beneficiaries, agents or participants in the developmental process. Therefore they must be drawn in to become equal partners in the process of progress and change. Violence and victimhood of women is a reality. But do the roots of it lie in an "exclusion" from the mainstream or is it in fact being precipitated by the process of "inclusion"?

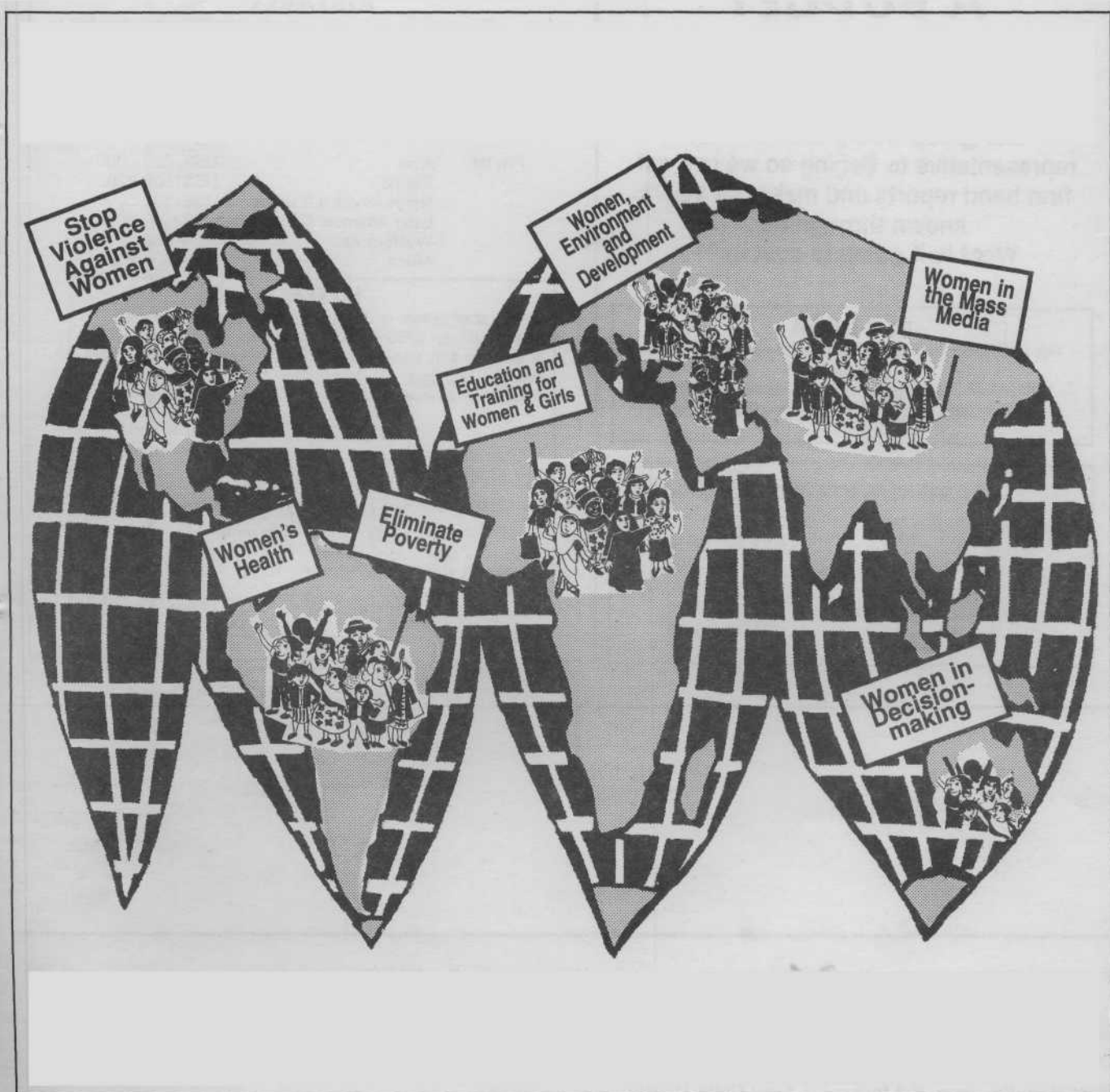
For it is also a reality that while this process of marginalisation and silencing has been violent to women, like all those who have lived at the margins and peripheries of power, women too have lived with other world-views that transcend the language of "rights" and empowerment; a language that has been evolved by the nation-state that has used its notion of rights and power to draw the powerless into a process of paralysing negotiations; today, more than ever, we need to remember the languages of other world-views that speak of power not as a competitive, aggressive, exclusive force born of Social Darwinism but as a sustaining, enhancing, creative life force that is more inclusive and holistic; that celebrates a power that does not fear difference, diversity and therefore does not deny it but reaffirms and grows strong with it; a power that does not polarise but attempts to harmonise and weave together the personal and the political, the private and the public, productivity and sustainability, profitability and subsistence, the rational and the intuitive; the lyrical and the logical, the home and the world. "Personal is the political" was one of the earliest assertions of the contemporary women's movement that sought to give a visibility to women's movements. Today we also begin to see that the political is the personal — for this is a vision that has sought to give visibility to women's strengths.

Always "empowered" in this sense, women in all cultures and societies have been living, surviving and resisting violence, both traditional and modern, personal and public. *Homo economicus* was never our god — nor is the masculinised economic woman — and so now

while greed, lust, terror, shame rule
 our lives
 forgotten goddesses return
 to heal, to care
 to create
 to celebrate
 to reclaim the earth
 for all of us.

And so, even as we despair of the country paper it is this vision that should sustain us through a dialogue with

the nation-state. For the nation-state is as much a reality today as the spaces being created within civil society to resist, rebel and renew ourselves. And so dialogue we must, but not on the terms and in the language being taught in the higher echelons of power, to which a large part of humanity does not belong, but with the insights and clarity that our own pains and victimhood bring us, with the quiet confidence of our own strengths, faiths and inherited wisdoms, for with these we can dare to dream and also live and share this dream, differently.



A BUDGET FOR BEIJING

"Our group would like to send a representative to Beijing so we can get first hand reports and make our views known through her. What is it going to cost us?"

PER DIEM

This is the bare minimum we think you'll need for your daily expenses:

MINIMUM Spending Money: (minus accommodation)
(Food/Transport)/day: US\$20/day x 9 days = \$180

APPROXIMATE COST RANGE

Participants coming from:

Asia	US\$ 845-3410
Pacific	US\$1725-4720
NA /Europe	US\$1725-4720
Latin Am/ Caribbean	US\$2725-5520
Western Asia	US\$2075-5220

AIRFARES

Link up with other women who are planning to make the trip to Beijing then check your local travel agent about the possibility of getting group rates. Here's the kind of figure you'll be looking at region-by-region:

Approximate Cost per person (group rates may be available)

FROM	Asia	US\$ 620 - 890
	Pacific	US\$1500-2200
	North America /Europe	US\$1500-2200
	Latin America/ Caribbean	US\$2500-3000
	Western Asia	US\$1850-2700
	Africa	US\$1850-2550

HOTELS

The cost of hotels in Beijing ranges from as little as \$5.00 to as much as \$260.00 per day. A Hotel Reservation Form is enclosed in this issue of The Tribune for your convenience. You must register first. Book early to make sure you get a bed!

HOTEL RATES

(per day, per person, for 9 days. All \$'s are US \$'s)

		US\$	TOTAL/9 days
		5-15 (1 bed)	\$ 45-135
*	1 star	US\$ 20-50 (per room)	\$ 180-450
**	2 star	US\$ 50-80 (")	\$ 450-720
***	3 star	US\$ 80-120 (")	\$ 720-1080
****	4 star	US\$120-180 (")	\$1080-1620
*****	5 star	US\$180-260 (")	\$1620-2340