



Swati

Editorial (Guest)

Newsletter

IAWS
Indian Association
of Women's Studies

August 2003

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Editor's Desk

As this special issue on WSF goes to the press – all Women's Studies practitioners in the country are expressing shock and concern about the UGC's proposal to rename Women's Studies as 'Women and Family Studies Centres'. The proposed guidelines for Women's Studies in the Xth Plan reduce Women's Studies Centres to monitoring agencies of government and international organisations. This is an erasure of the vision incorporated in the National Policy on Education (1986) as also of the efforts and writings of more than two generations of scholars and activists who have sort to develop women's studies as an interdisciplinary area of research and teaching. The IAWS which pioneered the development of women's studies is no longer even represented on the UGC standing committee on women's studies. The proposal to rename and remap women's studies as women and family studies is a matter of serious concern to all of us members and we need to have a wider debate on the issue at the local and central levels.

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In the last decade the interlinked rise of communalism and globalisation has posed several challenges to the women's movements and women's studies. This renaming is one more in the series of challenges. In times like this, collective joint platforms like the ASF and WSF which counter the neo-liberal and right wing forces adds strength to our on-going struggles. The editorial collective looks forward to your suggestions and comments on this special issue edited by Dr. Kiran Moghe. This issue also carries a letter written by the IAWS Executive to the UGC seeking reconsideration and wider debate on the question of renaming of women's studies. Do send in your comments and letters of solidarity on the issue of renaming of women's studies to wsc@unipune.ernet.in.

Sharmila Rege

On behalf of our editorial collective, it gives me great pleasure to present to all our members and readers, this issue of the IAWS Newsletter. We have chosen to focus on the subject of the World Social Forum in this issue. We do so, not only because it is a forthcoming event of global significance being held in India early next year (16-21 January 2004), but more so because the chosen themes of the World Social Forum deeply impinge upon the existence of women in our country. As described in the accompanying article (*World Social Forum 2004*) about its origin and nature, the WSF began as a platform to encompass all movements opposed to the forces of neo-liberal capitalist globalisation. Today, it has declared itself as a forum that is against imperialist globalisation, patriarchy, militarism, religious sectarianism and fundamentalism and casteism and racism. It is clear that the WSF secretariat felt it was imperative to include the latter two themes, not only because they are of special relevance in the Indian context, but also because there is an acknowledgement that all the issues are interrelated. Since the discipline of women's studies grew out of the recognition that gender is a multi-faceted construct, it may not be very difficult for some of us to make the necessary connections. However, for many, the advent of policies of privatisation and liberalisation in India in 1991 and the rise of politics based on communal polarization may appear as a mere (though not happy!) coincidence. On the other hand, the experience of the women's movement in the last decade has shown that the struggle for women's equality has been deeply and adversely affected, by globalisation as well as the rise of communal forces, independently as well as in an interconnected manner. The very fact that the concept of Women's Studies is sought to be strait jacketed and the Centres for Women's Studies converted to "Family Studies" in a context of declining budgetary support is a good enough example. Mass

struggles to counter the negative impact of globalisation policies on women's livelihood, employment opportunities, access to water, food security systems, health care, education, etc. have had to grapple with the threat to basic women's unity. Feelings of insecurity arising out of economic tensions have been exacerbated by the politics of identity based on religion, region, caste and community. There is a growing body of work on the impact of changing economic policies on different aspects of women's lives, and we have included *Madhura Swaminathan's* article as an example. However, a great deal of work needs to be done to examine and analyse the interconnections between the two processes, and we hope *Jayati Ghosh's* article will inspire more scholarly work, particularly in the area of women's studies, in that direction. We have also included *three reports of seminars and workshops* held on different topics (son preference, local governance and dalit issues) at the Asian Social Forum, which was a kind of precursor to the WSF, and was held at Hyderabad in January this year. The reports will give our readers an idea of what kind of discussions and debates are likely to be part of the WSF at Mumbai, and we hope that many of you will be prompted to take part in the event.

We are living in deeply troubled times. The US-UK occupation of Iraq and its implications for world peace, the deep economic crisis that is affecting not just Third World countries such as ours, but also the developed ones, strife and conflict in several parts of the world, and our own grim domestic situation, are enough to make many of us wonder whether there is ever a way out. It is precisely at this juncture when the official and the multinational controlled media is informing us that there is no alternative that the World Social Forum has emerged with its slogan of "Another World is Possible." Die-hard cynics would like to point out that such platforms only spawn fruitless debate and

discussion. It would be instructive for them to know that it was the WSF network that facilitated the huge international protest against the US led occupation of Iraq, and the demonstrations that saw the participation of over a billion people in anti-war demonstrations in 602 cities across the world on the 15th of February 2003.

For the women's movement, the construction of another world is imperative; it is the very rationale for the movement itself. Within the movement, there may be many theories of existing oppression, and many models for alternative social systems, but the goal of women's equality, and a society free of class, caste and gender exploitation remains common to all. The WSF provides a unique opportunity for the interface of different trends within the women's movement, to dialogue and debate, with each other and other sections, within India and across the world. We hope members of the IAWS and our readers will find the time to participate in it and enrich themselves and their disciplines as well as others in the process.

Kiran Moghe
Guest Editor

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World Social Forum-2004

The World Social Forum was conceived as an international forum built around the slogan "Another World is possible" to contest neo-liberal economic policies and capitalist led globalization. The first three WSFs were held in January and February 2001-2003 at Porto Alegre, Brazil. The first WSF in 2001 had 20,000 participants from more than 100 countries. The second WSF had 55,000 people from 123 countries, WSF 2003 had 1,00,000 people from more than 130 countries. WSF 2001 had 16 conferences and 420 workshops; in 2002 there were 27 conferences and seminars and 900 workshops and WSF 2003 had 61 conferences and 1200 workshops. In addition to WSF, there have been regional and thematic forums during 2002-2003.

Formed after WSF 2001, the International Council (IC) contributes to the WSF methodology, outreach, communication strategies as well as the local and regional organizing process.

WSF in India – India has been chosen as the host country for WSF 2004, to bring in Asian and African concerns to greater prominence. WSF 2004 is –

- 1) A symbol of unity and democratic space for people to assert their rights for peace and a world free of violence, bigotry and hatred.
- 2) It will focus on imperialist globalization and also on the issues of religious and sectarian violence, casteism and patriarchy.
- 3) It will make space available for less visible, marginalized, unrecognized and oppressed people of the society.
- 4) It will advance the debate on Indian concerns and yet simultaneously maintain an international perspective.

WSF India Process

- 1) **India General Council (IGC)** It is the decision making body. Its membership is open to all social movements and organizations committed to the WSF charter of principles. It has 135 members.
- 2) **India Working Committee (IWC)** It forms the policy guidelines, which are the basis for functioning of the WSF India process. It has 67 organisations (nominated from IGC). The IWC has 14 national trade unions and workers' organizations, 8 national women's organizations, 6 national farmers' networks, and 4 national platforms each of dalits, adivasis, 4 student and youth bodies, as well as 27 social movements; other organizations and NGOs.
- 3) **India Organising Committee (IOC)** It is the executive body of the WSF 2004 and is responsible for organizing the events. It consists of 45 individuals, each being a member of one of the 8 working groups.
- 4) **Mumbai Organising Committee (MOC)** It is the organizing body for WSF 2004. It, along with IOC has the following working groups:
 - Program
 - Venue and Logistics
 - Communication and Media
 - Liaison
 - Finance
 - Culture
 - Mobilisation
 - Youth and Students.

WSF 2004

Venue: Mumbai Date: 16-21 January 2004.

Mumbai is chosen as the venue as it is an ideal site to challenge neo-liberal globalisation agenda. Its proximity with the rest of the world by air and sea, and a large infrastructure to cater to the thousands expected to participate in the event, provides added advantage.

Mobilization – Around 75,000 delegates will participate in the WSF 2004. A range of accommodation facilities would be provided.

Reception Centres will be set up at all major entry points of Mumbai and shuttle Bus services will be available to the venue.

WSF India will work closely with the International Secretariat and International Council for international mobilization.

Programme and Methodology

- The Programme is focused on: Imperialist globalization
- Patriarchy
- Militarism and Peace
- Communalism (religious sectarianism and fundamentalism)
- Casteism and racism (oppression, exclusion and discrimination based on descent and work

WSF 2004 will include diverse forms of interaction including plenary sessions, conferences, seminars, round table discussions, workshops, cultural events, and mass meetings, rallies and marches.

Program Format

It will provide a larger space for self-organized activities, with the official organizers confining themselves to only a part of activities.

The events charted out each day, for four days are:

- 1 conference of 15,000-20,000 people.
- 1 round table and table of dialogue and debate of 4,000 people
- 3 panel discussions of 4,000 people
- 200 spaces for seminars and workshops with capacity ranging from 50 to 1000 people
- cultural spaces for continuous and spontaneous activities
- organized cultural spaces for events like theatre, music, dance, folk forms, poetry etc.
- 8 spaces for films

- spaces for living display of arts
- spaces for dialogue and alliance building
- testimonials and voices of resistance: 6-8 per day

It is proposed that registration be closed by 1st November so alliances and partnerships could be worked out in similar events. If there are conflicts over spaces, then the selection would be based on the following criteria:

- Diversity of groups proposing the topics
- Balance of various topics
- Global perspective

For details of event registration and other information you may visit the WSF website at www.wsfindia.org

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Concrete Alternatives to Religious and Economic Fundamentalism

After September 11, the task is even more clear: the challenge is to shift a discourse around the vague notion of globalization into a specific debate about democracy. In a period of 'unprecedented prosperity', countries around the world were told they had no choice but to slash public spending, revoke labour laws, rescind environmental protections – deemed illegal trade barriers – and defund schools. All this was apparently necessary to make them trade ready, investment friendly world competitive.

The task now is so measure the euphoric promises of globalization – that it would bring general prosperity, greater development and more democracy-against the reality of these policies. We need to prove that globalization – this version of globalization – has been built on the back of local human and ecological welfare.

Too often, these connections between global and local are not made. Instead, we sometimes seem to have two activist solitudes. On the one hand, there are the international globalization activists who seem to be fighting faraway issues, unconnected to people's day-to-day struggles. Because they don't represent the local realities of globalization, they are too easily dismissed as misguided university students or professional activists. On the other hand, there are thousands of community-based organizations fighting daily struggles for survival, or for the preservation of the most elementary public services. Their campaigns are often dismissed as purely local, even insignificant, which is why most grassroots activists understandably feel burnt out and demoralized.

The only clear way forward is for these two forces to merge. What is now the anti-globalization movement must turn into thousands of local movements, fighting the way neo-liberal politics are playing out on the ground: homelessness, wage stagnation, rent escalation, police violence, prison explosion, criminalization of immigrants and refugees, the erosion of public schools and imperilling of the water supply. At the same time, the local movements fighting privatization and deregulation on the ground need to link their campaigns into a large global movement, one capable of showing where their particular issues fit into an international economic agenda being enforced around the world. What is needed is a political framework that can both take on corporate power and control internationally, and empower local organizing and self-determination.

Excerpted from Klein Naomi (2002): From Symbols to Substance: After September 11, Concrete Alternatives to both religious and economic fundamentalism are needed more than ever. Fences and Windows Dispatches From The Front Lines Of The Globalization Debate, Leftword, Delhi

Markets, Fundamentalism and Conflict: A Gender Perspective

Jayati Ghosh

There are various aspects of market-oriented economic liberalisation and globalisation that are known to be adverse for working people. But even apart from these, it is increasingly being recognised that some of the economic and social processes unleashed by markets also have other adverse consequences. In particular, they generate or accentuate tendencies of fundamentalism, sectarianism and related conflict and violence, especially towards women.

Let us consider the mechanisms whereby this occurs more specifically in the Indian context. The past decade or more has been the period during which the Indian economy has been thrown more open to market processes than ever before, and such markets have been regional, national and international. This period has been associated with a tendency towards privatisation of state assets, reduction in crucial government investment, especially in infrastructure areas, reduced per capita public spending on health, reduced public expenditure in the rural areas generally, deregulation of and a number of tax benefits and other sops provided to large domestic and multinational capital, trade liberalisation which has affected the viability of small scale manufacturing units and agriculturalists.

These policies in turn have already had substantial detrimental effects on the economy, and more particularly, on the lives of ordinary working people. The most evident negative feature is the collapse of employment generation, especially in the rural areas. The rate of growth of all forms of rural employment, including casual and part-time work and self-employment, has slumped to less than 1 per cent in the 1990s (regardless of whether one looks at the National Sample Survey data or the Census data). The absence of productive work opportunities has

become the single most important problem for large sections of the rural population.

Even those who are self-employed as agriculturalists are facing huge problems of viability as cultivators because of the combination of threats from highly subsidised imports which are keeping prices down, and rising costs because of withdrawal of subsidies. In the urban areas, there has been some growth in services employment, and especially in IT-enabled services that has reduced the rate of educated unemployment. However, in the formal sector, employment has barely grown at all. The problem of lack of sufficient employment for all those who need to work remains significant. For less skilled workers, and especially women, the problem of access to productive work is especially acute. Women are being drawn into the paid labour force in some more regressive ways, in the form of home-based work as part of large chains of production organised by large capitalists, or as low-paid and exploited service sector workers.

In addition to inadequate aggregate employment generation, there is the problem of reduced security of work and of incomes generally. This is most marked for waged workers in less skilled and more unstable occupations. But it is ironically true that even in the higher ends of the job spectrum, employment has become more volatile and fragile, and the earlier security that was implicit in formal sector employment has all but disappeared in the new contracts. In addition, even non-wage incomes are now less secure and more volatile, simply because many markets, and the income accruing from them, fluctuate much more wildly than they did in the past.

The overall depressed conditions of employment generation and greater insecurity of incomes have in

turn been indirectly expressed in other negative features, notably food consumption. Food grain availability per head of population for the economy as a whole has been lower on average in the past few years, than even thirty years ago. There have also been evident declines in the availability of basic public services in the areas of health and sanitation. This has affected both preventive and curative health care in the public sector, which in turn means that even poor households are forced to undertake much more expenditure on private health care, even when this cuts into the incomes necessary for sheer physical survival. Naturally, this tends to affect women and girl children more adversely, and compounds the effects of gender discrimination in nutrition as well.

Along with this, the growing emphasis on markets has implied the commoditisation of many aspects of life that were earlier seen as either naturally provided by states and communities, or simply not subject to market transaction and property relations. Thus, the inability or refusal of the government to provide safe drinking water has led to the explosive growth of a bottled water industry. A whole range of previously services and utilities like power distribution and telecommunications have been privatised. Even the growing recognition accorded to intellectual property rights marks the entry of markets into ever-newer spheres.

Of course, markets imply marketing and drawing more and more consumers into the web of purchase through advertising and attempts to manipulate peoples' tastes and choices. In this effort, advertising companies have notoriously used women as objects to purvey their products. The dual relationship with women, as objects to be used in selling goods, and as a huge potential market for goods, creates a peculiar process whereby women are encouraged and persuaded to participate actively in their own objectification. The huge media attention given to beauty contests, "successful" models, and the like, all feed into the rapidly expanding beauty industry, which includes not only cosmetics and beauty aids, but slimming agents, beauty parlours, weight loss clinics, and so on. Many of these contribute to the most undesirable and backward attitudes to both women and their appearance, such as the advertisements for fairness cream that emphasise that it is necessary to

be fair to make a "good" marriage, which is in turn seen as the basic goal of a woman.

All this seems plausible enough, but many would argue that the link between all this and fundamentalism and violence is not all that obvious. I will argue that in fact these processes actively operate to strengthen patriarchy, encourage sectarian tendencies and add to factors making for social conflict and violence. Some of the mechanisms are described below.

The first mechanism comes from the sheer fact of greater material insecurity. As ordinary life becomes more volatile, insecure and unpredictable in various ways, people search for security in whatever ways they can muster. Precisely because some degree of certainty is seen as a comfort, often the more rigid a system is (whether it is a set of intellectual and spiritual beliefs, or a religious order, or a relatively close grouping claiming a particular special social identity) the more attractive it perversely becomes. This may explain why some of the more rigidly structured and sectarian religious and social groups have attracted large following in recent times.

These groups in turn contribute to the second mechanism, the use of such "religious" and sectarian sentiment as a means of political mobilisation. The Sangh Parivar, of which the ruling BJP is a part, has of course developed this to a fine art and science, but they are not the only ones using such particularist identities, rather than genuine class-based combinations, as a means of political organisation. The ruling parties have in turn seized on these to divert attention from their own shortcoming in basic governance, and their inability to prevent deterioration of basic material conditions for a significant proportion of the people. The pseudo-nationalism that is espoused (in which the relevant other is usually a neighbouring country like Pakistan or now even Bangladesh) serves as a way to channel and divert genuine anti-imperialist sentiments of people and convert them into simple and self-defeating war cries against neighbours.

Of course there is a strong undercurrent of violence in all this, which spews out into the open every now and then, as it did in the state-sponsored pogrom in Gujarat last year. The growing tendency towards violence of various sorts – towards other "communities" or caste groups, and especially towards

women – can be seen as another reflection and result of the economic and social processes outlined earlier. The greater insecurity and sheer difficulty of ordinary life, the complications and worries involved in providing for basic needs, all make for much greater levels of everyday irritation in people. This can only rarely find an outlet in places of work, and requires other means of expression. In addition, the massive increase in inequality, the growth of rampant consumerism, and the explosion of new media that brings all the lavish new lifestyles into open public view, all serve to add to the resentment and frustration of have-nots. The gap between aspiration and reality becomes ever wider, and this creates a strong urge to somehow get at those who are seen as “responsible”. Of course, the real agents of these processes – the unresponsive government, the large companies and multinationals, the foreign investors – are all too large, too distant and too powerful to be touched. How much easier, then, to direct one’s ire against those who are seen as more easily attacked – minority communities or lower caste groups, women within and outside the household, and so on. The substantial increase in violence against women is not just because of higher reporting of incidents, but also because of this process, which results in an actual increase in the number of such crimes.

Other factors also help once a climate of violence and incipient conflict has been created. Fear of retribution or of being the next target serve to ensure silence – if not complicity – among those whom would not themselves directly engage in such violence. Such fear is all the more potent because the agencies of the state are increasingly used to protect the perpetrators of violence and to deny victims of violence the minimal degree of justice.

The other philosophy that is invoked and sought to be spread is that which lies at the heart of the reliance on markets – individualism. The “competitive spirit” is unleashed and used to make people feel that it is each man or woman for himself or herself, and that individuals can succeed in making gains at the expense of others in their own social group. This acts as another way of reducing attempts by people to forge groups for collective action to change the processes of liberalisation and corporate globalisation.

It is clear therefore, that market fundamentalism breeds religious and social fundamentalism as well, with disastrous consequences for ordinary people and especially women. Of course, all this helps both directly, and indirectly, the cause of imperialism and its domestic allies. However, there are recent signs that such a process is finite, and that there are limits to the extent to which rightwing fundamentalism can be used to counter and destroy progressive forces. The recent upsurge of people across the world against the US imperialist aggression on Iraq, and the coalescing of the antiwar movement with the anti-globalisation movement across the world, are very positive signs, which may indicate a turning point in international politics. It leads us to hope that even in India, we will soon get a reversal of these current very reactionary tendencies and the development of a genuine democratic and socialist alternative which will also fully recognise and protect the rights of women.

Obituary

Vimal Kaku – the mother figure for all in the Shetkari Mahila Aghadi passed away on 12th July at Yavatmal, Maharashtra. Vimalkaku will be remembered for her special task of organising the women of the Deshmukh families which impose rules of seclusion on their womenfolk. Her role in the ‘Darudukan Bandi’ [Ban the Liquor Shops] and ‘Zilla Parishad Kabza’ [occupation of Zilla Parishad] agitations has been a source of inspiration to many. The Shetkari Mahila Aghadi salutes her work and memory.

Gender Concerns in Food Security

Madhura Swaminathan

Women have a strong stake in a basic and effective system of food security. This is for several reasons. Given women's roles in the gender division of labour, women bear the primary responsibility for provisioning of food. A recent FAO study points out that for women "Food is not just a consumer item or a trade commodity, ... it is nourishment, taste and an expression of culture and identity" (Macan-Markar).¹ There is also some evidence to suggest that the share of expenditure on food out of women's earnings is higher than that out of male earnings, reflecting the importance that women attach to food for their families, particularly their children. Food can be viewed as priority expenditure in women's budgets. In periods of shortages or rising prices, the burden of adjusting the family food budget usually falls on women. Lastly, there is also some evidence to indicate that leakages are likely to be lower, particularly for food security programmes, when women are included in decision-making and management. Given the importance that women attach to food and food security, and their responsibility for household food management, women's needs and concerns must be taken into account in planning any food delivery system. In several countries of Africa, women dominate also as producers, and thus have responsibility for food production as well.

Many developing countries have instituted a combination of policies to ensure basic food security for the population. Typically, as in India, these policies have included public support for food production, its marketing and storage, and finally, distribution to consumers, particularly poor consumers. In Mexico, for example, the state-owned CONASUPO or National Basic Foods Company undertook the

import, processing and distribution of subsidized foods through a national chain of food stores. In South Asia, Sri Lanka has been cited as a model in terms of its effective system of universal food rationing through which subsidized rice was provided to the population. In Zambia, the marketing and distribution of maize were controlled by a National Marketing Board so as to keep the price to consumers low. Generalised price subsidies for basic foods have been effective in many countries, particularly those relying on imports such as Jamaica and Tunisia.

Among the developed countries, the United States is unique in having a large food stamp programme that provides food coupons to poor persons. In fact, the US Department of Agriculture carries out a Food Security survey annually. The survey conducted in 2001 showed that in 3.5 million households (3.3 percent of all U.S. households), one or more household members were hungry, at least some time during the year.² This national average hides huge variations: single mothers with children registered the highest rate of food insecurity (31.9 percent).

In the 1980s and 1990s, many of these programmes of food security have come under attack from proponents of orthodox structural adjustment. The two main arguments put forward for reform have been that the policies are too costly and impose a heavy burden of subsidy and secondly, that they distort prices and hence the functioning of private markets. A third and more recent argument is that many policies and the associated subsidy are WTO-incompatible. I shall argue, with evidence from India, that these arguments are baseless.

1 "Women's Skills Sow Food Security", available at http://www.ipsnews.net/fao_magazine/sow.shtml

2 "Putting Food on the Table: Household Food Security in the United States", available at <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/Feb03/Features/PuttingFood.htm>

Much of the current discussion on domestic policies and the need for cut-back in food subsidies assumes that international trade in food grain is "competitive", an assumption far from reality. Grain prices are heavily influenced by large subsidies in the richer countries. The latest estimate of agricultural subsidies in the OECD countries is nothing less than one billion dollars a day. In comparison, the subsidy given by developing countries is minuscule. It has been pointed out by Pedro Medrano of the World Food Programme that India, whose population of malnourished persons exceeds the total population of the United States, spends 2.5 billion USD a year on food subsidies while the United States spends 40 billion dollars annually. Or take another indicator, the size of the food subsidy relative to GDP. This ratio has remained in most years of the nineties at around half a per cent of GDP rising to around 1 per cent of GDP recently. Is this too large for a country with half a billion malnourished persons? These numbers provide a perspective on the rationale of lowering food subsidies in order to lower the fiscal deficit.

Secondly, consider the suggestion to privatise part of the food security system, the procurement, storage and transport of grain. This suggestion assumes that markets work well. However, the markets for food grain in India are not perfectly integrated. Not only are markets in different parts of India not fully integrated but transactions in many markets, particularly, rural markets continue to be mediated by relative economic position of the participants, interpersonal links and complex links between different types of markets. It is also argued that privatisation can be combined with international trade rather than build-up of domestic reserves of food. The disastrous effects of depleting domestic food stocks and relying on international trade to meet domestic food requirements are only too well known on the African continent. In the context of the WTO, developing countries with common concerns need to come together to ensure that policies for basic food security such as public stockholding or sale and purchase of food grain at administered prices can be pursued without fear of reprisals. In January 2001, in the Committee on Agriculture, India made a proposal for a "food security box". Such proposals need to be strengthened and taken forward by an alliance of developing countries.

The most direct lesson from the Indian experience of the last five years is of the failure of narrow targeting in a situation where chronic hunger and malnutrition is prevalent on a large scale. The three main failings of the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) have been the following. First, targeting has led to the large-scale exclusion of genuinely needy persons from the PDS. Secondly, targeting has adversely affected the viability of the PDS network, and thirdly, TPDS has failed in the regional task, that was performed by the earlier PDS, namely of transferring cereals from surplus to deficit regions of the country.

Exclusion of the needy

The current definition of eligibility for BPL status is based on the official poverty line as estimated by the Planning Commission in 1993-94 (adjusted for population levels in 2000). Accordingly, the target group comprised 37 per cent of the rural population and 32 per cent of the urban population in 1993-94. This is going to be revised soon to the new **lower** poverty estimates based on the controversial NSS 55th round for 1999-2000 (the head count ratio for rural poverty is 26 per cent according to the Planning Commission) and that will be very dangerous. Let us try to identify the target group, that is the persons who should be eligible for a minimal programme of food security. Data from the National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau show that around 48 per cent of adults are malnourished. Data from the National Family Health Survey show that around 47 per cent of children are malnourished. Data from the National Sample Survey show that the food share (share of expenditure on food) is 60 per cent or more for 90 per cent of the rural population and 60 per cent of the urban population (averaging to 80 per cent of the total population). The food share is a suitable indicator of poverty for a food subsidy programme. The average calorie intake is low and declining, including for persons in the lowest expenditure groups or deciles. Combining these facts, it is clear that a very large majority, around 70 to 80 per cent of our population is either undernourished or at the risk of undernourishment, and spending the bulk of their income on food and therefore vulnerable to changes in prices of food or to changes in income.

Secondly, there are huge administrative problems in identifying BPL households on the basis of income at the ground level since we do not collect regular

data on incomes of households. In practice, all kinds of proxy criteria and shortcuts have been used to identify the BPL, increasing the chances of mis-identification and of excluding the vulnerable population from the TPDS.

Together, because of definitional/conceptual issues and operational problems in identification, hundreds of millions of needy persons have been excluded from the BPL category. These so-called APL families have faced steep increases in PDS prices over the last few years and have to pay even more than market prices.

Viability of the PDS network

India had a remarkable network of fair price shops but the viability of this distribution network has been severely weakened in the last few years. First, with a smaller number of ration cards to serve, and upper bounds on margins that can be charged to BPL consumers, the net profits of fair price shop owners/dealers has fallen. Many ration shops have closed down (even if open on paper) as it is not worth transporting small quantities of grain for a few households in a village. Secondly, several prices within the same distribution network and for the same commodities have created incentives for leakages and other malpractices among traders and officials. As far as consumers are concerned, when PDS prices are frequently changed, rolled-back, and differentiated according to scheme and card, there is confusion among consumers as to the appropriate prices to be paid.

Regional issues

In the TPDS regime, the size of the BPL population has been identified by the central government, and this has led to conflicts between state governments and the centre on whom to count as poor. In general, under the TPDS, the better-performing states have been at a disadvantage. In particular, the PDS has been weakened in Kerala, the state which had the most effective PDS in the country before targeting was introduced.

To conclude, given the scale of malnutrition in India and the short-term and long-term effects of malnutrition (on individuals and through them on society), our main concern must be to ensure that all needy persons are included in the PDS. The Targeted PDS, however, is more concerned with excluding

persons. It is time to return to a universal PDS, which can make a significant impact on hunger and malnutrition by making available a reasonable quantity of a person's daily cereal requirements at affordable prices throughout the year and throughout the country.

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Finding Sites of Resistance

Thus the modern activist challenge: how do you organize against an ideology so vast that it has no edges; so everywhere that it seems nowhere? Where is the site of resistance for those with no workplaces to shut down, whose communities are constantly being uprooted? What do we hold on to when so much that is powerful is virtual-currency trades, stock prices, intellectual property and arcane trade agreements?

The short answer, at least before September 11, was that you grab anything you can get your hands on: the brand image of a famous multinational, a stock exchange, a meeting of world leaders, a single trade agreement or, in the case of the Toronto group, the banks and corporate headquarters that are the engines that power this agenda. Anything that, even fleetingly, makes the intangible actual, the vastness somehow human-scale. In short, you find symbols and you hope they become metaphors for change.

For instance, when the United States launched a trade war against France for daring to ban hormone-laced beef, Jose Bove and the French Farmers' Confederation didn't get the world's attention by screaming about import duties on Roquefort cheese. They did it by 'strategically dismantling' a McDonald's.

Many activists have learned over the past decade that the blind spot many Westerners have concerning international affairs can be overcome by linking campaigns to famous brands – an effective, if often problematic, weapon against parochialism. These corporate campaigns have, in turn, opened back doors into the arcane world of international trade and finance, to the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and, for some, to a questioning of capitalism itself.

Excerpted from Klein Naomi (2002): From Symbols to Substance: After September 11, Concrete Alternatives to both religious and economic fundamentalism are needed more than ever. Fences and Windows Dispatches From The Front Lines Of The Globalization Debate, Leftword, Delhi

Renaming Centres as 'Women and Family Studies': Need for Debate and Reconsideration

We, the undersigned as women's studies teachers, researchers, activists, associated with the development and growth of women's studies in the country express our deep concern about recent proposals to reorganise UGC supported Women's Studies Centres. This seems to be a radical departure from the earlier vision that informed women's studies since the mid seventies and what was incorporated in the National Policy on Education (1986) calling upon the entire educational system to play an active role.

UGC played a trail blazing role in the promotion of this vision within the university system and brought women's studies within the university system even prior to NPE.

Historically as well as in contemporary context Indian women have played multiple roles in the economy, society, polity and within the family. Much of the knowledge of these wider roles and contributions of women has been generated only in the last two and a half decades by women's studies scholars which has led to a paradigmatic shift in policies, planning as well as in research and curriculum development within higher education especially in social sciences and humanities. There is a need to extend this thrust into areas of science and technology (particularly bio science and biotechnology) where contemporary developments affect women's lives in many ways.

The renaming of the Centres as 'Women and Family Studies Centres' by implications limits the focus of women's studies and denies the historical role played by it both globally and nationally. The new nomenclature, the manner in which this decision has been taken, the thrust that is being given to the content of the women's studies and proposed guidelines and consequently reorganization of the structure, function and role of these centres are matters of serious concern. It is precisely because of its wider perspective that women's studies has contributed to the understanding of family and

other institutions and has influenced studies of society through different disciplines and has contributed to the knowledge building and dissemination process.

Women's studies had visualized a three fold thrust of teaching, research and extension within the University system. The National Policy on Education adopted by Parliament in May 1986 had reiterated this view and emphasized the need to gear the entire education system to a positive interventionist role in the empowerment of women. Visualising these centres primarily as extension agencies of government and international organizations at the cost of knowledge creation and dissemination will marginalise these centres and hinder the development of critical enquiry.

We understand that UGC's new Tenth Plan guidelines for the development of women's studies in Indian Universities would subvert the basic principles of autonomy of universities including their statutory bodies and departments and the capacity of women's studies centres to exercise any influence on research and curriculum development activities of different disciplines. Its proposal to bring out a journal and publish material produced by the centres will mean centralization of decisions concerning research and publications etc.

The replacement of the Standing Committee of the UGC by the Review Committee (the former had already prepared guidelines for the Xth Plan) with limited representation from women's studies scholars and narrowing down of the perspective will limit the growth of women's studies.

The Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) pioneered the development of women's studies and played an active role in seeking UGC's support for setting up women's studies centres in universities. The IAWS has received consistent support from the UGC for its conferences and was also represented on the UGC Standing Committee.

However this convention has been ignored for the past few years.

In conclusion we would like to draw your attention to the mandate given by the NPE (Section 6) and as amended and adopted by Parliament (1992) and the four dimensions (research, teaching, training and extension) emphasized in the Policy.

We are deeply concerned by the UGC's current moves which suggest an abandonment of this national mandate and the broader vision of Women's Studies. We strongly feel that it needs a wider debate and consultation and a reconsideration of the proposals of the UGC before they are enforced.

[IAWS Executive Committee]

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Women's Voices: Pioneering Contributions

Kuntala Kumari Sabat

Translated by Mary Mohanty

Lecturer in English

Behind Khurda Central Co-operative Bank, Thana Chhak,
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(Orissa)

[Kuntala Kumari Sabat (1901-1938), the first Oriya woman novelist, was born of Christian parents at Jagadampur of Bastar, Madhya Pradesh. She spent her childhood in Burma. She studied at Ravenshaw Girls' School and Cuttack Medical School. For a short period, she worked with the Red Cross Society at Cuttack before leaving for Delhi where she worked as a physician. In 1928 she married Krishna Prasad Brahmachari. In August 1938, she suddenly passed away after giving birth to a son. She was survived by two daughters and a son.

Kuntala Kumari wrote both fiction and poetry. Her novels are *Bhranti* (Illusion, 1923), *Kalibohu* (The Dark Bride, 1925), *Parashamani* (The Philosopher's Stone, 1925) *Naa Tundi* (The Woman of Many Tongues, 1926) and *Raghu Arakshita* (Raghu, the Orphan, 1928). The following excerpt is a translation of the first chapter of *Kalibohu*. It presents the plight of a child-widow during the early years of twentieth century Orissa]

Kalibahu: The Dark Bride

Who was this beautiful lady sitting on the edge of the pond in the evening, her cheek resting in her palm, and engrossed in deep thought? Stars appeared in the sky; jasmines blossomed in the garden; bats hung from trees; the cattle returned to their shed; women returned to the village with water-filled pitchers; but, she seemed oblivious of everything that was going on around her. Who was she thinking with her hand on her cheek, holding the rim of the pitcher and stretching her legs to the edge of the water? Why were hot tears streaming down her lily-blue eyes? Readers! She was a child-widow. Her name was Lakshmi.

Kamala performed many a religious penance, pious charity and pilgrimage and after eighteen years of her marriage when a baby was born to her, Mishra's house burst with joy, although it was a girl. Mishre was a rich trader. Every year lakhs of rupees were earned by him through huge transactions in paddy, rice, coconut, betel-nut, pulang, mango, jack-fruit, sugar-cane, etc. One to two batis of paddy fields yielded plenty; cows and calves without number were in the cowshed; the house was afloat, so to say, with milk and ghee. There was no dearth of male and female servants, maid-servants and attendants, and labourers and farm hands; but, in spite of everything one thing was lacking: Mishre was childless. He had married four wives; but none was fortunate enough to be blessed with a baby. It could easily be understood how it was a matter of great joy on the part of that family when, at last, after eighteen years of marriage his second wife Kamala gave birth to a daughter. Mishre performed the birth ceremonies of his daughter

with great pomp. And before the daughter was seven years of age, he married her off to a ten-year-old Brahmin boy named Pitambara, possessed of all the auspicious signs. Lakshmi was the darling daughter of four mothers. It would not be an exaggeration to say that she was the apple of her father's eye. But fate dealt a harsh blow to Lakshmi. She was widowed at the age of ten. Enormous wealth and immense love of her parents could not eliminate the agony of her life of eternal desolation.

Lakshmi was widowed the only blossom of the large family withered prematurely; her parents' yearning for a grandson was shattered. Who could have patience after this? True, Lakshmi was the daughter of a rich man; but, could scriptures point a way out? The ten-year-old child was stripped of her ornaments, and when arrangements were made to feed her habishya, Kamala fell unconscious. It would not have mattered if destiny had not blessed her with an offspring; destiny blessed her with only one child and decreed so much suffering in her daughter's life. Fun-loving Lakshmi was not aware of anything, she did not even know who her husband was. When ornaments were forcibly taken off her body, she cried so much for it, implored so much; but who was there to listen to her? Vermillion mark was wiped off her forehead; ornaments were taken away from her hands; lac-dye was washed off her feet. In making arrangements for Lakshmi's habishya Kamala herself partook of habishya. All traces of joy and merry-making disappeared from their house. All were now afloat in an ocean of grief.

Ekadashi, the day for the widow to observe fasting even without a drop of water, came. That day Achyuta Mishra could not take even a morsel of rice. Lakshmi was very delicate; fasting made her frail, but the parents could do nothing except shedding tears. Yelling, "Water water", the girl fainted; a drop of water was poured into her ear; but no attempt was made to wet her parched throat.

Her mother could not bear this prolonged suffering of the daughter. Her ceaseless worrying made her ill. At last death put an end to all her agony. Worrying about this daughter, Achyuta Mishra became restless. He gave the charge of all his material possessions

to a distantly related nephew and went on a pilgrimage with his daughter. But he could not find peace in anything. Even the scourge of widowhood could not stop Lakshmi from attaining her youth. Her beauty blossomed forth.

Lakshmi was most beautiful. Whoever saw her incomparable charm in her dark body, delicacy of youth in her limbs, thick wavy black tresses and large blue-lily eyes, gazed at her for some time. But what was the use? All fruitless! The agony of a frustrated life and the cruel mockery of a doomed future corroded Lakshmi bit by bit. Lakshmi understood that there was no place for her in this world. She could not know for which sin of her previous birth she was entangled in eternal widowhood. Only hot tears of deep desolation streamed down her eyes.

Lakshmi was fourteen years old. She had received a little education, thanks to her father. She had gathered knowledge by visiting places of pilgrimage; yet no solace could come to her heart. Why was she alive today in this world, her life cursed with utter loneliness and destitution? Why were all the enjoyments of the world denied to her? Why was she today deprived of the pleasure of womanhood and motherhood? Which crime, which sin caused this burning? Day and night Lakshmi brooded over her lot. She could not understand anything – marriage, devotion to a husband etc. What is marriage? Who was her husband? Who demanded her sole devotion to her husband? She used to ponder over all this in solitude, sitting alone on the edge of the pond. Evening approached; earthen lamps were lighted; household deities were worshipped; but Lakshmi could not move from where she sat. She would remain engrossed in endless thought.

Today, too, Lakshmi was absorbed in similar thoughts; coming and pushing her from behind her peer Durlabha said, "Oh Nakhi! Why are you sitting with the pitcher; are you thinking of tomorrow's ekadashi? Swear be me! You will eat baked rice cake secretly; who will know?" Durlabha loved Lakshmi very much. Hugging her Lakshmi said, "Duli, I'm not thinking about ekadashi. I'm not thinking of he who made ekadashi; was his heart

utterly devoid of kindness? Did Providence turn him into stone while he was considering women's woe?"

Putting her hand on Lakshmi's mouth and checking Lakshmi's overflowing sobs, Durlabha said, "Don't talk like this, my dear. Are lies written in scripture? Gods will bring your misfortune."

Hugging her affectionately Lakshmi said between sobs, "Sister, a fire is burning in my heart and you say gods will bring me misfortune! Is there any good-luck left for me? Why didn't I, who is unlucky

since birth, die in my mother's womb? Providence decreed my birth in a Brahmin family. I became the cause of grief for my parents. "Durlabha shed silent tears. Comparing the permanent widowhood of nubile Lakshmi with her own happy marital life blessed with a husband and a son, her heart burst. With deep sorrow, she said, "Lakshmi, scriptures are only for us, the women. In the Hindu society, scriptures are like knives at our throats."

When night descended both of them left for their homes.

Gauri Deshpande (1942-2003)

[From S. Thanu and K. Lalita: *Women Writing in India, Vol. II: The 20th Century, 1993*]

Gauri Deshpande, a bilingual writer, wrote poetry in English and fiction in Marathi. Her journalistic writings spans both languages. She has also translated into Marathi Burton's sixteen-volume translation of *Arabian Nights*. Her poetry has been widely anthologized. Gauri's fiction centred on women and their experiences.

The male characters are often kindly, protective, and accommodating, but the action takes place in the inner and the outer worlds the women inhabit. She also deals with problems and issues that attend the latest phase in the development of urban society in Maharashtra. Other writers depict the passing away of the joint family, but in Gauri Deshpande's fiction, the nuclear family, too, is a thing of the past. Her characters are individuals who hold on, often fiercely, to their independence. The 1989 novella, *Thang* (*The Dive/Discovery*), celebrates the woman protagonist arriving at a mature self-consciousness, and is in some ways a resolution to all the searching that marked Gauri Deshpande's earlier fiction, and a celebration of arrival. The protagonist finds herself, her own identity, and her own address. The title contains connotations of each of these quests.

Ahe He Ase Ahe (*That's the Way It Is*) is the title story of a collection published in 1986 and is in many ways typical of Gauri Deshpande's fiction. Among her other writings are three short novels, *Karavasatun Patre* (*Letters from Confinement*), *Madhya Latpatit* (*Shaky in Between*), and *Ek Pan Galavya* (*Leaves Dropping One by One*), published in one volume in 1980. Her latest book, "*Dustar has Ghat*" ani "*Thang*" ("*A Difficult Mountain Road*" and "*The Dive/Discovery*"), 1989, consists of two novellas.

Gauri passed away on 1st March, 2003 after a brief illness. Gauri's writings and support to women's organisations will be missed by all.

Milune Sarya Jaani, Pune has published a special issue on Gauri Deshpande and her writings. Interested members may contact Milun Saryajaani, 40/1/B Bhonde Colony, Karve Road, Pune 411 004.

“Expanding Dimensions of Son Preference in India”

Report of a Seminar organized by AIDWA at the ASF, Hyderabad, 3 January 2003

Mythili Sivaraman, Vice-President, All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) began her Keynote Address by raising the question whether **son preference is simply a cultural phenomenon, or is it being strengthened by the course of development in the country in the last few years?** To find an answer, we have to understand the exact nature of son-preference and what compels a woman to commit female infanticide. During a survey on dowry conducted by AIDWA in Salem district of Tamil Nadu, one woman who had been severely indebted because of the high dowry she had been required to pay for her daughter said, “I wish I had killed my daughter... I can't pay back this loan.”

AIDWA interviewed some women who were under trial or convicted after being charged with the crime. When asked why she had killed her second girl child, one of them looked bewildered and said, “I don't know.” The fact is that no one had gone to see her after she delivered the baby, and the fear of facing torture had made her kill the child. Another woman, whose husband simply washed his hands off the matter by saying that the baby died in its maternal grandmother's house, had committed suicide. One of the problems that came to light was the plight of the families and particularly the children of these women who were languishing in prison. Some had to sell their land in order to pay for the costs of the court cases. One of the women who had killed her third female infant constantly worried about her two daughters, and wanted them to be with her in jail along with her because she saw no future for them.

Although the state was formulating schemes specifically aimed at promoting the welfare of the girl child, the over all macro-policies pursued in the wake of globalisation and liberalization defeated the very purpose of these policies. She gave the example

of the “Cradle Baby Scheme” implemented by the TN Government, which encouraged mothers to deposit their female infants with the state instead of killing them; it had simply resulted in a growing number of girl children being abandoned by their mothers. It did it not strike at the root of the problem and eliminate it. It is quite clear that consumerism, also reflected in increasing dowry and lavish weddings, has reinforced son preference, as has the devaluation of women's work. Liberalization breeds uncertainty and insecurity for the girl child, creating conditions that encourage female foeticide and infanticide. The situation therefore called for urgent steps to improve the overall status of women, reversal of imperialist driven policies of globalisation, media monitoring and intervention to reiterate the dignity of women, and a drive to discourage obscurantist practices.

This was followed by a presentation by Tahera Ali from Karachi, Pakistan, an activist with the Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum and the Pakistani women's movement. She highlighted the fact that the situation of women in India and Pakistan was the same, especially with regard to son preference. While Islam gave women the same rights as men, this was not reflected in practice. Discrimination against the girl child started at birth, in the spheres of nutrition, education, health, etc. She strongly believed that women alone could change the situation through a united struggle, which transcended national boundaries.

An extremely illuminating talk by Jagmati Sangwan, President of AIDWA, Haryana illustrated the shocking realities of son preference in the northern states of Haryana and Punjab. States that has witnessed the Green Revolution now had a sex ratio of only 820 (Haryana) and 793 (Punjab). Translated into numbers, it meant that over 2 crores of girls have disappeared.

Economic development and affluence had encouraged son preference. The practice was now spreading to those communities that had until now been free from it, such as the tribals. The shortage of girls was leading to men buying trafficked women from Bangladesh. Many of them are from Dalit communities, while the men are upper-caste, as a result of which their families did not accept the relationship. These women and their children live a shunned existence apart from the rest, and the legality of these marriages remains a question. Another terrible consequence she reported was certain incidents of women facing sexual violence from brothers, husbands and other male members of the family. In general, superstitions regarding son preference were being strengthened, and one would hear of truckloads of women visiting "godmen" who "ensured" the birth of sons by different means.

Making an interesting point, Jagmati said that a market oriented consumerist society constructs the image of a man as the "provider" or the "bread-earner", while the woman is seen as "dependent." In turn, the forces of terrorism, fundamentalism, communalism and casteism strengthen this "male-centric consumer", devoid of any human relationships and humane values. These same consumerist values see the birth of a male child as "profitable" since it is the source of potential wealth in the form of dowry, and gifts for the other members of the family, and even the midwife who assisted in his birth, while the birth of a girl child is a the harbinger of future "losses". In a situation where the status of women is already degraded, globalisation contributes to their further devaluation, and son-preference is strengthened. Women themselves tend to feel "secure" if they have male children, perceiving them to be their support in case they are widowed or during times of economic crisis.

Further, imperialism forces see women from the Third World as a threat, responsible for its burgeoning millions, and son preference as a method of controlling populations. They are aided by fundamentalist forces, which encourage obscurantism and traditional systems of oppression. She gave the example of the caste panchayats in Haryana that had virtually become defunct, but have found a new lease of life in the current context. These panchayats openly endorse bigamy in the absence of the birth of a son and even order the death of young men and women entering into inter-caste marriages. They infringe on the very

basic democratic rights of the people, but again the state displays no political will to control them. Hence, along with opposing neo-liberal policies of globalisation, it was equally important to oppose the forces of fundamentalism, highlight the contribution of women to the household and the economy, and wage a struggle to replace patriarchal society by a truly democratic system.

Gigi Francesco from the Phillipines, one of the architects of DAWN and a crusader for the rights of workers and women appealed for a full understanding of the meaning of son preference, which ranged from the "soft" version of the subtle and disruptive neglect of the girl child on one hand, to the "hard" version manifesting itself in selective infanticide and foeticide on the other. She described how the Chinese policy of encouraging the one child norm led to sex selective abortion of girl children, since the birth of a second child necessarily curtailed state benefits of health, education, housing, etc. While the state did not overtly encourage the birth of male children, this was inevitable in a society steeped in the Confucian tradition where men are seen as a symbol of prosperity, and women as that of suffering.

Gigi said that we need to explore the linkages between these extreme methods with the more benign everyday practices that society accepts as normal and natural. In the Phillipines, where the Spanish colonizers imposed their "machismo" culture on the local Filipino culture, it is said that the men never grow up! As a Catholic country that prohibits divorce and abortion, the same "machismo" promotes the practice of keeping mistresses, something that is emulated by working class men even though they cannot afford to support even one family. Thus the brotherhood of male sexuality and male privileging transcends class. The media and the worst kind of television soap operas promote such values and lifestyles of the elite, and these are some of the reasons why son preference remains firmly entrenched in society. Son preference is stronger in the rich, because the birth of a son helps to further the "family name". Apart from cultural traditions, the church establishment that ignores bigamy and puts it down to neglectful wives also encourages these values. In a marketised economy, marriage, family, sexuality, human love and relationships, all become commercialized. There is an economic value, both

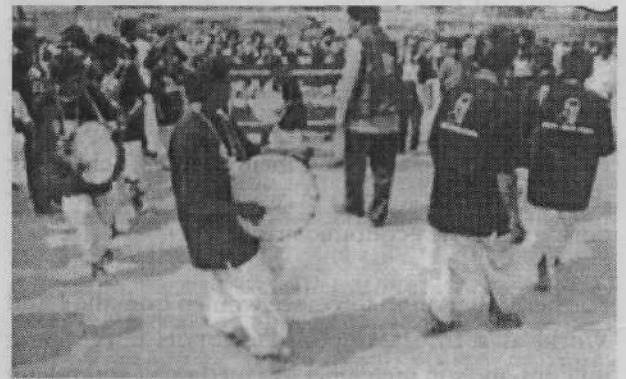
real and imagined, constructed around men. The capitalist economy that generates the money machine is centered on the image of a patriarchal man. The neo-liberal system prompts people to think about money and ways and means to make more and more money. Since men are seen as the source of economic value, social investment in men is larger and skewed away from women. The question is, why are men valued more when in fact women work harder?

Linking the so called "Global War against Terror" with the practice of son preference, Gigi pointed out that for women living in a society that is being terrorized by imperial powers or fundamentalist forces, facing devastation as with Iraq, Palestine, Bosnia, etc., there is a tendency for women to seek the protection of men, thereby strengthening patriarchal values. Thus, she concluded, it was necessary for women to come together to visualize and struggle for a society that was rid of both class materialism and violence.

Summing up the seminar, Indu Agnihotri, noted that there was a great diversity in traditional practices and that not all castes practised female foeticide, just as all did not adhere to dowry-related customs. These alternate and alternative 'contentious' traditions, customs and practices seem to be disappearing and it is important to recapitulate and record them in order to strengthen the effort to challenge the current practices. This is all the more important because there appears to be a progressive universalisation and a kind of homogenisation of anti-women customs, practices and rituals and beliefs in the wake of fundamentalism, which cuts across regions, religions, communities and borders.

There are many who believed that these rituals and customs were vestiges of backwardness, and would disappear with advancement and modernity, and that technology is gender-neutral. But technologies, like markets, operate within socially embedded structures. They not only maintain or preserve inequalities but also end up enhancing existing and perpetuating new forms of inequalities and vulnerabilities. This is exemplified by the new reproductive technologies. Those who believe and act as votaries of globalisation, as the only and the right path of growth and development, forget that societies and communities exist and co-exist in the midst of diverse and uneven layers, historical contexts and paths and forms of

development. Therefore the ways of social and technological advance have to be suited to their specific needs, and have to address the issues, problems and concerns keeping in mind these socio-historical specificities as well as ideological beliefs. Failing this, growth-oriented models of economic growth and donor agendas can combine to launch fresh forms of onslaughts on women. This has happened in the case of recent population policies where neo-liberal ideological beliefs are seen to coalesce with patriarchal notions of son-preference. This has given India its peculiar demographic profile, where affluence and advance become synonymous with a premium on sons and the denial of life itself to daughters. Interestingly, these prejudices cut across the frontiers of nationalities, as the example of China also highlights. It was important to note that the advent of socialism per se does not ensure a better status for women unless gender-based inequalities and ideological beliefs are specifically addressed, interrogated and challenged.



ASF and Dalits

C. H. Sareen

A number of dalit organisations (mostly NGOs) participated in the ASF on two podiums – the 'Dalit Beat', lead by the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) held at St. Paul's High School and the 'Dalit Social Forum', led by the Dalit Social Forum held at the Nizam College Grounds.

A major conference on 'Dalits, Other Social Groups and Globalisation' was organised on January 5. Nearly 3,000 delegates participated in the conference. Prof. S.K.Thorat, Bhalchandra L.Mungekar, Bojja Tarakam, Ruth Manorama, Prof. K.S. Chalam and Vincent Manoharan from India, Nozomi Bando from Japan, Padmalal Viswakarma from Nepal and P.Siva Pragasam from Sri Lanka were the speakers. Six cultural performances by dalit cultural teams from Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan and Maharashtra were witnessed on the Nizam College grounds throughout the show. The Chindu team's presentation from Andhra Pradesh – a ballad with 50 'Dappus' (traditional drums of dalits) – was the highlight of the inaugural session. The dalit cultural teams marched in the Nizam College grounds every morning. Besides these performances, daily cultural events were organised by different dalit teams from different states as part of the 'Dalit Beat'.

In an exhibition held at the Nizam College grounds, photos by Sudhakar Olwe (Mumbai) and paintings by Savi Savarkar (New Delhi), both dalits, attracted nearly 5,000 visitors during the six days. The photos and the paintings exposed caste discrimination and the state's oppression against dalits. Around 20 studies that were conducted on globalisation and its impact on dalits were compiled and released as a folder titled 'Dalits on Globalisation', designed specially to present the plethora of dalit concerns to the Asian civil society by Prof. Bhalchandra Mungekar on 5 January at the main conference.

In the 'Peoples Voices', organised on January 3, three presentations stole the show. 'The Impact of Globalisation on the Buraku Community' by Nozomi Bando from Japan; 'Caste Discrimination in Rajasthan' by Lakshman Singh and 'The Impact of Globalisation on the Dalits in Nepal' by Dinesh Achhami from Nepal.

In an attempt to express their solidarity with anti-globalisation struggles, 7,000 dalits from various districts of Andhra Pradesh and 1,000 dalits from other states of India participated in a rally organised on January 7. Dalit delegates wearing bands with messages such as 'cast out caste', 'reservation in private sector is a dalit right', 'another world is possible', took out a procession from Nizam College to Sundarayya Park.

Another India

The Dalit Social Forum, the only organisation to come out with the title 'Another India is Possible', organised a conference on 'Globalisation – Upper Casteisation, Globalisation, Communalisation' on January 4 at Nizam College. The DSF concentrated on contemporary trends in India and severely criticised the hinduisation of society and politics in India. They proclaimed that while playing the role of an unwritten constitution, hinduism also feeds into cultural nationalism.

Though various tribes, castes with different languages and religions coexist in India, hinduism preached cultural nationalism in the guise of unity in diversity. Because all the linguistically formed states have the caste system, hindu religion perpetuates hindu culture as Indian culture. They therefore severely criticised the ongoing hinduisation, communalisation and upper caste-isation of politics and society in India and

proclaimed that another India was not possible without fighting against these three. The conference concluded with the proclamation: 'Another India is possible', an India that is not brahminic, but a dalitised India; not a private-capitalist India, but a state-socialist India.

(Edited version reprinted from *The Dalit*, March-April 2003)

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Refresher Course

University of Pune

[December 29th, 2003–January 17th, 2004]

Themes in the course include:

- Introduction to concepts in Women's Studies
- The idea of Globalisation
- Gender and global restructuring of capital
- Market and Religious Fundamentalisms: Impact on the every day lives of third-world women
- Gender concerns in food security
- Gender Budgeting
- Analysing cinema, television serials, advertisement and print cultures of the last decade
- Gender and Information Technology
- Gender and social movements: Imagining Another World
- Gender and the politics of cultural practice

Report of the Workshop on "Education for Democracy: Making Local Governance Work for the Marginalized" at Asian Social Forum, Hyderabad, Jan. 2003.

By Vandana Kulkarni

Aalochana

"Democracy is not only the goal of development, it is the primary means of development" stated Nobel Prize winning economist Amartya Sen. Only when all individuals experience greater freedom, voice & opportunities, will each fully bring her or his creative powers to bear on solving the problems of community.

To create 'space' & give 'voice' to the marginalized sections of society, to enable them to say what they think is good for them or in other words make decision making truly participatory, is of utmost importance. This is precisely the underlying intention & principle of the 73rd & 74th Constitutional Amendments, which have widened the democratic base of the Indian polity.

In order to give local government (Panchayat Raj) Institutions (PRI) the necessary status & dignity, certain basic & essential features were enshrined in the Constitution. They pertain mainly to regular elections, representation of weaker & hitherto excluded sections such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, (reservation of seats & chairpersons in proportion to their population), women (not less than one-third of the total number of seats & posts of chairpersons are reserved), devolution of powers & financial resources aimed at imparting certainty, continuity & strength to them.

But on the other hand, global economic forces are supporting neo-liberal economic policies by joining local oppressive, caste based feudal forces to undermine the constitutional rights & responsibilities of the 'have-nots' i.e. the Dalit, tribal, women, poor communities to make local self governance a farce.

Thus by understanding the strengths as well as sighting these challenges many social organisations, community based organisations, NGO's are working in this arena

of PRI. They are conducting training for capacity building of Elected Women Representatives (EWRs), providing support through building networks and are engaged in advocacy. Some of them are interested in documenting the experiences of women in PRIs.

It is very important to share these experiences & ideas, to identify challenges, to discuss strategies to deal with them. The ASF provided a platform to build relationships & the common resolve to make local self-governance a success.

Aalochana had an opportunity to share its experiences in the seminar on **“Education For Democracy: Making Local Governance Work For The Marginalized”**. Groups from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, and Maharashtra, etc. participated in it.

The passing of the 73rd amendment opened the doors to the hitherto closed arena of public life for women. However ‘taking office’ has not been enough. Entry into decision-making bodies does not ensure acceptance, effectivity or ‘real’ power. Women are seen as illegitimate entrants who come via quotas. Women do not have the backing either of any political party or their family. Neither have they any back up to shoulder their domestic responsibilities. This new political role triples her responsibility/burden. Lack of support, non-cooperation from male colleagues and the bureaucracy and lack of information makes her survival in politics difficult. And yet women have to prove that it was not wrong to give them quotas.

Dalit, Adivasi women have a tougher time, as they have to fight against caste prejudices as well. There is strong opposition to their becoming sarpanchs. Here both gender & caste go against them. There are many instances of no-confidence motions used against them. They too have become the victims of exploitation, violence & harassment. For the men to give up their age-old privileges & accept women as leaders is still very difficult.

This is the reality & the background on which different groups are working towards making the 73rd amendment a reality. Aalochana’s programme attempted to contribute in a very small way. We evolved the strategy from our previous experience that we would be primarily addressing the needs of the community rather than of EWRs alone.

Strengthening civil society is important to ensuring the future of democracy.

The Gram sabha is the cornerstone or the foundation of the democratic structure of the panchayat raj. It can become an effective forum for voicing the different needs & grievances of people. Crucial issues like BPL list, or the selection of the beneficiaries can be put forth in the Gram sabha. Thus through greater participation & vigilance of the people, the Gram sabha can play an important role, but for this they had to be rejuvenated, & for that people had to be convinced of its importance.

Therefore we decided to build a network of different organisations for creating a support structure for women’s effective performance in local governance & for strengthening the panchayat raj. This network consisted of ten organisations that have been functioning in the Pune & Raigad districts for several years.

Plan of action

1. Every 3 months district level camps for the capacity building of the trainees where lectures, discussions, group work etc could be conducted and information exchanged, perspective building and skill learning were organised.
2. Between the district camps, the trainees would organise follow-up meetings & pass on what they learnt in the district or learning camps.
3. Mobilisation of their communities in different ways; especially women to participate in Gram sabhas.

Content of the training

1. To give information about the rules and regulations and functioning of the PRI.
2. Perspective: A feminist perspective was adopted on all issues be it politics, class, caste or religion. This is essential for understanding the dynamics of political processes. These insights enable them to intervene effectively in the social and political process and this knowledge of the dynamics is empowering in itself.
3. Skills: such as communication, report writing, street play, poster making, mobilization, campaigning etc.

Contribution of our programme:

- At the individual level we can perceive the growth in the thinking process, in the confidence level, in the capacity of articulation & mobilization.
- At the organisation level Panchayat Raj has become one of the important issues on the agenda of organisations.
- With the power of knowledge people have become more confident to intervene in the functioning of the PRI.
- Women have become confident and there is change in self-image.
- There is change in social image of women to some extent i.e. their leadership is slowly being accepted.
- Attendance in Gram sabhas has increased, especially of women.
- Women have started raising questions, putting their own needs on the panchayat's agenda.
- We can see their eagerness to contest the gram panchayats elections. Some of them have actually contested the elections and won.
- Self Help Groups (SHG), Mahila mandals are emerging as support groups to women in panchayats. It is a documented fact that wherever there is support in the form of SHG, CBO, political movements, networks the ability to perform as EWR increases tremendously.

Challenges before PRI

Recently we have celebrated the 10th anniversary of the 73rd amendment. A lot of water has flowed under the bridge during these years. What is the level of participation of marginalized people? It is mixed.

Women's political empowerment in the last ten years through the constitutional amendments has exploded several myths, such as the belief that they are passive and disinterested in political institutions, only the well-to-do, upper strata women come through reservations, women are only proxies and do not participate in the panchayats etc.

Some of major challenges that have been identified are:

1. Engendering the political process and the institutions:

It means making women an integral part of the political processes and ensuring their presence in all the institutions and locations of power. Through this women will be able to break the 'public-private' divide and the informal male networks of power that exist.

Making the issues of women the issues of panchayats are also engendering the political process. How will issues of the private domain like domestic violence become the issues on the agenda of panchayat?

2. To insist on a feminist perspective with a focus on 'value politics' is also important. 'What is power for' is a question that must be raised constantly.

3. Claiming citizenship:

How do we ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected, the rights of livelihood, health, education, housing for the poor and the marginalized? Inequality of caste, class, gender, and religion determine the ability of the person to claim a right.

In the present changing scenario in India, when the state is withdrawing from its welfarist role and responsibilities, how are the marginalized sections of people going to realise their rights?

How do we ensure that elected panchayat bodies are not overtaken by existing traditional bodies like *jati panchayat* or *gavkis* or newly created societies and co-operatives?

Thus there are a lot of issues, challenges ahead of us. There is a need to build a people's movement around issues of local self-governance for the assertion of their rights as citizens. This movement will help to improve the functioning of the panchayats, would also result in the strengthening of democratic processes and institutions. This will ensure a movement towards social and gender justice. In the long run this would help to institutionalise democratic values in society.

This poem was written by a terminally ill young girl in a New York Hospital. It was sent by a medical doctor — Make sure to read what is in the closing statement AFTER THE POEM

Slow Dance

Have you ever watched kids. On a merry-go-round?
Or listened to the rain. Slapping on the ground?
Ever followed a butterfly's erratic flight?
Or gazed at the sun into the fading night?
You better slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

Do you run through each day On the fly?
When you ask How are you? Do you hear the reply?
When the day is done. Do you lie in your bed
With the next hundred chores. Running through your head?
You'd better slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

Ever told your child, We'll do it tomorrow?
And in your haste, Not see his sorrow?
Ever lost touch, Let a good friendship die
Cause you never had time. To call and say, "hi"
You'd better slow down. Don't dance so fast.
Time is short. The music won't last.

When you run so fast to get somewhere. You miss half the fun of getting there.
When you worry and hurry through your day, It is like an unopened gift...
Thrown away. Life is not a race.
Do take it slower. Hear the music. Before the song is over.

PLEASE FORWARD THIS TO HELP THIS LITTLE GIRL. ALL FORWARDED E-MAILS ARE TRACKED TO OBTAIN THE TOTAL COUNT.

Dear All:

PLEASE pass this mail on to everybody you know. It is the request of a special little girl who will soon leave this world as she has cancer. Please send this to everyone you know or don't know. This little girl has 6 months left to live, and as her dying wish, She wanted to send a letter telling everyone to live their life to the fullest, since she never will. She'll never make it to prom, graduate from high school, or get married and have a family of her own. By you sending this to as many people as possible, you can give her and her family a little hope, because with every name that this is sent to, The American Cancer Society will donate 3 cents per name to her treatment and recovery plan. One guy sent this to 500 people! So I know that we can send it to at least 5 or 6. Just think it could be you one day. It's not even your money, just your time! PLEASE PASS ON AS A LAST REQUEST Dr. Dennis Shields, Professor Department of Developmental and Molecular Biology, 1300 Morris Park Avenue, Bronx, New York 10461

Sent to the LAWS Newsletter by Mallika Ghosh

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