

Editorial Note From Kamla Bhasin, the Outgoing General Secretary

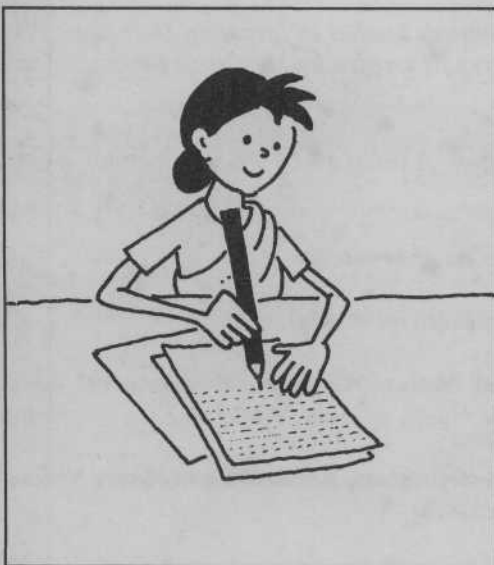
It seems it was just the other day that we were elected to the Executive Committee of the IAWS ... but the fact however is that our term is already over, and a new Executive Committee has been elected.

In this transition phase our last Editor, Nandita Gandhi has handed over charge but the new Editor, Kavita Punjabi has not yet resumed charge with the result that, I, the outgoing General Secretary, and the ever helpful Juhi Jain have had to take responsibility of bringing out this newsletter to inform the members of the latest in IAWS and to generally keep in touch.

*The main news from IAWS is about the **ELECTIONS** of the Executive Committee. As most of you know the EC elections were conducted in April this year. The IAWS President Neera Desai, the Returning Officer, Divya Pande, and the two tellers Kumud Shanbag and Subhadra Patwa worked very hard to conduct the elections, the procedures of which are fairly cumbersome and time consuming. We appreciate the work done by Divya Pande, Kumud Shanbag and Subhadra Patwa.*

Divya Pandey reports that 31 members were nominated in the Life Member category out of which eight were elected. However, in the Ordinary Members and Institutional Members categories only as many members were nominated as the number of vacancies with the result that there were no elections for these categories. No one was nominated for the one seat reserved for Student Members.

Concluding her report Divya Pande states "Though there has been fair response in the Life Member Category, it is sad to note that in the remaining categories the response has been very disappointing. I wish some measures are taken to improve the participation of members in elections." All IAWS members need to think and do something about this.



However, we are happy to inform you that inspite of the above lacuna very capable and committed members from different parts of the country are on the new EC.

In the first meeting held on June 7, 1996, the members present unanimously selected the office bearers. The names of the new EC members and office bearers are on page four. We are happy to reproduce in this Newsletter the self-introductions of some of the members.

Since the new, General Secretary, Chhaya Datar is from Bombay, it has been decided to move the IAWS office to Bombay. Do note the addresses of the new office and the new office bearers.

This newsletter has been edited by Kamla Bhasin and Juhi Jain. All illustrations are by Bindiya Thapar.



On behalf of the outgoing EC I would like to inform the members of the main activities undertaken by us during our term December 1993 to June 1996.

We raised funds to set up a proper office with a full time coordinator and office assistant. Jagori, Women's Research and Training Centre offered its premises (free of cost), other resources, solidarity and support to the IAWS office. Jubi Jain and Reba Dhar Pant ran the office efficiently.

We raised funds also for the VII National Conference on Women's Studies and other activities of the IAWS.

The total membership in 1994 was 632 - Ordinary - 224, Associate - 16, Corporate - 12, Student - 26, Institutional - 25 and Life - 333.

The total number of members now is 1153 - Ordinary - 448, Life - 532, Institutional - 36, Corporate 12, and Student - 111. Foreign friends of the Association are fourteen.

IAWS held the following workshops during the last two years.

- *"The State and the Women's Movement" in October 1994 in Delhi in collaboration with Jagori, New Delhi*
- *"Re-examining the Indian Family" in July 1995 in Calcutta in collaboration with the Jadavpur School of Women's Studies and Center For Studies in Social Sciences Research*
- *"Feminist Economics" in August 1995, in Bangalore, in collaboration with Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation*
- *"Women and Media" in August 1995, in Bombay*



Reports of the first three workshops have been printed.

IAWS sponsored and supported the Second Regional Conference of the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspith and a meeting on the review of the women's movement in Gujarat organized by the Gujarat Forum for Women's Studies.

During its term the out-going EC organized the VII National Conference on Women's Studies in Jaipur in December 1995. A brief report of this Conference is being presented in this newsletter. A detailed report written by Maithreyi Krishnaraj will soon be available.

Ten new publications were brought out during the term of this Executive Committee. A list of all IAWS publications is being provided in this newsletter.

The following three documents related to the VII conference are in the final stages of production.

1. *Detailed report of the VII National Conference being put together by Maithreyi Krishnaraj*
2. *Papers and Proceedings of the sub-theme workshop "Women-Centered Natural Resource Management" edited by Chhaya Datar*
3. *Papers and proceedings of the sub-theme workshop "Women's Writing: Redefinitions, Aesthetics and Future Visions" edited by Jasbir Jain. Jasbir Jain has identified a publisher for this document.*



We produced a poster for the Conference designed by Manjula Padmanabhan, a well known cartoonist and artist and a set of two posters designed by Kamla Bhasin and produced by Jagori for the IAWS campaign on women's political empowerment. An **audio cassette** containing commentary and songs about women's political empowerment was also produced by Jagori for IAWS .

On Devaki Jain's initiative the IAWS initiated a campaign on women's political empowerment. For various reasons this campaign did not take off, but it is worth pursuing by the new EC.

In addition to the contribution of the members of the EC who took on specific responsibilities, the contribution of the following persons and organizations is gratefully acknowledged by the outgoing EC.

JAGORI, New Delhi for providing IAWS a home and a lot of support and solidarity.

AKSHARA, Bombay and Ritu Menon for helping with our publications.

All the conveners of the plenaries and sub-theme workshops.

The Jaipur Coordinating Team for its excellent and exemplary organization of the Conference.

All the donors.

Maithreyi Krishnaraj for coordinating the sub-theme workshops and bringing out several documents.

The conveners of the four workshops organized by IAWS.

Jubi Jain, for running the office efficiently and for her continued hard work months after she ceased to be a paid employee.

Reba Dhar Pant for his contribution particularly during the Conference.

Mr.R.K.Sharda, Mr.Sachin, Mr.Rajesh and Ms.Shraddha Shah for helping us do the accounts and auditing them.

During the VII National Conference a resolution was passed to carry out a **national campaign** against rape and sexual harassment. We are happy to report that several organizations have joined hands to initiate this campaign and to strengthen the ongoing work against violence against women. We are presenting some information on this campaign.

Friends, finally I wish to report to all of you that in addition to being hard work, membership of the IAWS Executive Committee was an honour, a pleasure and a revival of the spirit of solidarity and hope. At the time of joining the EC I had, like many others I know, this strong and painful feeling that fatigue was setting in, we were getting insular, isolated, confined to our groups and activities. I had this feeling that increasing institutionalization of our groups was somewhere blunting the sharpness and the togetherness of the movement.

Working with the IAWS gave me the opportunity to be linked and work together with a large number of activists and to feel the strength and warmth of togetherness.

I wish the Association the very best and hope it will continue to play an important role in advancing the empowerment of women and in creating a more just and sustainable society.





NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF IAWS

June 1996 to May 1998

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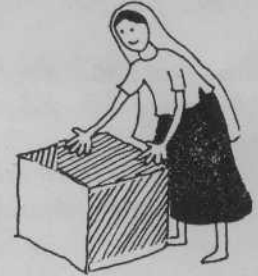
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PROFILES

We thought it would be good to introduce the members of the New Executive to the members and friends of LAWS. Here are self introductions of some of the EC members. The remaining EC members will be introduced in the next newsletter.

Nirmala Banerjee

Nirmala Banerjee is a professor of economics at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta. She is also involved in an advisory capacity with a number of official as well as academic bodies concerned with research and policy making on issues related to women. Earlier she had worked as an economist/town planner for the Govt. of West Bengal. In the 1970's she began studying women workers as the most vulnerable section of the urban labour market. From then on she has done considerable research on the broad issue of women in the economy, findings of all of which have gone to reinforce her strong feminist beliefs.

Nirmala is a founder member and joint secretary of a women's organization called Sanchetna which has been operating in Calcutta for the past 15 years. Its aim is mainly to explore the nature of Indian feminism, raise debates around its concerns and to increase general awareness about these. The organization also does some counselling work and from time to time undertaken action-based research studies in this field. Nirmala was a founder member of the DAWN international network.

Originally a Maharashtrian, Nirmala moved to Calcutta after her marriage to a Bengali. She is fascinated by the subtle variations in the patriarchal norms and practices as found in these two societies which nonetheless are not inconsistent with the broad, India-wide Hindu pattern. As a combined result of her observations, activism and research, she is convinced that analysis and action for women's empowerment in India are not possible without a thorough understanding of the processes and motivations of patriarchy.

Nirmala is a mother of two sons and a grandmother of one.

Sunita Pathania

Dr.Sunita Pathania is a professor of History and Director, Women's Studies Research Centre at Kurukshetra, Haryana. Having keen academic interest in Women's Studies, Sunita is engaged in research in Women's Studies at the personal level as well as through supervision of a team of scholars engaged in research on various aspects of Women in History for their PH.D. Programmes.

As Director of the Centre, Sunita hopes to generate awareness among the students and teachers of the University and affiliated colleges on gender issues through Centre's academic/extension programmes like Seminars, Workshops, Lectures, Group Discussions, Street Plays, Curriculum designing and Counselling activities. The Centre has also been successful in establishing link with various Colleges of the State by setting up Women's Cell in the Colleges.

Chhaya Datar

At present I am a Reader and Head of the Unit of Women's Studies at TISS. I teach three courses and act as



a director for three projects, two of which are action research.

I am also active in the Associations of Women's Studies at the national and Maharashtra level. I am presently a member of a standing committee for women's studies set up by the University Grants Commission of India, which monitors Women's Studies Centers located in different universities. This committee has been assigned to write an approach paper to prepare a rationale for the women's studies stream to be included in the ninth plan of the UGC starting from next year.

The route to my present work and involvement began through my frustration as housewife confined to household chores. I became active in social movements in 1972 and worked in several youth, trade union and women's organizations on a voluntary basis. I have been a short story writer in the beginning and have published two collections. Later on I developed interest in serious writings, especially on women's issues. I was awarded a Dutch Government Scholarship to study women's issues. I completed a Masters degree course in the Hague and since then I have been involved with research.

I am a founder member of Stree Mukti Sangathana, which took the initiative of organizing a Stree Mukti Yatra in 1985, which covered 11 towns and 7 villages in Western Maharashtra, spreading the message of need for women's liberation outside big cities like Bombay and Pune. Later, I was associated with the editorial collective which published "Stree Uvach" for seven years. We also commissioned some books, published them and undertook the responsibility of distribution.

Kavita Punjabi



Lecturer in Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University, Calcutta since 1989.

On the academic committee of the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University.

Doctoral work on fictional and prison narratives of women in political struggle in the Naxalite movement in West Bengal and the "Dirty War" in Argentina.

Currently working on issues of women's conflicting identities in political struggle, women's responses to sexual violence, strategies of resistance to state and community oppression, gender violence and mental health.

Worked on developing the curriculum for the proposed M.Phil syllabus in Women's Studies at Jadavpur University, one of the organizers of the National Women's Studies Conference held in Calcutta in 1991, teaching women's studies in an undergraduate college affiliated to Jadavpur University.

Involved with the network of women's groups in Calcutta currently working on gender just laws.

Dr. Rohini Gawankar

Specialization in Women in Politics. Retd. Reader and Head of the Dept. of Political Science, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai.

Founder member and first President of Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth.

Conducts orientation and training camps for women members of Gram Panchayat.

A book published on "Contribution of Maharashtrian Women to Politics".
Contributing author to ten books on women's issues.

Vice President Mahila Dakshta Samiti and Maharashtra Federation of University and College teachers.



Connected with IAWS since 1981.



Kamla Bhasin

Kamla Bhasin a social scientist by training has been involved with issues related to development, education, gender, media etc. since 1972 when she joined a voluntary organization in Rajasthan, India.

Since 1976 she has been working with the FAO's Freedom From Hunger Campaign/Action for Development, supporting innovative NGO initiatives, organizing trainings/workshops and facilitating networking between NGOs, women's organizations and people's organizations in South Asia.

She is a member of several women's groups and voluntary organizations, including some regional and international ones.

Kamla has written extensively on participatory development, participatory training, women's empowerment etc.

She has been writing songs for and with the women's movement and other people's movements and has written songs for children. She is now busy putting together a book of feminist humor.

She is married, has two children, one husband and lives in New Delhi, India.

Bhawna Mehta

I am Bhawna. My association with Women's Studies begun in 1988 when I attended my first IAWS Conference which was held at Vishakhapatnam. Later, I joined Women's Studies Research Centre of the M.S.University of Baroda as a Programme Officer in 1990.

Over the years, with the centre I have grown from a young girl working hard in the redlight area of Bombay, against dowry crusade to a married woman, mother of a son, who is desperately trying to penetrate in the university systems so as to bring women in the mainstream disciplines.

By qualification, I have a professional degree in Social Work from College of Social Work Nirmala Niketan.

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REPORT OF THE VII NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

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

JAIPUR, DECEMBER 27-30, 1995

The VII National Conference on Women's Studies organized by the Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) was held in Jaipur from December 27 to 30, 1995. The four day Conference had a registration of 712 delegates from 20 States in India and 12 countries, particularly the South Asian Countries. The theme of the conference was "Looking Forward, Looking Back: In Search of Feminist Visions, Alternative Paradigms and Practices". This was spelt out in four plenary and nine sub-theme workshops with over 120 presentations. This Conference not only addressed wide range of women's issues but looked at major socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological problems of society in an integrated feminist perspective. The style in which the Conference was run corresponded to this approach. The Conference resounded with the call for a resurgence of the feminist movement which will have to face the challenge of the resurgence of patriarchy, consolidating itself through the alignment of several forces.

Several pioneering and committed women who have been part of the Women's Movement for several decades attended the Conference. The IAWS was honored to have in the Conference Pramila Dandavate, Mrinal Gore, Medha Patkar, Vandana Shiva, Krishna Sobti, Indira Jaising, Bhanwari Bai, Aruna Roy and hundreds of other committed activists/scholars.

Celebration of Women's Creativity

The St. Xavier's School, which was the location of the Conference, had a festive and celebratory look with colorful banners and posters all around. Dozens of banners in Hindi and English had slogans like "All issues are women's issues", "Looking at the world through women's eyes", "The light of knowledge is now my partner". In addition to over 700 participants in the main Conference there were about 75 craftswomen and men and 40 women folk artists who had brought their crafts and performances to the Conference. The crafts exhibition and the

performances by women artists from Rajasthan were an integral part of the Conference. Those crafts groups had been invited which are empowering women through income generation and revival of traditional skills and crafts. Over 37 groups from seven States exhibited their crafts and sold them. The vibrant, skilled and energetic folk artists presented another face of feminist expression and aspirations and lent colour and energy to the gathering. (Local women's groups had also put up food stalls on the venue.)

The **book exhibition** had over 5000 books of about 50 Indian and Third World publishers and organizations. There were also several cards, posters, calendars and video and audio cassettes for sale. The **painting exhibition** had more than hundred women painters from all over the country exhibiting their paintings and sculptures at the Jawahar Kala Kendra.

These exhibitions provided a link between the Conference and the citizens of Jaipur and thereby conveyed women's concerns to a larger number of people.

Songs from the women's movement were sung before, during and after sessions. Some groups presented street plays, others showed video films on the themes of the Conference.

A Celebration of Collaboration and Solidarity

The Conference was the result of collaboration and collective thinking, planning and action by a very large number of women and men. In addition to the fifteen Executive Committee members of the IAWS, seventeen women and men from different parts of India were involved in the conceptualization and running of the five plenaries, nine sub-theme workshops and the exhibitions. Forty women's groups, peasant organizations, NGOs, colleges and University departments and government organizations in Rajasthan were part of the local co-ordination committee which made excellent arrangements for board, lodging and conferencing.



The process of organizing this Conference in Rajasthan was used very effectively by the local women activists and scholars to popularize the concept of women's studies, to revitalize women's groups, to make alliances with other people's organizations, NGOs, like minded media persons, artists etc. The local group showed feminist films in colleges, university women's hostels and in cinema halls to reach out to younger women and involve them as volunteers. All these efforts bore fruit and there were 100 women and men students who worked long hours on the tasks assigned to them. We hope this exposure will attract many young women and men to the women's movement and other people's movements.

Donor partners, (particularly EZE Germany) and FAO/NGO South Asian Programme, and UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia extended their full cooperation to the IAWS for making this event a success.

The support provided by the media was also quite considerable. The Conference was well covered by the local newspapers, some national dailies, by several television networks, All India Radio and BBC Radio. It was featured on the national TV news and there were several reports on the Jaipur Door Darshan.

As the process and method of organizing this Conference was synergetic and feminist it energized all those who were involved.

The South Asian Presence

Being committed to the creation of a peaceful South Asia, the IAWS has always tried to promote co-operation and solidarity between women's groups, feminist scholars, people's organizations and NGOs working in different countries of South Asia. Like in earlier Conferences, special efforts were made to invite feminist activists/scholars from the SAARC countries. The response was very positive and there were 16 women from Nepal, one from Bhutan, six women and one man from Pakistan, four women from Sri Lanka and five women from Bangladesh. The South Asian participants actively participated in different sub-theme workshops and all the other events.

A special South Asian Plenary was co-ordinated by Kamla Bhasin, on the theme " **Women's Visions and Strategies for a Peaceful and Democratic South**

Asia". Five speakers from peasant organizations, trade union groups, women's organizations, human rights organizations and academic institutions spoke on different aspects of the South Asian reality and people's (specially women's) struggles to create a just and sustainable society. The Indian participants and the media made special efforts to interact with the South Asian delegates.

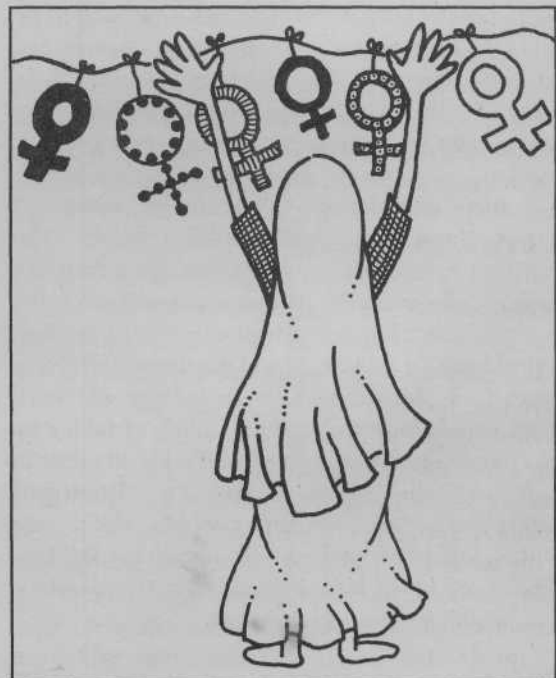
The efforts made by the IAWS to reach out to Indian scholars based abroad and foreign scholars working on India attracted women from South Africa, Germany, U.K., U.S.A., Canada, Japan, Netherlands and Thailand. Their presence added an important dimension to the Conference.

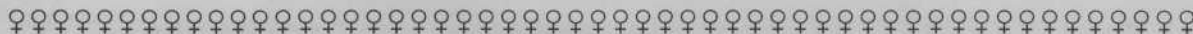
The Plenaries

The opening ceremony lit with a 1000 diyas set the mood of the meet which began with a song from Mirabai who struggled over 400 hundred years ago to establish her identity in her own way and challenged the patriarchal controls in her life.

Pagdola Kondamma from the anti-arack movement in Andhra Pradesh, in her interview says : 'Our village has no water, no primary health care centre, but plenty of arack'.

This was part of the opening plenary entitled "**Voices of Resistance and Struggle**" which focused on the crucial issues of survival facing poor women in





today's context. The present realities and women's struggles were elaborated in the other presentations too. Complex experiences arising in the context of the Total Literacy Movement in Pondicherry and the Students Movement in Andhra Pradesh were narrated.

In her key note speech on "**Women Ecology and Economic Globalization: Searching for an Alternative Vision**" Vandana Shiva, an eminent feminist ecologist, critiqued the present non-sustainable development model and the way in which the IMF, the World Bank and the GATT agreement are destroying the resources and the means of livelihood of the masses of women. The major foci of the presentation were the extremely wasteful and inhuman manner in which nature is manipulated, the loss of control experienced by people and the marginalization of women's knowledge systems.

In the afternoon of the first day the voices of women in struggle in **Rajasthan** were heard by the participants of the conference. Although there has been a sense of empowerment and several struggles, the Women's Movement is confronted with the challenge of multiple identities of women—those of class, caste and community. A cross section of speakers from adivasis, landless laborers, teachers, community organizers, and party based organizers spoke in this very illuminating and exhilarating session. This plenary co-ordinated by **Aruna Roy of Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathana** (Organization of Workers and Farmers) brought together the experiences and aspirations of people's movements on gender, environment, cast and class issues and highlighted the need for alliances between these movements. This plenary had women speakers from different class and educational backgrounds.

The second day dawned with similar echoes of struggles from the South Asian region. The discussions covered the problems emerging from the process of globalization of the economies of South Asia and the consequent marginalisation of women. The problems of minorities and the threat perception promoted by the ruling elite to indulge in heavy defence expenditure with the possibility of raking up huge commissions also figured at the discussions. In the plenary on the third day on "**Resurgent Patriarchies**" the speakers spoke about the solidification and resurgence of patriarchal thinking and behavior in the legal system, mainstream media, the economic system and religions.

Sub-theme Workshops

The morning plenary sessions were followed everyday by simultaneous workshops on 9 sub-themes.

In the sub-theme on "**Family and Sexuality**", one of the foci of the discussions was the manner in which social, religious and familial relations impact on the sexual and reproductive capabilities and feelings of women and how often control is sought to be imposed through these relationships. The role of the commercial media in reinforcing the construction of female sexuality as legitimate only within marriage does great damage to women's autonomy. There was also a discussion on the prevalence of a wide range of relationships outside marriage. The need for exploring alternatives to the patriarchal family was an important aspect of this workshop. Increasing the public space for women does not necessarily change the intra-household inequality between men and women.

The over-arching theme of the sub-theme on "**Culture, Identity and Women's Rights**" was to examine questions of identity which evolve from the intersection of categories of caste, class and community, with and around gender. Some of the themes explored in these sessions were women's relationship to the nation state and the treatment of women in politics. Another important aspect discussed was how the lack of security and autonomy in some communities, including some of the adivasi communities restrict women's access to public spaces. The discussion concluded with a recognition of the need for all struggles to deal with a range of issues—class, caste, community and gender and the need to build strategies in ways that foreground survival.

The sub-theme on "**Women's Writing: Redefinitions, Aesthetics and Future Visions**" discussed the distinctiveness of women's writing from the historical, philosophical and socio-economic points of view. It was felt that it was necessary to move out of not only patriarchal norms of morality and chastity, but also outside the 'victim syndrome'. It must address itself also to aesthetic concerns and seek to preserve the uniqueness of women's contribution in terms of myths, forms and language in de-constructing patriarchy.

The session on "**Women, Political Participation and the Politics of Organizing**" dealt with the



incorporation of women in the representative process at different levels and the limitations and constraints that the existing structures of power and patronage pose for women's active involvement. The major conclusion was that participation in the present setup by itself was not enough for social transformation. This was illustrated by the experiences of women members in Panchayats. It is critically necessary to equip women in positions of decision making with information, confidence, managerial abilities and knowledge of their responsibilities.

With regard to organizing around issues of **work**, the participants highlighted the denial of recognition to women functionaries in various women's programmes such as sathins, balwadi workers, gram sevikas, bal sevikas etc. as workers and the right to minimum wages, security of service and protection from various types of harassment. In this context, the role of the State and State sponsored bodies came in for serious criticism. The women's movement has to take up this challenge of organizing women in various informal sectors, especially in the present context of liberalization and structural adjustment, which is displacing women on a large scale. The National Policy on Women has to be formulated in a more democratic manner.

The sub-theme on "**Creation and Dissemination of Knowledge and Knowledge-Systems**" discussed the manner in which knowledge is constructed, the marginalisation of traditional knowledge and how the methods of communication of important knowledge has to be re-oriented from a feminist and a people's perspective. In this context, the scientific establishment came in for criticism as a tool and hand-maiden of hegemonic forces. It was felt that women's studies could play an important and useful role in re-constructing knowledge through a dialectical process of engagement with modern and traditional knowledge in the light of women's experience.

It was strongly felt that the presence of women's studies have to be enhanced in the field of Literature, Physical Sciences and Technology. The sub-theme of "**Work and Workers**" focussed on how concepts of work, workers, skill and heavy/light work were defined in a biased way so as to marginalize women's expertise and the need to come out with alternative definitions. A second issue was the issue of regeneration of traditional crafts to provide employment. While it is true that these are caste-based and operate within patriarchal households,

efforts can be made to overcome these hurdles for mobilizing women. A crucial sector in the coming years is going to be the fast expanding informal sector. New strategies are called for and a clearer articulation from the women's movement on the structural adjustment policy. Do we want to reject it altogether or find ways of mediating it? Agriculture and natural resource management would be priority areas. A South Asian trade block is called for and also a clear-cut research agenda.

The sub-theme on "**Women and the Media**" discussed developments in the media sector and the growing marketization of the media industry where marketability rather than the issues and national concerns receive priority. A historical picture was presented of how the commercial Hindi cinema has changed to project a different kind of heroine who has combined the 'vamp' and the 'good woman'. In the print media there is an emphasis on individualist and self-assertive, consumerist middle-class woman as the 'new woman'. Advertisements not only commodify women but also sexualize all commodities. The absence of any kind of regulation on private channels has led to utter chaos. The participants made several recommendations of which the major ones are: restructuring censor boards, improving regulatory mechanisms, sustained gender training for all media persons and monitoring media as a public activity.

The sub-theme on "**Women-Centered Natural Resource Management**" engaged with the crisis of survival faced by the majority of people in the wake of destructive models of development. The participants were seriously concerned with the acceleration of these processes by the single-minded export promotion as a strategy of development. The agenda for women's groups put forward were:

1. women's access to natural resources (land, water, forests, pasture land etc.)
2. capability-building for neighborhood resource management
3. a shift to renewable energy sources such as bio-mass.

In this context the participants spoke about many experiments in local community level management and regeneration of natural resources like water sharing schemes, wasteland development, and watershed programmes from across the country. The need for new methodologies in all these areas of work was emphasized.





The sub-theme on "Personal Laws" had the most well-attended sessions, where participants spilled over to the corridors. Several groups presented their points of view—Majlis, Working Group for Women's Rights, The Forum Against Oppression Of Women (FAOW), All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA), The Bombay group, Saheli, and Women's Research and Action Group. There were two opposing points of view: one pleading for reform within personal laws within each community and the other for a secular law applicable for all. It was felt by some that we need to seek a middle-ground between these two extreme views because:

- a. women are desperate for legal changes,
- b. women fear a threat to their community identity, and
- c. women are aware of oppression by men of their community.

As many customary practices have positive features, participants spoke about the need to work towards a draft of a gender just package of civil law and retain the possibility of options.

Spontaneous Sessions

In addition to the planned sessions several discussions were organised spontaneously during the free time.

In one such session Medha Patkar from the Narmada Bachao Andolan spoke about the people's struggles against unsustainable and destructive development thinking and projects and the attempts being made to create a National Alliance of People's Movements.

In another spontaneous session the well known writer Krishna Sobti spoke about her literary journey and her women characters. Smaller groups met to discuss alternative sexualities, a national campaign against violence against women, people's struggles against unsustainable development etc. A special press conference was organized on the rape of a minor girl which was brought to the knowledge of the Rajasthan Mahila Sangathana.

RESOLUTIONS:

In the plenary of the last day, the Conference participants discussed and passed resolutions:

1. The Conference expresses serious concern at the manner in which the Government of India has turned the long standing demand of

the women's movement for a National Policy on Women into a pre-election political stunt. With no concrete action plans or recognition of the impediments to the goal of gender justice and equitable society, the draft policy makes no mention of resource allocation in terms of budgetary provisions, or women's access and control over productive resources.

2. The Conference protests against the continued exploitation of women working as Sathins, Anganwadi workers, Balsahiyakas, Sahyoginis etc. It extended its support to the continued struggle of Sathins and other women workers struggling against the continued devaluation of their work and social victimization.
3. The participants of the Conference have been deeply disturbed by decision of the sessions court in the Bhanwari Case. Physical and mental violence on women is on the increase. A rape of 14 year old Monisha a week ago, also discussed in the Conference, is only one of the many instances. The IAWS resolves to launch a campaign against rape and sexual violence.
4. It was resolved that women's issues should be given priority in coming elections. All the reports and resolutions will be given to all parliamentarians, political parties and the National Commission of women. It is hoped that the voices raised on this platform will be given the priority in setting the agenda for election.

Apart from the intense and engrossing discussions in the plenary and the sub-theme workshops, the Conference was studded with the emotions of meeting friends, sharing our work and our lives, learning from each other and dancing and singing together. One of the several songs sung over the four days was:

*Bahna chet sake to chet,
zamano aayo chetan ro.*

*(Report written and put together by
Kamla Bhasin)*





COORDINATORS

Of The Panels And Subtheme Workshops At The VII National Conference

Overall Co-ordinator

Maithreyi Krishnaraj

Voices of Resistance and Struggle

*V.Vasudha/Rama Melkote
ANVESH*

Women Ecology and Economic Globalization:
Searching for an Alternative Vision

Vandana Shiva

Women's Visions and Strategies for a
Peaceful and Democratic South Asia

Kamla Bhasin

Resurgent Patriarchies

Ritu Menon

Family and Sexuality

Nirmala Banerjee

Culture, Identity and Women's Rights

Kalpana Kannabiran

Women's Writing: Redefinitions,
Aesthetics and Future Visions

Jasbir Jain

Women, Political Participation and the
Politics of Organizing

Vina Mazumdar/Indu Agnihotri

Creation and Dissemination of
Knowledge and Knowledge Systems

Maithreyi Krishnaraj

Work and Workers

Indira Hirway

Women and the Media

Akhila Sivadas

Women-Centered Natural Resource
Management

Chaya Datar

Personal Laws

Kumkum Sangari/Gautam Navlakha

Book Exhibition

Norma Alvares/Srilatha Swaminathan

Craftsmela

Kumkum Srivastava





A CAMPAIGN FOR FREEDOM FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The issue of sexual violence against women is not new. Women's groups in the country have been mobilizing and working on this issue for almost two decades. Significant advances have been made, notably in the area of law. Pressures built up by national campaigns have resulted in increased public awareness. Crimes of a sexual nature against women, and now children, are being increasingly highlighted in the media today.

Despite increased public awareness and media attention, sexual violence is continuing and figures of such violence are escalating. The registered cases are only the tip of the iceberg. Changes in the law notwithstanding, women and children continue to face serious constraints and barriers to reaching out for justice. The existing systems and institutions that are responsive for meting out justice show clear gender biases. There is increased frustration among women and NGOs taking up cases with attitudes of the society in general and the State bodies involved in particular.

There is a need therefore for those in the women's movement today, to understand why this is happening, to review past struggles, to look at both strengths and limitations and move forward with newer strategies. It is time for women's groups, with their experiences and expertise in different areas, to now pool in their resources to build a more comprehensive and concentrated campaign on the issue of sexual violence.

A good starting point has been the recent and continuing struggle for justice in the Bhanwari Devi rape case. It has brought up fresh challenges and areas of debate for the women's movement. The case clearly bring up the need for change, not only in the law, but also in the attitudes of the judiciary, the police, the medical establishment, as well as of the community at large. Moreover, the struggle has created today an atmosphere where a nation-wide movement for freedom from sexual violence can be carried forward.

The need for such a campaign and the serious concern of the women's movement for this issue was reflected in a resolution that was passed in the conference organized by the Indian Association of Women's Studies in Jaipur in December 1995.

The campaign, by enabling women to speak out

against sexual violence, would also be creating much needed space for women to eventually talk of other areas of violence they are subject to. This is an important and necessary step towards bringing out in the open incidents of domestic violence for instance, which abound but are rarely reported.

THE CAMPAIGN AND ITS OBJECTIVES

The campaign will be multi-pronged. Though bringing about further changes in the law is a definite focus, we know that legal amendments do not in and of themselves amount to gender justice. The hostility women and children face at every step begins with the family itself, and close on its heels follow the community, police stations, public hospitals and court rooms. The campaign will therefore address attitudes as well.

The broad objectives of the campaign are thus seen as:

- creating awareness in the public
- sensitizing specific institutions: judiciary, police, medical establishment, universities, media
- suggesting amendments to the rape law

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

As the campaign evolves, so will the strategies. To begin with however, it is clear that different strategies will be used to reach out to different sections of society. The campaign will also involve professionals – psychologists, lawyers, police and college faculty, etc – to lend their names to the draft for action. This will ensure that the campaign has a broader perspective and opens itself to new forums in order to be more effective.

In sensitizing specific institutions, the overall strategy of the campaign will be to initiate dialogue and sharing of experiences for long term interaction, rather than confrontation. For this it will be necessary not only to use our existing resources, but also to strengthen our own understanding and expertise in different areas of sexual violence, especially medical and legal.

Some of the suggested activities of the campaign therefore are:



- documenting and highlighting problems faced by women, children and NGOs in cases of sexual violence, collecting data and creating a resource pool
- preparing model case studies of such violence
- meetings, discussions, at various levels with
 - a) other NGOs in Delhi and in different states
 - b) print/electronic media people, judges and lawyers, doctors, students and faculty, police in order to initiate dialogue on the subject.
- workshop on gender sensitization with identified legal professionals, police, doctors, media, educational institutions
- legal workshops with feminist lawyers and NGOs in order to discuss desired amendments to the law
- preparing a NGO resource list and coordinating all activities with these NGOs at various levels

In order to create public awareness, the campaign will use several means of communication. The suggested activities are:

- street plays
- mock trials and tribunals using case studies prepared by NGOs
- press articles and letters to the editor
- programmes on electronic media

These are only some of the activities we will begin with. As mentioned earlier, as the campaign progresses and new individuals and groups get involved, different activities and strategies will evolve. The activities will culminate in demands for gender justice and for promoting an environment for women and children that is free from sexual violence.

ACTION INDIA

ANKUR

ALARIPU

CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

GENDER STUDIES GROUP

INDIAN ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN'S STUDIES

JOINT WOMEN'S PROGRAMME

KALI FOR WOMEN

MARG

MEDIA ADVOCACY GROUP

MOBILE CRECHES

NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF WOMEN

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IAWS

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People call me a feminist
every time I refuse to
be a doormat....