



# Newsletter

## IAWS

Indian Association  
of Women's Studies

November 2000

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### Editor's Desk

Dear Friends,

Warm Greeting to you from all of us, the newly elected EC of the IAWS and the new members of the Editorial Board of the Bulletin. This issue is more of a 'reporting' kind; it introduces (at least the institutional affiliations) the new EC members and carries reports of the activities of the association and the IXth conference held at Hyderabad.

With the next issue, we hope to grapple with difficult, sometimes controversial topics and open the pages of the newsletter to debates on contemporary topics. In the best traditions of this Newsletter, we aim to provoke debates, discussions, to probe, to and build networks. Ofcourse, none of this is possible without your responses, articles, poems, artworks.... suggestions etc.

The next issue is planned as a special issue on 'No Right to Say No : Violence Against Young Girls'.

In Maharashtra, in the last ten years, there have been at least 64 cases of violence by 'Jilted Lovers'. They have often murdered the 'beloved' who dared to say 'no' and then ended their own lives. The issue is a complex one and cannot be reduced to increasing violence in the media or 'male ego'. Several friends from different regions have reported similar increases in eve-teasing/abuse of young girls at schools, college campuses, home, workplace and in the community. We request you to share your experiences/research on these issue. Please send your contribution to the editorial office by post or by Email to: wscpune@hotmail.com by 10th January 2001.

We really do hope that voices from all regions will be heard through these pages and request you to send :

Brief Reports of Seminars Workshops  
Announcements of Courses, Workshops,  
Reviews of Books (especially significant works in regional languages),  
Letters of Protest - for Circulation.  
Your viewpoints on contemporary issues/poems/artwork etc.

Vidyut Bhagwat  
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# Indian Association for Women's Studies

Interim Narrative Report

The year 1999-2000 has been a very eventful for the Indian Association for Women's Studies. This year has been spent planning and holding several events of national importance. It is my pleasure to present a brief report of the activities of the Association for the period April 1999 to March 2000.

## a) Executive Committee Meetings

The Executive Committee meetings are the main forums for discussion and planning of events organised by IAWS or in collaboration with other institutions. Three such meetings were held in the past year: the first in June, at the conclusion of the VIII National Conference in Pune, the second in September in Hyderabad where the new Secretariat is located and the third in January in Hyderabad. This report will present a summary of the discussions at the EC meetings, which will offer a substantive profile of the Association's current activities and future plans.

Kamla Bhasin resigned from the Executive Committee in late 1998 for personal reasons. While we were very reluctant to let her go, we accepted her resignation on her assurance that she would be there any time we needed her.

Significant among the concerns voiced by the members of the Executive Committee during its meetings in the past year :

- \* The need for greater emphasis on improving the quality of discipline-wise and interdisciplinary research and theorization of women's issues on a professional basis.
- \* The need to link up more effectively with the University Grants Commission and work closely with University Academic Staff College.

- \* Several members on the Executive Committee have been experimenting over many years with new and more innovative ways of teaching Women's Studies. The strengths and constraints of programmes were discussed in fair detail. In general it was felt that the IAWS should strengthen Women's Studies Centres in the country and draw on the experience and expertise of institutions – university based and non-governmental. There is a need to facilitate an effective liaison between university centres and NGOs engaged in Women's Studies making optimum use of the clustering approach of universities. Given the high costs involved in conducting residential programmes, as has been the experience of non governmental organisations, a more effective collaboration must be established between universities and NGOs to ensure increasing standards of excellence that were cost effective at the same time. It was felt that the involvement of the UGC is vital in this aspect.
- \* The need to draw up an annual programme for training and curriculum development. It would be useful to design foundation courses in women's studies. In this exercise, a historical perspective, members felt would be essential to help students widen their perspective, the collection and preparation of material in regional languages being a first step. The Executive Committee is committed to producing such material. I take this opportunity to invite suggestions from members of the General Body.
- \* The need for comparative research and comparison of research findings, especially with regard to trends in specific areas. Within the broad framework of regional histories, specific thematic divisions could take into account specific issues as well as regional priorities.
- \* The need to document the history of the IAWS, especially because the Association is about to complete 20 years. The aim of this exercise would be to preserve and document institutional memories and record oral histories of people who had been active in the Association at various points in its history. In writing the history, different voices that have emerged in the course of the last twenty years,

particularly the debates and dialogues between activists and academics must find space. A history of this kind would in fact be a history of the women's studies movement in India.

- \* The need to look at various aspects of women's health historically - especially with regard to feminist critique of health care systems, health services, family welfare, population control policies and contraceptive policies.

As is evident from the deliberations of the Executive Committee, the IAWS has played and continues to play a critical role in Women's Studies research, teaching, curriculum design and advocacy in the country.

### **b) Regional Histories Seminars**

The Association planned a series of five seminars around the theme "Women and Regional Histories". The seminars were planned in each of the five regions in the country: North-east, North, East, West and South.

In looking at Women and Regional Histories, the seminars attempted to delineate specific thematic divisions and regional priorities, as well as conceptual clarity on notions of citizenship and identity - especially the ways in which they intersect with gender and region. The framework of workshops in each region was determined by the specificity of that region and its priorities.

Of the five seminars planned, four have been held:

- \* The Eastern Regional Seminar in Calcutta was titled "In Search of Pasts? History, Women's Movements and Women's Studies", and was held on 25 and 26 February 1999 in Calcutta at the K. P. Basu Memorial Hall, Jadavpur University. It was organised jointly by IAWS, the School of Women's Studies, Jadavpur University and the Women's Studies Research Centre, Calcutta University. In the two days, there were about 150 participants.
- \* The North-Eastern Regional Seminar was held in collaboration with the All India Coordinating Forum of the Adivasi/Indigenous Peoples on 24-25 July 1999. There were thirty-two groups from the North-East represented at the meeting. The significant achievement of the workshop was that it

gave birth to a new chapter of IP women in the region. The objectives of this chapter are to strengthen links with other groups in the region and beyond, document histories, analyse the impact of processes of assimilation in the North-East, and engage in a constructive critique of culture.

- \* The Western Regional Seminar titled Women in History: A Regional Perspective from Western India was held in collaboration with the Research Centre for Women's Studies, S. N. D. T. Women's University on 19-21 August 1999 in Mumbai. There were about 46 delegates. The seminar focussed on issues: Economy and Polity, Women's Education in Western India, Expression of Identity, Cultural Representation, Control over Sexuality, and Movements for Change.
- \* The Southern Regional Seminar was held in collaboration with Department of History, University of Hyderabad, on 30, 31 August and 1 September 1999. This seminar aimed at reviewing "women's space" in southern histories in domains like politics, literature, literary criticism, gender orientation in different relations, hierarchy, patriarchy and the formation of language. The seminar also identified existing gaps and provided reorientation to existing research.

A consolidated report of the 4 seminars was brought out in time for the IX National Conference in January. A copy is enclosed for reference.

### **c) University Grants Commission**

#### **Standing Committee on Women's Studies**

The University Grants Commission and its Standing Committee on Women's Studies have decided to bring out a volume on "Women's Studies in India". The purpose of the volume is to document the evolution and experience of Women's Studies Centres in India, both within and outside the University system. It is hoped that this will provide a kind of history of Women's Studies movement during the last quarter of a century in the context of social, economic and educational development of the country. The volume will also aim at providing a perspective for the development of Women's

Studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, focusing on the Indian scenario within the global context. The involvement of the IAWS in the formation of this committee and in the entire planning process is significant. The IAWS also provided travel subsidies to people invited to attend the last meeting of the Standing Committee in April last year. This is for us yet another demonstration of the close relationship that the Association has had with the UGC over the past twenty years, i.e. since its inception.



#### **d) IX National Conference on Women's Studies, The Process**

The Executive Committee of IAWS decided that the focus of this conference would be "Women's Perspectives on Public Policy: Evolving an Agenda for Action into the Next Millennium".

In the first eight national conferences, the themes as well as the coordinators were identified by the Executive Committee, while the sub themes were developed by the coordinators in close consultation with, or on the recommendation of the Executive Committee. While this practice undoubtedly has its merits, members have time and again felt that the process must be more inclusive and transparent. As a more democratic alternative, we decided to put out an announcement of the conference detailing the focus, inviting proposals for themes and sub-themes, from anyone interested, not only members of the Association. In response to our announcement, which was published in the Economic and Political Weekly and the Indian Review of Books, and posted on the notice boards of several institutions across the country, we received several proposals, from which the ones that feature at this conference were selected. In the selection process too, we encouraged institutions/individuals/groups with similar proposals to jointly coordinate sessions, as far as possible. While we concede that there are critical areas that do not feature in the programme because we did not receive proposals, we are entirely satisfied with the out-

come of our experiment, and do hope it will be a precedent for future conferences.

This time the IAWS was able to provide full financial support to Comet Media Foundation, Mumbai, for Stri Vividha, continuing, facilitating and strengthening the involvement of artisans and small producers, especially women, with the IAWS – a process that began at Jaipur in 1995. This is of specific relevance here, since the focus of this conference was on public policy.

A Media Team consisting of women journalists from the English Press, Hindi, Oriya, Punjabi, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Assamese, Bengali and Marathi was constituted to cover this conference, and were provided logistic support to facilitate reporting. C. Mrinalini, a member of the local Organising Committee was the Media Coordinator.

The work done by Asmita Resource Centre for Women for this conference is of critical significance. At a time when NGOs are under attack from all sides, Asmita, the group responsible for local coordination, has yet again demonstrated the indispensability of collaboration between NGOs, the university system, the bureaucracy and movements. It is an established practice of the IAWS to collaborate with a local university in the organising of the conference, with the university taking major responsibility for local coordination and hospitality. The universities in Hyderabad were willing to support the IAWS in small specific ways, but did not possess the infrastructure to host an event on this scale. Asmita was then invited by the IAWS to coordinate the work of the conference. In recognition of the practice of the Association of including a university in an organisational capacity, Asmita constituted a Steering Committee consisting of heads of various institutions/universities in the city, senior bureaucrats with a proven commitment to women's studies, and academics and creative writers of repute. The Organising Committee has drawn in senior faculty members from each of these institutions.

Most of the institutions represented on our committees have become institutional/corporate members of the IAWS: The Maulana Azad National Urdu, Pottu Sreeramulu Telugu University and Central University of Hyderabad have become Corporate Members while the NALSAR Univer-

sity of Law and NISIET have become institutional members. The Vice Chancellor of Central University readily agreed to host the Pre Conference. Information Workshop held by the CWDS. We have drawn heavily on the support of this group for volunteers, transport and other logistic support. The contribution of Mr. Prabhat, Principal Director, NISIET, and his team, in a sense, made the conference possible. Besides this, the Steering Committee hosted the inaugural lunch for the delegates.

All matters related to the conference – logistic as well as thematic – were discussed in detail at the meetings of the Steering and Organising Committees. The responsibility of executing plans fell entirely on the Asmita team, and they did a remarkable job. The Centre for Women's Development Studies, Delhi, received and edited the abstracts for publication.

Personal friends in Mudra Communications, Hyderabad, provided tremendous support to the IAWS both for the Pune conference and in far greater magnitude for this one. The IAWS brochure, the Pune conference brochure, the book of Abstracts at Pune, the brochure for this conference, the book of abstracts, the consolidated report of the regional histories seminars, the conference banner and badges have all been designed by and printed through Mudra as a special case, at not extra cost.

The IAWS has been extremely fortunate in finding financial support for the conference. Every agency we approached was extremely positive and interested in the conference. Those that could not offer support actually took the trouble of forwarding our requests to other agencies and recommending support. We are particularly grateful to Hedwig Schlags of EZE for directing our application to ICCO. Sarojini Ganju Thakur untiringly pursued our request to the Department of Women and Child Development, Government of India, for a publication grant and made sure the money was released immediately and confirmed support for both the Regional Histories Seminar Series as well as this conference. UNIFEM has assured us partial support for Stri Vividha. The Ford Foundation graciously permitted reallocation of part of their ongoing support to cover conference costs. Some serious thought must be put to the logistics

of organising events like this in future. With the constituency of the IAWS growing in geometric proportions, conference related work gets more and more elaborate and complicated each time. We have been fortunate in that we have had solid back up from Asmita, a group that has a firm base in the twin cities and very broad-based support, as is evident from the composition of the Steering and Organising Committees. This is really an exceptional situation. In the absence of this kind of back up, we need to think of mechanisms by which we can make conference coordination more manageable for anyone in this position. The Executive Committee over the last two terms has been concerned with the need to decentralise the organising of the conference, delegating and farming out responsibilities as far as possible. At the end of the Pune conference, the Executive Committee decided to appoint coordinators for logistics, theme, media, etc. These persons need not all be members of the EC. Somehow, we were not able to put this plan through for this conference, but it is necessary to think this through.



#### **e) Membership Directory**

For the first time, this year, we decided to bring out an IAWS Membership Directory. This is the culmination of a long and painstaking effort begun by Chhaya Datar to clean up our membership lists, update addresses and cross check validity of memberships against the original membership forms in each category. We have also printed and distributed copies of the IAWS Constitution.

#### **f) Election 2000**

Since this conference is being held six months ahead of schedule, the Executive Committee decided to begin the Election process at the conference. Dr. Rohini Gawankar has been appointed "Returning Officer" by the Executive Committee for Election 2000.

## Announcements

### 1. Refresher Course in 'Gender and Social Sciences', University of Pune, Jan. 2001

In the last two decades, theoretical and empirical work in the area of Women's Studies has seriously challenged the accepted theories and methods of the Social Sciences. These developments in Women's Studies have been across the disciplines of Literature, Sociology, Economics, Political Science, History, Anthropology and Philosophy. This rich body of knowledge needs to be conveyed into mainstream teaching at the Undergraduate and Postgraduate level. In this context, the Women's Studies Centre, University of Pune is organising a Refresher Course from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2001 to 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2001. The highlights of the course would be:

- a) Introduction to Feminist Theory.
- b) Impact of Women's Studies on major Disciplines and their practices.
- c) Gender Issues in "Studying Culture".
- d) Engendering analyses of major contemporary issues in the Indian context.
- e) Understanding Caste, Class and Gender in the Indian context.
- f) A focus on integrating Gender into curriculum, pedagogical practices.

For details please contact:

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### 2. Regional History Workshop

Eastern Region 4-6 November, Ranchi

Venue: Xavier Institute for Social Service  
Parulia Road, Ranchi 834 001

Phone: 200873

Time: 10.00 a.m.

For Details Contact: Ms. Vasavi

Journalist, Janasatta  
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## Courses in Women's Studies

Dear Friends,

We at the Women's Studies Centre are compiling a list of courses in Women's Studies/Gender Studies, Components on Gender/Women taught in Mainstream Courses. We hope to send this compilation to all Women's Studies Centres and Documentation Centres — so that we could learn from each other's experiences. Some of the courses could also be advertised, circulated to others through the IAWS Bulletin. The long-term plan is to hold a National Consultation of 'Teaching Gender' in 2001. Please do send the title/details/syllabi to

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## Women and the Internet

Shubhangi Apte

There are two very distinct views of the Internet. One portrays it as the messiah that is going to solve the world's problem. The other portrays the Internet as the juggernaut that is going to roll over anyone unable to harness it. The first view hails the freedom personified by the Internet. The second, in questioning the reach of the technology, asks freedom for whom.

There is no doubt that on peeling away the layers of positive hype about the Internet one is confronted by the glaring inequalities — in reach and access. The answer to the question, is this technology benefiting all, is a resounding NO. To the economic divide is now being added the information divide — the information rich (haves) and the information poor (have nots). Since information is also equated with power, those with no access to the latest forms of information are also in the danger of becoming even more powerless in this increasingly Cyber-savvy world.

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### WOMEN PIONEERS IN THE COMPUTER FIELD

Ada Byron Lovelace is known as the first computer programmer. Admiral Grace Murray Hopper is referred to as the mother of COBOL (Common Business-Oriented Language). Jean Bartik along with five other women became one of the first programmers of the ENIAC. Judy Clapp began working with software in the early 1950s at MIT on the Whirlwind, the world's first real-time control computer. Adele Mildred Koss was part of Grace Hopper's group that developed the first compilers, the A0 and A2. Joyce Currie Little developed one of the first computer curriculums in the U.S. at Baltimore Junior College and became head of the Computer and Information Systems Department.

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It is precisely to correct this increasing imbalance in power that more and more activist groups including women's groups need to get on the Internet. It is important that women's groups make use of the Internet's ability to provide quick and

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As part of my research paper for the Women's Studies Course (Women's Studies Centre, Pune University) I put together a database of 86 Web sites. This database includes feminist journals and webzines, Web sites put up by men in support of the women's cause, and resources on violence, women's studies, feminist theories, women's history, women's organizations etc. Listed here are a few Web sites from the Database.

<http://www.wwwomen.com/>

It is the premier search directory for women on-line. What might interest you are the links under Feminism, Lesbian Visibility, Women Throughout History, Women in Business and some more.

[www.rawa.org](http://www.rawa.org)

Check out the Web site of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of Women of Afghanistan), a political/social organization of Afghan women struggling for peace, freedom, democracy and women's rights in fundamentalism-blighted Afghanistan

[www.feminista.com](http://www.feminista.com)

Feminista! is an on-line journal of art, literature, social commentary, philosophy, wit, humour and respect, and is currently published on the first of each month.

[www.infoera.cl/red\\_de\\_salud/ingles.html](http://www.infoera.cl/red_de_salud/ingles.html)

This is the Web site of the Latin American & Caribbean Women's Health Network. This organization was created in 1984 during the first regional Women and Health meeting held in Tenza, Colombia.

[www.femina.cybergrrl.com/netscape.htm](http://www.femina.cybergrrl.com/netscape.htm)

FeMiNa was created in 1995 (September) and debuted on-line to provide women with a comprehensive, searchable directory of links to female friendly sites and information on the Web.

[www.freespeech.org/manushi](http://www.freespeech.org/manushi)

This is where you will find Manushi, the journal about Women and Society, on the World Wide Web.

<http://www.globalfundforwomen.org/>

This is the Web site of the Global Fund for Women which provides flexible, timely grants to women's groups around the world striving to improve women's human rights.

<http://feminist.org/>

You will find here the Feminist Majority Foundation On-line. If you're interested in Women's Health you'll find it here. The same for other issues like Women and Work, and Clinic Violence. There are special sections for Women's Sports, and Feminist Books and Films.

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cheap communication to network with like-minded people from all over the world. A patient search of the Internet will show that many networks between women are already being forged in cyberspace. It is heartening to see that many women's organizations are getting on the Net and are making their histories and activities easily available for public viewing.

The Global WomenAction 2000 network, established in March 1999, is now an active network with Web sites established in Asia, Africa etc. ([www.womenaction.org](http://www.womenaction.org)). The IIAV Web site has a section called 'Mapping the World' ([www.iiav.nl/mapping-the-world](http://www.iiav.nl/mapping-the-world)). This section is a growing database of women's library and documentation centers in the world. BOL is a moderated Electronic discussion list on gender issues currently managed by the Centre for Women's Development Studies, India.

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The genesis of the Internet can be traced to the era of the Cold War when the use of nuclear weapons in combat was a distinct possibility. It was important for the U.S. Defense department to create a communications network that would be able to withstand a nuclear attack. Thus was born the ARPANET in 1969, a network without any central authority and based on the assumption that it had to operate in tatters. This meant that even if a couple of nodes in the network were destroyed by a nuclear attack, it would still be possible to communicate through the other surviving nodes. The institution responsible for the birth of the ARPANET was the Pentagon's Advanced Research Project's Agency (ARPA).

Though born out of a military security need, the ARPANET soon found a foothold in the academic institutions. As more and more academicians realized that they could use the ARPANET to collaborate on research and exchange information, it resulted in an exponential growth of the network. More and more people started working on ways to make the Internet faster and user-friendlier. As the use of the standard technique of communication, Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) became common, more and more networks became part of the main network. By the time the ARPANET stopped functioning in 1989, there was an entire complex of networks spread out all over the world. This network of networks was called the Internet. The decentralized nature and open structure of the Internet resulted in its rapid growth and today it has taken various forms — e-mail, discussion groups, long-distance computing, file transfers, bulletin boards, mailing lists, networking, Internet Chat, e-commerce and the World Wide Web.

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Even more interesting is that some women have already formulated a theory — Cyberfeminism — that deals with the issues of

women on the Internet. Faith Wilding and Critical Art Ensemble in their paper, 'Notes on the Political Condition of Cyberfeminism' (<http://mailer.fsu.edu/~sbarnes>) have put forth a definition, "The territory of cyberfeminism includes the objective arenas of cyberspace, institutions of industrial design, and institutions of education — that is, those arenas in which technological process is gendered in a manner that excludes women from access to the empowering points of technoculture... Cyberfeminism is also a struggle to be increasingly aware of the impact of new technologies on the lives of women, and the insidious gendering of techno-culture in everyday life."



Though there is a lot of feminist content on the Internet, a quick study highlights that most of it is dominated by the developed countries. There are Web sites that talk about women's issues in the South, but they are fewer than the ones from the developed world. Moreover, while there is no dearth of Indian content on the lines of popular women's magazines, it is alarming that there are very few Indian feminist resources on the Internet. While most of the Western Search Engines (yahoo, lycos, alta vista) include Feminism as a category, it is glaringly missing from the Indian Search Engines.

In the final analysis, ignoring the Internet is not the answer. In spite of all the problems inherent in this technology, it is important that we form linkages to get on the Internet. We need to make ourselves visible on the Net to make it more democratic and representative of the world communities. Also, we need to acknowledge the positive aspects of this technology and harness it for our own purposes — be it research or activism.

Shubhangi Apte  
Aalochana

## Report of the IX National Conference on Women's Studies

IX National Conference on Women's Studies  
8-11 January, 2000, NISIET, Hyderabad  
*Evolving an Agenda for Action  
into the Next Millennium*

NISIET hosted the IX National Conference on Women's Studies at Hyderabad. The conference spread over four days (8-11 Jan., 2000) is a biennial feature of the Indian Association for Women's Studies. It was coordinated this year by the Asmita Resource Centre for Women and offered a rich fare of intellectual discourses, informal discussions, an exhibition, meaningful films, photo documentary and ongoing cultural activities.

The primary objective of the conference was a critical assessment of public policy: historical and contemporary, in shaping women's lives. By public policy is meant not only policy documents actually released from time to time by the government in power but by all public agencies in all sectors of life – in institutions and their functioning, in the prioritisation in allocation of resources and in the modus of implementation.

The conference attempted to identify the sectoral priorities that have emerged in each region, their dynamics and their linkages with mainstream priorities viz, employment, health, violence, environment, communalism, family, political representation and right to resources including property.

The plenaries addressed all important policy initiatives in the last few decades. Population, health, legal reforms, labour policy and censorship — evaluating policies as well as women's responses to them.

The sub themes explored major shifts in priorities and perspectives and sought to understand and foreground unexplored areas and successful and unsuccessful strategies.

The ballet *War and Peace* was an emphatic exposition on how women through the ages, while bearing the brunt of conflict and violence have remained the only unfailing agency for transformation.

This was also emphasised upon by the observer guest, Srilankan activist Sunila Abeysekera who said in her speech: "We know that it is women in the conflict ridden parts of our sub continent who have come forwards to challenge patriarchal norms of war and conflict and to replace it with a humane norm of dialogue, consensus and negotiation... women belonging to different communities that are in conflict with one another have been the pioneers of community based peace building efforts, balancing their individual concerns as members of a particular community or group with their collective interests as women". She was delivering the Madhuri Shah Memorial lecture at the end of the conference.

At Savera Function Hall less than a kilometre from the main venue of the conference, Comet Media Foundation of Mumbai organised *Stri Vividha* — a development resource fair. This was a celebration of the vitality of alternative efforts in education, communication, livelihoods and art aiming at sustainable and equitable ways of working and living. While the conference concentrated on academic discourses and debates around the theme of women's perspectives on public policy, *Stri Vividha* brought these issues into the public arena by making a popular event of it replete with fun, food and films. The experience of the conference can be summed up in the words of Vasanth Kannabiran who said in her inaugural address: "We meet at a moment when the future seems bleak and yet we meet to bend our minds to the task of building a new society... We meet to search for ways to influence and write policy in a way that it takes account of women. To set up mechanisms by which women's rights and women's interest will have the priority that they require in a sane society. A peaceful society".

## Report of Workshops on Mental Health

Sadhana Natu and Bhargavi Davar

### Women and mental health

In the 1990s, many women's organisations in India have engaged with the question of women's 'mental health'. The earlier reluctance to admit the reality of 'mental illness' as a part of women's lived experience has been replaced by systematic efforts to engage with and deconstruct the received lexicon of the mental and the behavioural sciences. Some attempts at giving perspectives and 'agenda setting' have happened and much has been written about, in terms of feminist ideology, research, practices and activism, regarding this subject. By the late 1990s, a mental health module or component has been appended to quite a few health training projects, training curricula, self-help health books, etc. that are woman-focussed. It has been evident that mental health, and the special problems of women who have entered and exited the psychiatric regime, needed feminist deconstruction. The women's movement has been responding in diverse ways to this challenging task. Mental health is increasingly a priority item in the global health initiatives and programmes. Global databases have emphasised the rise in mental and behavioural problems and have specially stressed the needs of vulnerable social groups. 'Development' related spin-offs (poverty, homelessness, displacement, violence and cultural loss) invariably have been linked with greater psychological stresses. Political crises, civil strife, communal war, and other natural crises situations such as disasters have also become important mental health issues. In each of these contexts, and with respect to India, feminist perspectives and special emphases by professionals on 'women' are being created.

In all these developments, we must also make a note of the uneasy relationships and theoretical tensions between feminism, the mental and

behavioural sciences and the human rights positions. At the level of negotiations between women's collectives, professional groups and activism, these tensions have become quite obvious at various levels. Creating a new lexicon for women-centered mental health involves working through these knots and interrogations at many levels, and clarifying what feminism and feminist practise means in the mental health context.

In our work together over the last 3 years here in Pune, we, [Bhargavi and I], have tried our best to address some of these issues and concerns. In this period, a meaningful friendship has been formed between us which has carried our own individual concerns forward. Bapu Trust, a social science forum committed principally to mental health advocacy, has also been created. So our concerns with Gender and mental health is now able to make linkages with the larger issues critical to psychiatry and the other mental sciences (Eg. ethics of practise, and the rights issues).

Bapu Trust organised a workshop in September on 'Planning gender-sensitive community interventions'. The workshop set up a local dialogue between feminists, feminist activists, health groups, professionals, advocates, users of mental health services and NGOs on the meaning and scope of community mental health. We also intended the workshop to help network these different stake holders in mental health in Pune. There were sessions linking mental health with topics central to the feminist concerns: common mental health problems, victimisation by violence, feminist psychology and the contribution of women's movement to mental health issues. Important dimensions to this workshop that require special mention were the sessions devoted to mental health advocacy: the mental health law and rights of persons diagnosed with a psychiatric illness; and psychiatric ethics. The complete workshop report is available for reference at the Bapu office archive for anyone who is interested.

I did a workshop for the Women's studies Centre last December for the 'Refresher's course for College Teachers'. In this workshop, I had the opportunity to address college teachers in order to acquaint them with a broad framework of mental health, feminist issues in mental health, services and policy, and present advocacy concerns. Since

teaching is an active intervention point, I thought it important to also address problems of youth, and how these issues may be taken up in the course of teaching of the regular curriculum. This workshop was interactive and elicited a good response.



Together, we also did a structured presentation, of 3 lectures each, for Aalochana, a women's documentation centre in Pune, on Women and mental health. The audience comprised of NGOs, feminists, activists, journalists and students and was a thoroughly enjoyable experience. While Bhargavi covered issues pertaining to clinical work and feminist concerns with respect to diagnoses and treatment, I gave a broad overview of received theories in clinical psychology and how these are to be looked at, questioned and reformulated from a feminist perspective. We decided to adopt a quasi-historical approach to the presentation, because we felt that contemporary practices have been regulated by the histories of the sciences, and the political contexts linked to these histories, e.g. colonialism. We also stressed the primacy of psychology as a mental health discipline, instead of psychiatry, which professionals see as the primary mental health science. Our aim was also to give a substantive content to 'feminist therapy' and the discussion around this with the group was very productive, as many were also practising in the field. Our presentation was pedagogical, but there was enough scope for discussions and our audience was very responsive. Certain issues which

have not been raised before, such as the problems of single women, and the problems of mentally ill women within the women's collectives, were raised. Bhargavi has been saying for a while that the women's movement is yet to create safe places within itself for including the experiences of diagnosed women. This provocative stance was discussed in a positive way within the group and alliances were forged between the lesbian rights positions, the dalit women's positions and us, who were speaking on behalf of persons with mental illness. We hope that we will have the opportunities in future to present these lectures again. These workshops and presentations have also brought us in touch with media persons and journalists and we hope to cultivate these avenues also.

Eventually, for ourselves and for Bapu, we have a dream of building Women and mental health into a multi-dimensional discipline. At Bapu, we are building a fledgeling resource centre, which will collect and store information, build perspectives and curricula, and create supports at the community level. Bhargavi did a short 3-day orientation module for NGOs on Women and mental health, for the Women and Health (Maharashtra) Programme. I too have been associated with organisations in Pune as a resource person on ongoing health projects. Other than our own individual academic work, we are also engaged with local issues on mental health advocacy: for eg. on building local pressure for obtaining benefits from the 'Persons with disabilities Act'; discussions on ethics in mental health; etc. Our interest in gender and women's issues in mental health is certainly enriched by these larger concerns.



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### Important Announcement

- \* Life Membership                      Rs. 500/-  
for individuals
  
- \* Life Membership                      Rs. 1000/-  
for individuals

Operative 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2001

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## Global March 2000, Pune

Medha Kotwal

It is rarely that a common programme or slogans link up the whole world. The year 2000 was different. A global situation of increasing poverty, unemployment and violence cutting across rich as well as poor countries of the world has brought women together. A world campaign has called for an immediate halt to WTO-IMF-WB dictated structural adjustment programmes that are the root cause of the deplorable situation.

The 15th of October 2000 will remain a special day for it marked a global action. Rallies were held right from New York to New Delhi. A state rally was organised in Pune as well, by the Maharashtra State Committee, Global March of Women, 2000 formed specially for this purpose. In all twenty six organisations across Maharashtra supported this campaign. The committee consisted of eleven members and the gigantic task of organising the rally was successfully carried off by the office bearers — Nirmala Sathe, Kiran Moghe, and Vidya Bal. The whole year round several programmes were held to mobilise women to culminate into this very impressive convergence of women power.

The rally drew over two thousand women from all over the state. Adivasi women from Karjat, Dahanu, Thane, peasant and working class women as well as middle class women from Mumbai, Nasik, Aurangabad, Dhulia, Pune and several other parts of Maharashtra were present. And in spite of a strike by rickshawallas, most women managed to get to the venue in time.

The organising committee had chosen this as an occasion to honour the senior women leaders who had till now successfully led the women's movement in Maharashtra. These were women from the National Federation of women, the Samajwadi Mahila Sabha, Janwadi Mahila Sangathana and the Lal Nishan party. The women

honoured were Ahilya Rangnekar, Tara Reddy, Malini Tulpule, Shanta Ranade, Mrinal Gore, Anutai Limaye, Pramila Dandavate, Leela Bhonsale, Manju Gandhi and Kusum Nadkarni.

Two main presentations were made on the theme. Dr. Sulabha Brahme, the economist explained very simply the impact of globalisation on the lives of the people especially the poor who always bear the brunt of such policies. She condemned the policies of the government that were totally insensitive to the needs of the people and urged women to come together and fight these policies of the government.

The other major presentation was made by Manisha Gupte, of MASUM, whose major contribution has been in the field of health and sexuality. Her focus was on the increasing violence against women brought on by the new economic policies. Whether it was the distortion of the body of a young girl or the increasing numbers of sex workers being pushed into sex-trade, or the multiplying beauty contests, the new philosophy of the market legitimised the increasing violence. She urged women to become aware of these linkages of violence and the economy and to resist them.

Besides these two presentations, Ahilya Rangnekar of the CPM and Mrinal Gore of the



Janata Dal also addressed the gathering and inspired the women with their fiery words to carry on their struggle against the unjust policies of the government.

Twelve resolutions were passed at this meet. These had been arrived at through earlier discussions and were presented by different speakers. These urged the government to –

1. Improve the Public Distribution System
2. Stop the Privatisation of Public Sectors.
3. Improve the conditions of the Unorganised Labour.
4. Halt the Privatisation of the Essential Services
5. Provide essential health services to people.
6. Stop the privatisation and contractual nature of education system.
7. To recognise and halt the impact of globalisation on adivasi, dalit and minority women.
8. Stop the growing alcoholism blessed by the government itself.
9. Oppose the fundamentalist and communal forces
10. Stop the commodification of women
11. Stop the promotion of violence, communalism, and consumerism through the media.
12. To provide land for the displaced people and stop the violence of development.

At the end a cultural programme was presented by Charul and Vinay of the Loknaad group from Ahemdabad.

## Protests/Speak Out

Joint Statement by National Organisations of Women and Women's Studies on the Prologue to NCW's Recent Publication 'Rape — A Legal Study'

We are shocked that the Prologue of the book Rape: A Legal Study contains a historical presentation of position of women in ancient India which distorts history and introduces a communal propagandist slant which has no place in a publication of the National Commission for Women.

Paragraph 6 of the Prologue states that in ancient India women enjoyed "an able (?) position in the household and in society. As the Queen of the household, her position was envied by her

counterparts elsewhere. Unfortunately constant invasion by foreign elements from about 8<sup>th</sup> Century changed the scenario to the detriment of women. Her vulnerability to abuse by the invading hordes bestowed upon man responsibility to protect her and from then develop the inherent dominant role of the male within the family fold and her inevitable dependence on the male. Long years of the invasion and infliction of crime on her resulted in many protective measures. The direct effect of this state of affairs was perforce, keeping women within the corners of the home and consequential enforced illiteracy which has been, by and large, her lot since then".

We register our protest against such statements for the following reasons:

- a) This is not history but is distortion. Setting aside recent scholarship by women's studies scholars on the origins of patriarchy and oppression of women in ancient India, even 'nationalist historians' like R.C. Majumdar and A.S. Altekar, acknowledged the decline in women's status several centuries before the compilation of Manusmriti which still remains the pillar for Indian society's dominant attitude to women.
- b) The National Commission for Women is created by an Act of Parliament in the 5<sup>th</sup> decade of the Indian Republic, a secular state. An official document released by the Commission should not contain such non-secular statements with communal connotations, which can be challenged even by undergraduate students of history.

We join all others who have protested against this Prologue and demand its deletion to restore the credibility of an otherwise painstaking document representing the considered views of the NCW.

**All India Democratic Women's Association, All India Women's Conference, Centre for Women's Development Studies, Indian Association for Women's Studies, Joint Women's Program, YWCA of India**



## Population Policy

Centre for Women's Development Studies,  
Indian Association for Women's Studies,  
Joint Women's Programme YWCA of India

You are aware that the Maharashtra Government has passed a Population Policy in May, 2000 and Government orders to implement the same in September, 2000. Several women's organisations, health groups, child rights and human rights groups had met on 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2000 to discuss and take a collective position on the policy.

This is to request you to widely circulate it among groups/communities that you are working with. We would appreciate it, if you seek signatures endorsing the statement on a separate sheet and send it to lakshil@tiss.edu.

### Joint Statement on Maharashtra Population Policy

We, the undersigned organisations strongly condemn the decision of the Congress-NCP Democratic Front Government of Maharashtra, to implement a coercive population policy that seeks to reduce the numbers of poor and marginalised who depend on the State for their survival. The policy is full of punishments and disincentives for those who do not accept the "small family" norm. We are shocked at this blatant violation of the Cairo Platform of Action that India is a signatory to, and which commits our country to a target, incentive and disincentive-free approach to family planning.

Instead of raising the bogey of population growth, there is a need to immediately halt the indiscriminate and unequal consumption and distribution of resources. Free market systems and models of development that have fostered ecologically unsustainable production and consumption patterns, need to be challenged and opposed. Any policy that ignores these issues and targets controlling the numbers of the poor, who do not even consume enough for their own survival, is unsci-

entific, empirically incorrect and illogical. The "State Population Policy" as laid out in a GR dated 9 May 2000, does this in an extremely fallacious manner.

The policy states that only those families that have adopted the state government's concept of a "small family", defined as "one with two living children", will henceforth be considered eligible for government schemes and subsidies. Subsequently, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2000, the government announced that the third child and their families will no longer be eligible for around 60 to 70 individual and family-based poverty-alleviation schemes presently implemented by the government. State Government employees who fail to limit their children to two will be denied medical benefits and house loans. Incidentally, it was the BJP election manifesto in 1996 that first proposed a cut in rations to those families with more than two children.

It is a well established fact that malnourishment, high rates of infant mortality, lack of education, water and sanitation, all contribute to high death rates and therefore higher birth rates. On the contrary, social policies that provide for basic needs — inexpensive food and nutrition, potable drinking water, sanitation, education and employment — have historically laid the grounds for lowering birth rates the world over, including the State of Kerala. A policy that denies subsidies to the poor will surely be counterproductive and will only exacerbate the fundamental reason for high birth rates, viz. Poverty.

As it is today the state of the poor in the State of Maharashtra is deplorable. As a result of the IMF-World Bank sponsored Structural Adjustment Policies, all government schemes are today being targeted only to those "poor" who



fall in the category of "Below the Poverty Line". For access to the PDS, the Maharashtra government uses ridiculously low cut-off limits for the state poverty line of Rs. 4,000/- in rural and Rs. 15,000/- in urban areas, thus limiting the once universal PDS and other government schemes to a handful of families. Barely six months ago the DF Government doubled the priced of food grains on the PDS, raising them to levels higher than the market prices. As a result, while lakhs of tonnes of food grains continue to rot in government warehouses, hardly 20% are being lifted from the PDS in Maharashtra. Equally shocking is the fact that many Anganwadies, particularly in rural Maharashtra have not received supplies of supplementary nutrition for 3 to 4 months during this year. In such a scenario, this move to further restrict families that can have access to various government schemes to only those that obey the two child "small family" norm, will lead to impoverishment of more numbers of the population. Denying food through PDS and other facilities like nutrition supplements, free education for girls, etc., to children who happen to be the much maligned "third child of the family", will merely lead to higher rates of malnutrition, infant mortality and birth rates, and declining food shares of women and girl children. While it is unlikely that the disincentives will directly result in the poor curtailing the number or children they have, it is more likely that population control will be achieved by another means – of starvation deaths.

The DF Government also plans to implement the law that was passed by the previous BJP-Shiv Sena Government that bans those with more than two children from contesting Panchayat and Municipal elections. Such a law is patently authoritarian and undemocratic, since it takes away the fundamental right of political participation, and discriminates against the poor.

Furthermore, this population policy has not been discussed in the State Assembly. On the other hand the government has promptly appointed various state and district level committees to oversee the implementation of the policy.

We are convinced that the policy is authoritarian, undemocratic, anti-women, anti-poor and anti-minorities. It infringes upon Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution of India. It seeks to punish

the disadvantaged and weaker sections of society by coercing them to adopt the small family norm, without making adequate provision to meet the conditions of employment, nutrition, health and education that will enable them to have small families. It would be better if the government lowered PDS prices, raised the cut-off limit of the poverty line and made available inexpensive and clean food grains to the majority of the people, and made specific provisions to improve health and education services, and the law that bans those with more than two children from contesting local elections be withdrawn immediately.



#### **Signed by:**

**Indian Association for Women's Studies**

**Janavadi Mahila Sanghatan**

**Samarthan**

**Yuva**

**Vidrayak Sansad**

**Bharatiya Mahila Federation**

**Women's Centre**

**Ccommunalism Combat**

**India Centre for Human Rights and Law**

**Maitreyi**

**Appnalaya**

**Ration Kriti Sanghatana**

**Aawaaz-e-Niswaan**

**Akshara**

**Swadhar**

**Initiative — Women in Development**

**Forum for Women's Health**

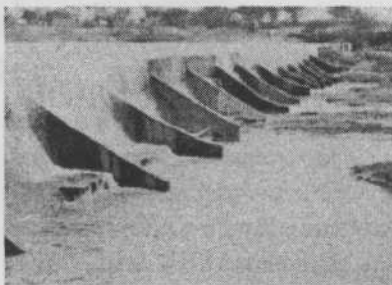
**Forum Against Oppression of Women**

**Maharashtra Forced**

**Cehat**



## Disappointing Judgement on Narmada



On the 18th of October, 2000, the three judge bench of the Supreme Court delivered its verdict on the PIL filed by the Narmada Bachao Andolan against the Union of India and the State Governments of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh. Now Sardar Sarovar Dam is to be completed as expeditiously as possible. Where in reality, 'officially' displaced families are not rehabilitated so far, one has to leave the thousands of oustees to their fate. It is painful that the Supreme Court has allowed this judgement to make such claims that the big dams do not have disastrous environmental impact and India had become self-sufficient in foodgrains by big dams.

For more details please see -

### **The People v/s The God of Big Dams**

by Arundhati Roy in

The Times of India, Bombay,

Thursday , October 26, 2000, Pg. 9

Feminist research over the past two decades has raised more than doubts about the so called self-sufficiency in foodgrains and has underlined the growing violence, malnutrition and poverty of women in the so called 'green revolution' belts of the country. In spite of the big dams, poor women's arduous labour for food, fuel and water continues and is often intensified by increasing statisation and privatisation.

This Supreme Court judgement would have us believe that the big dams have nothing to do with either the environmental hazards or the labour of women of peasant community.

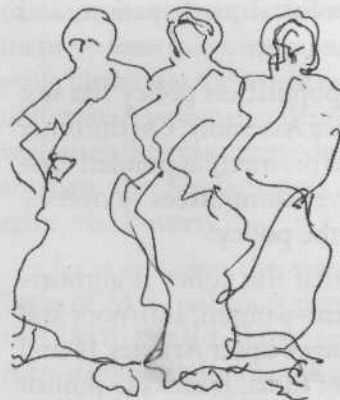
Send your responses/protests about this judgement especially in the context of its impact on Women.



## Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas

25<sup>th</sup> December, the day on which the manusmriti was publicly put to flames by Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, is now commemorated as Bharatiya Mahila Divas. Since 1996, Women's groups, Dalit organizations, Political parties have been coming together to celebrate this day. The first of these events was held at Nagpur and Vardha, the second at Pune, the third at Aurangabad in Maharashtra. The fourth Bhartiya Stree Mukti Divas will be celebrated at Ahmednagar in Maharashtra on 25<sup>th</sup> December, 2000. The Bhartiya Stree Mukti Divas is not in opposition to the International Women's Day. It seeks to highlight the interlinkages between caste and women's subordination in Indian society; a fact highlighted by Dr. Ambedkar. The Manusmriti stands as a symbol of Brahmanism and Women's subordination. Its public burning by Dr. Ambedkar was a call for the liberation from chains of caste and patriarchy. On this day we once again reaffirm our commitment to this liberation. For more information on the same contact:

Rekha Thakur  
J/17 Palm Aeres  
Gawanpada  
Mulund (E)  
Mumbai 400 081  
Tel: (022) 567 5615



## Maharashtra State Stree Abhyas Vyasapeeth: A Report of the Bi-Yearly Convention, May 2000

Bi-yearly convention of the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyasapeeth held at Sangli in May 2000 was a big event where the General Body Meeting and the bi-yearly elections were also held. The new Executive Council comprises Dr. Chandrakala Bhargava (President), Dr. Hemalata Kothari (Vice-President), Smt. Jyotsna Chitnis (Treasurer), Prof. Meenakshi Apte and Smt. Sudha Karkhanis. Smt. Vijaya Chowk, Smt. Sharayu Anantram, Smt. Vandana Talekar, Smt. Roopa Shah and Smt. Shruti Tambe have also been decked as members of the E.C.

Smt. Shreedevi Goyal, Dy. Director General of Police, Maharashtra State inaugurated the Convention at Sangli.

In her keynote address Prof. Pushpa Bhave effectively explained the meaning and dimensions of feminism and also observed that our existing patriarchal culture and society will recognise real strength of women if they actively participate in politics.

Smt. Sudha Karkhanis in her presidential address highlighted the need for women's studies and noted that the knowledge and awareness emerging from such studies should reach common women.

Well-known writer Prof. Kamal Desai chaired the convention the following day. Veteran political leader Smt. Mrinal Gore in her speech observed that globalisation is leading to increasing marginalisation of women in every aspect of development.

Disturbing incidents of burning women alive like that of Vidya Prabhu Desai from Mumbai are sharp pointers to the fact that a lot of conscientisation work needs to be done. Many public meetings and 'dharanas' were held by the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyasapeeth to mark its

protest against such incidents of violence against women. The MSAV also protested in a big way against women not being allowed to enter the temple at Shani Shinganapur. Many camps were organised to educate college students and youth on issues of gender inequality and on increase in committed against women.

Tributes were paid to the Veteran Gandhian leader, freedom fighter, late Dr. Ushaben Mehta, who was rhw first president of the first convention of the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyasapeeth. Ushaben was a widely respected public figure, who was always a pillar of strength tot the women's movement. Condolences were also paid to Nirmalaben Mehta who died at Sevegram.



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I enclose a demand draft/money order for Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ made out to the **Indian Association of Women's Studies**.

Signature and Date : \_\_\_\_\_

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Education: \_\_\_\_\_

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Please fill, detach and mail to :  
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No. 46, 1<sup>st</sup> Main Road,  
Jayalakshampuram,  
Mysore 570 012.

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