



Our Story:
Twenty Years of the IAWS

Vidyut Bhagwat and Sharmila Rege (Eds.)

Indian Association for Women's Studies

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Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

Editors:

Vidyut Bhagwat Sharmila Rege

IAWS

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Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

Introduction

The last decade was marked by women's struggles around issues thrown up by the politics of Mandal-Masjid-and the World Bank. The gendered character of communalism and globalisation became evident in this decade that saw growing communal, caste atrocities against women. The new technologies of globalisation combined with cuts in welfare have unleashed new miseries in the spheres of labour, sexuality and everyday lived cultures. The decade was also marked by the struggles of women in the informal sector and Dalit women's autonomous assertions. The formation of broad Left-Dalit and feminist platforms and voices of women in Durban further confirm our belief in collective struggles.

The apparent collapses and the inadequacy of registers of our languages and methodologies have led to a 'crisis of confidence' in the social sciences. While micro-histories and concerns are welcome, the apologetic attitude to collective hope and action is a matter of concern. This is a critical juncture for all of us practicing women studies- as there seem to be no ready made paradigms and we must patiently 'listen' rather than 'resolve'.

In the late 1990s, many women's studies scholars and practitioners have turned their attention to graduate and post graduate programmes in the discipline. Old questions are being asked in new ways for new times. Once again questions about the interdisciplinarity of Women's Studies are being asked. The possibilities and limitations of transforming and being transformed by traditional disciplines are being debated. What seemed like abstract debates in the 1980s are concrete quandaries for many of the Centres and departments where Women's Studies has been practiced for more than a decade. This is a critical juncture, for the events of the 1990s have made the work of feminist scholars, at once more crucial and vulnerable to challenges from within and without the university. Any discussion on the dilemmas and opportunities facing women's studies in the academy has to be located in the context of interdisciplinarity. The structural, institutional, epistemological and political issues involved in interdisciplinarity have to be untangled. We recognize that interdisciplinarity will not naturally emerge, that considerable reflection, creativity

combined with strategic planning and alliance building is called for. If interdisciplinarity is to be more than a mission statement, we have to continue to grapple with the nuts and bolts of fostering interdisciplinarity, the different models of practicing interdisciplinarity in the university and their implications for Women's Studies.

This collection was planned in the tradition of feminist reflexivity to bring together reflections on the last decade and organisational strategies for the future. In the first section, the 'midwives, nurturers, daughters –of women's studies whether obedient or rebellious have reflected on the intellectual, organizational and institutional issues in women's studies. The second section puts together critical reflections on the relationship between the women's movement and women's studies in India. The third section is crucial for planning more inclusive and intensive strategies for regional networking of the IAWS. Contributions from the Western and Eastern India reflect on the experiences and significance of sustaining regional networks. The fourth section is an attempt to document the ways in which the IAWS conferences and meetings have 'recast' conference cultures. Songs, dramatizing of histories and struggles have emerged as an integral part of the conferences. As we began to connect with friends to plan this collection and put together documents for this issue, we realised that the IAWS has a rich history of its own which needs to be documented. An archive should be next on our agenda- we'll have to store and save our histories in these times of hijacking of histories and agendas. The fifth section is a step in this direction towards building an archive

of the IAWS. The visuals in the collection reinstate the commitment of IAWS to secular democracy and have been borrowed from Bhasin et al edited volume entitled 'Against All Odds' published by Kali for women, New Delhi.

In putting this collection together, we have incurred several debts. Members of the Editorial Board of the IAWS Newsletter have been actively involved in the planning of this collection. Special thanks to Zarina Appa, and Pushpatai for the guidance; Rameshwari and Lakshmi for their sustained support and all the members who sent us their comments. The office staff of the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre has often worked extra hours for this collection to get through on time- a big thanks to them. Special thanks to our young colleagues - Swati and Anagha for their active participation from the planning to production phases of this collection. Thanks to friends at Alochana, Kamala Bhasin, Juhi Jain, Kalpana Kannabiran, Chayya Datar, Lakshmi Lingam and Vibhuti Patel for sharing their collection of reports and photographs. We are grateful to all the contributors who sent in their articles in record time. We regret the regional unevenness in the contributions, which in part is a consequence of the uneven responses to our requests for articles and reports. This effort to document our history – is by its very definition a collective effort and we are grateful to all involved in the effort. The usual disclaimer of course applies.

Vidyut Bhagwat Sharmila Rege

Indian Association For Women's Studies, Its objectives and Growth

Zarina Bhatty



Indian Association for Women's Studies (I.A.W.S.) will celebrate its 22nd birthday later this year. It has reached adult hood, and adult hood is associated with maturity, responsibility and growth. Can IAWS claim to have acquired these qualities? Taking into account both qualitative and quantitative parameters, the answer will be yes but not an unqualified yes, as it has been suffering from growing pains too.

IAWS was born as a result of the deep concern for women's continuing subordination in Indian society despite the Indian Constitution granting gender equality. This persisting subordination of women was vociferously brought out by the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (C.S.W.I.) published in 1975. The report broke the complacency towards women's plight which prevailed during the post-Independence decades of the 50s and the 60s. Although, earlier, there had been sporadic women's movements in different parts of the country in addition to Social reform movements of the 20s and the 30s, which were initiated by enlightened men, the feminist movement as it is understood to-day may be traced back to the post 1975, the year when Mexico hosted the first International, U.N. Conference on women.

C.S.W.I. report and the Mexico Conference provided a suitable environment to highlight gender issues. A number of N.G.O.s emerged focussing on women's backwardness and launching programmes for

women's development. About the same time the I.C.S.S.R., responding to the Report's findings, also initiated programmes for research on women, it commissioned a number of studies and motivated social scientists to put gender on their research agenda. A Centre for Women's Studies, was set up, as Dr. Veena Mazumadar as its director. The S.N.D.T. Women's studies already had Research Unit on women headed by Dr. Neeraben Desai. Indian Institute of Social Science Trust (ISST) was also established, by Dr. Devaki Jain, in Delhi, to conduct research on women, later on a number of other women's research centres also came into existence.

These developments led to the holding of the first National Women's Conference in Mumbai under the joint auspices of the S.N.D.T. Women's University, The Centre for Women's Development Studies, Delhi, and the University Grants Commission, which then was chaired by Madhuriben Shah, an ardent supporter of Women's development. The Conference indicated an enthusiastic and widespread interest in women's studies and the idea was collectively mooted by the stalwarts of women's movement, present at the Conference to set up an Association for Women's studies. This idea was whole heartedly supported by Dr. Madhuriben Shah, as a Chairperson of the University Grants Commission. Thus the I.A.W.S. was set up as a Registered body in 1980 to provide linkages between institutions and individuals engaged in research and teaching on women and to collaborate with the activists who were advocating the cause for women's development. The founders of the Association envisaged women's studies to be a transformative agency by promoting research and teaching in the higher education system. This was considered necessary to create awareness of women's issues across disciplines, to enrich knowledge itself and to create awareness among

students and the Faculty. An important objective of I.A.W.S. has been to generate gender consciousness among the planners towards gender inequalities and for the need of women's active and effective involvement in national development. I.A.W.S., therefore, from the beginning had a twofold agenda, first, to generate an inclusive knowledge base recognising the significance of gender in academic inquiry and second, to contribute towards the social transformation of society by collaborating with the activists in their advocacy endeavours.

Over the years new concerns have been articulated by its members, regarding the future thrust of the Association and its relationship with the activists wing of the movement which was regarded in Neeraben's words as an academic arm of the movement. As is natural, the academics and the activists both also had responded to the new political and economic situation prevailing in the country, with which have emerged new concerns. At this juncture, as I see it there are two major challenges that need to be addressed by the I.A.W.S. community, academics and the activists included. One reflects at the status of the women's studies in the higher education system and its contribution to Knowledge itself. There have been two major locations of women's studies in the country, Women's Studies Centres (WSC) in the Universities, and institutions for research on women outside the university system. The number of WSCs have increased to 33 currently, which have been churning out research studies and also been collaborating with the N.G.O.s. The quality of research and the extent and level of collaboration with the N.G.O.s have differed. Some WSCs have been struggling with the welfarish approach to women's issues while others have been probing deeply into concepts and methodologies and have been trying to integrate gender into other disciplines. This process has been slow and a difference of opinion regarding the nature of women's studies has also surfaced. Although there is no difference of opinion on the multidisciplinary nature of women's studies, there is a debate on whether it needs to be developed and recognised as a separate discipline or should gendering of disciplines will suffice. It is a healthy debate I personally feel that it is not an either or situation, the processes can be carried on simultaneously. Women's studies having its own identity and

acquiring a separate status in the University system will have greater chances of introducing gender perspective into other discipline.

Women's Studies Centres outside the University system have been more oriented towards action research rather than purely academic. These Centres have also been operating more closely with the activists. A distinction between more academic research and action oriented research need not lead to a hierarchy, placing academics on a higher pedestal, there are some lurking fears which needs to be watched.

A concern has been expressed by some feminist that academics and the activists are distancing themselves from each other. I do not share this concerns. In fact it has not been the case in I.A.W.S. The close relationship between the two arms of the movement has amply been reflected in the issues taken up in I.A.W.S. workshops and in its biennial conferences; the large number of participants from activists organisations; and the representation of activists in its executive committee.

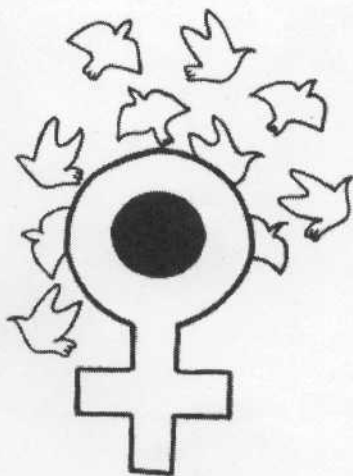
What I will regard to be the greatest danger to the movement, at this juncture is the danger of co-option of women's studies scholars by the fundamentalists. Recent statements by some scholars crediting Manu Smirti as a feminist text and claiming that patriarchy was introduced in India in the 8th century A.D. and that before that Indian woman was the queen of the household, are very disturbing. Further that School curricula is being based on these motivated truths and thus the woman's domestic role is being idealised in the golden Vedic period. In creating such a scenario the self styled, patriotic scholars are trying to send a message that women's movement is redundant, all that is required is to take a long jump into the Vedic period and the Indian woman will be assured of a queenly status in Indian society. These recent developments are of grave concern to both the academics and the activists. Hopefully both these two arms of the movement will come closer to face this challenge which are not only trying to destroy the neutrality of scholarship but also the very fabric of our multicultural democratic society.

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Nuts and Bolts of Running the Office of the General Secretary

Lakshmi Lingam

The terms of reference of the General Secretary of the IAWS has not been stated in the Constitution of the Association explicitly. The same is true also of the other office bearers. This lacuna is strength as well as a weakness. It gives the General Secretary, during her term, the possibility to identify new focus areas and segments of people in the movement and women's studies to work with. Despite the absence of role specifications in the Constitution, guidance is readily available through former Committee members, the General Secretary, correspondence files and Minutes Book of the Executive Committee meetings. For many other practical purposes, common sense developed with years of dealing with different kinds of bureaucracy and diplomatic skills developed over years of relating to different types of personalities at the work place, at home and in the community come in handy for managing the office and problem solving. Hence, the scope of the 'job' of the General Secretary, which unfolds almost on a daily basis, is more process oriented while being task oriented at the same time.



I would like to jot down some of the tasks that I think are the nuts and bolts of running the IAWS Secretariat. The various tasks are classified here as academic, administrative and advocacy. However, these are not watertight compartments.

Academic Tasks

During the tenure of an Executive Committee, several activities are carried out with the intention to further the cause of women's studies by:

- improving the visibility of the discipline;
- attaining greater clarity on emerging issues;
- keeping the membership informed on feminist perspectives on various issues; and
- sharing collective concerns, dilemmas and experiences.

The workshops, regional meetings, collaboration and partial support to events related to the interests of the IAWS are some of the ways in which this is done. The National Conference organised once in two years reflects the current thinking in the discipline and in the movement on contemporary issues of development and gender justice. Based on the suggestion of the previous EC, the present EC had identified some of the EC members as regional Co-ordinators to help organise regional workshops. Though most activities are collectively discussed and decided upon the General Secretary facilitates, mediates and follows up the proposals, the budgets, the reports and the necessary dates and deadlines.

Planning the focus of the National Conference, preparing the concept note and identifying subtheme topics and Co-ordinators through a participatory process are the other significant tasks carried out by the General Secretary with active participation and

support from the Executive Committee members. During the course of preparing for the conference, division of work emerges to cover the aspects of planning logistics, fund raising, communication, co-ordination of sub-theme sessions, etc. There is no uniform pattern in this. Every EC has its own way of organising these aspects. However, uniformly the GS is accountable for all aspects.

Preparation of the conference brochure, book of abstracts, compilation of the regional workshop reports has been my responsibility. However, this has also been distributed among the members, in some of the ECs. The fact that EC members are generally located in different cities/towns and many EC members do not have office and institutional support, either because they are retired or they are activists, leaves the GS to be solely responsible for all these compilations and publications. Facilitating the election process of the next EC, is another activity of significance that the GS performs.

Administrative Tasks

Maintaining the IAWS Directory of members is always an ongoing task, with members joining in on regular basis and ordinary and student memberships expiring around March of every year. Hence, the Directory is always dynamic and streamlining it has always been a preoccupation for all General Secretaries. Deletions and omissions always cause a lot of heart burn because this the lifeline for the General Body to be informed about events, elections and information. So not a day will pass without somebody writing to complain that they have not been receiving communications.

While the Treasurer is incharge of maintaining the accounts books and keep it regularly updated. All matters pertaining to allocations and approvals have to be duly streamlined by the GS with full knowledge of the EC. This includes allocations and advances to publish the IAWS Newsletter which often the responsibility of one of the Six monthly organisation of EC meetings, maintaining the minutes book and reporting on the tasks performed during the reporting period are important responsibilities to eliminate adhocism in decisions and also document work in progress through the association.

Preparation of Annual narrative reports for funding agencies that support the various events of the Association is an important task. Maintaining contacts with funding agencies and maintaining contacts with the members and individuals that show interest in becoming members, is a regular Public Relations task.

While collaborations with Women's Studies Centres at regional level are often identified and nurtured by the EC regional representatives, the Secretariat is responsible for seeking regional workshop reports and the Treasurer follows up for the financial statements.

Advocacy Inputs

The Newsletter of the IAWS represents the concerns of the Association. However, in a professional capacity of being a women's studies researcher and in the capacity of being the General Secretary, I am expected to provide an opinion on a range of issues, like women's empowerment policy; population policy; media representation of women; on issues of violence and globalisation. These are important ways in which the General Secretary represents the concerns of the IAWS.

The issue that always confronts me and perhaps all individuals who have been General Secretaries is how to assess the value of running the Association, at a personal, professional and also at the level of serving the discipline. This is a hard task and there are no indicators as of now to do that.

Greetings for the Twenty Year Old: From one of the Midwives

Vina Mazumdar

You are twenty, going on twenty one, soon you will think you are old,
 All who surround you, steer and guide you, some not so young, nor bold.
 You are a rover, without any cover, not even a permanent home.
 Many who love you, want to settle you, within the walls of a room –
 Because they believe in - order and ruling
 Filing and accounting order.
 Records are needed, as and when heeded
 To avoid in the future – disorder.

But you, my darling, were born without a farthing –
 To challenge a powerful system,
 The symbol of a hope, from many who were broke
 But believed they could transform the system
 Not through destruction, but persuasion,
 Carrying the torch for knowledge –
 Through research and teaching, action, debating –
 Enriching young minds with courage.

Structures these days, age faster than earlier,
 And become homes without people,
 With declining rationale, sponsors and personnel
 The life-force moves away – as natural.
 Life is dynamic, Knowledge not static.

'Tis a mistake to tie them down.
 Challenge especially, needs strategically
 New thrusts, ways and not frown
 On changing methodology, for order and maintenance
 Of records, history and the spirit –

Of moving on gracefully, welcome affectionately
 New people ready to (wo)man it.

Retain your youth, and remain a rover
 Keep on challenging the system!
 Systems – though obdurate, hesitant and cussed –
 Know they must bend to the wind.
 Fanning that wind is your raison d'etre –
 Think up new ways to do it better.
 Monolithic models hid most of our reality,
 Bharat darshan opens door to diversity.



Acton India, Delhi

IAWS: Two Decades of Journey of Tight Rope Walking between Research and Activism

Neera Desai

While reminiscing about the emergence of IAWS and traversing through its the two decades countless memories come back to mind. The first conference held at Mumbai in 1981 was organised within about six months, with lot of trepidation about the response and outcome. To the joy and satisfaction of many of the participants and those involved in the organization, the attempt proved to be an invigorating, meaningful and exiting experience. Participants constituting both young and old, belonging to various ideological hues, running around the campus, dropping in at the book exhibition, enjoying the evening at sea shore, hardly missing any session and finally with one voice passed the resolution to launch the IAWS – a crucial landmark in the history of women's studies and women's movement. In fact there is a nostalgic feeling lurking among many of the participants.

At this historic occasion retrospection over what have the intervening years of the organisation meant in terms of issues discussed, of increasing the involvement of the members, of its outreach or action taken to bring forth gender justice in the Indian society? Of course detailed analysis of the IAWS could be a future systematic project; here I would briefly record some of my feelings about the role of IAWS in the last two decades and challenges ahead. While traversing through the history three or four features of the conference come to mind. Firstly, the IAWS has surely provided a forum to meet and dialogue on various critical issues affecting women in the radically transforming Indian society. A casual glance at the major themes of the biannual conferences and the plenary sessions will indicate the range of issues covered and perspectives encouraged. Secondly though it may not have reached all the strata of women ranging of students , teachers, researchers, activists, sensitive bureaucrats

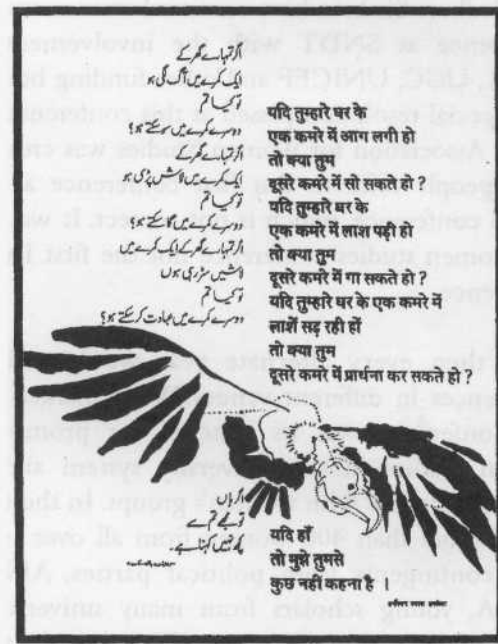
and the grass root workers but every conference has been drawing more and more participants providing them the opportunity to interact as freely and equally as possible. In fact deliberate attempt had been made to bridge the gap between various participants. Thirdly from the very initial years activities of collaborating with national and international organisations involved in women's studies discussions have been pursued helping to build solidarity amongst the various groups; thus IAWS as a concerned organisation is visible at number of such meetings and conferences. Fifthly by encouraging though not always very successfully regional meetings and workshops so as to reach out to the various local groups and also address some of the regional concerns. IAWS conferences to a great extent has been an arena for coming to gather of number of different interest groups and individuals for dialoguing on critical, disturbing issues. The debates have been of substantial depth and nuances which to an extent have made significant dent in the recognition of women's studies in enhancing the knowledge base of gender reality.

The enigma which now before us is, what has been the transformative role of IAWS, besides providing a space to articulate and debate on women's issues? Should praxis be one of the axis on which the role of an organisation could be evaluated. Two decades is sufficiently long period when some introspection about its role in the area of effectiveness may be attempted. As mentioned earlier undoubtedly IAWS has given space to both academics and the activists. There was a period around the second and the fifth conference when a feeling of hiatus between the activists and the researcher had surfaced. In the Calcutta conference issues of difference, who speaks for whom and marginalisation of minority groups began to surface which raised the issue of

homogeneity of women. In subsequent conferences all these issues have been more sharply posited. The activists have been participating in various sessions of IAWS platform not merely for interacting but firmly articulating the concerns. In a way this indicates the opening of the women's studies. The crucial issue is how the debates and discussions are affecting the practitioners in the higher education institutions?

One dichotomy which has been noticed by various observers is the disparity between the quality of presentation and discussion in the plenaries and the sub theme sessions. Of course the sub themes are arenas to give opportunity to many participants to present their papers. However the language and the level of the plenaries have been noticeably elitist.

The final problem in the organisations pursuing the academic interests and establishing the credentials on those counts (in spite of the fact that activism is final goal of IAWS) the intervention of the organisation affecting women's issues somehow gets side lined. Individual members may be taking positions, intervening actively and participating in the movements against violence on women or crucial legislation is being enacted or non secular in roads are made into the educational structures. The major issue here is whether the organisation like IAWS has to be a vehicle only of providing arena for debating and dialoguing on crucial issues affecting women's lives or it has also to play an interventionist role? I do not have an answer, I am only posing the problem.



Design: Zagar Zahoor, Poster: Janatantric aur Dharmirpeksh Manch, Delhi

Looking Back

Maithreyi Krishnaraj

The IAWS was born in 1981. A conference was called after a decision by our stalwarts among whom were Veena Mazumdar, Neera Desai, Lotika Sarkar and Madhuri Shah, to host a national women studies conference at SNTDT with the involvement of ICSSR, UGC, UNICEF and other funding bodies. By a special resolution passed at this conference, an Indian Association for Women Studies was created. Most people refer to this first conference as the 'IAWS conference' which is not correct. It was the first women studies conference not the first IAWS conference.

Since then every alternate year we have held conferences in different venues. What marked the first conference was its concern for promoting women studies in the university system and in building alliances with women's groups. In the turnout of more than 400 women from all over India were contingents from political parties, AIWC, YWCA, young scholars from many universities, students, new women's groups. This broad range was not kept up in later years. At that time women studies centres had not come up. Women's groups had not yet rallied under the label 'autonomous women's groups'. The issues discussed in panels voiced concerns about women's status and feminism was not yet a part of the vocabulary. The ICSSR programme of women studies under the leadership of Veena Mazumdar had clearly laid emphasis on economic issues. The level of discussion was general, there was no divide between 'activists' and 'academics' as the latter had not become a category.

The process of confronting the subordination of women was primarily seen as a political challenge and women studies was to be an aid- truly speaking the 'academic arm'. There was great faith in the role of higher education as an influential agent for

transformation. The faith in research arose also with the impact that Towards Equality made on a complaisant society. Law seemed a potent instrument for we were meeting after the famous Mathura case. We were all going to work together in this shared vision of sisterhood. Lawyers, women professionals, voluntary groups, established traditional organisations and grass roots women. This high hope was not sustained. While individual political activists continued to attend conferences, after the first two conferences party women stayed away. A pity for dialogue between party groups and others receded. The rise of hindutva has now made this even more difficult. The new context of the political – economical changes have reduced the space for women's active intervention.

The first IAWS conference (but the second WS one) was in Tiruvanandapuram with sensitive bureaucrats taking initiative in participating and organising conferences. Those women within the government who had been educated on 'Towards Equality' were confident that governments could be nudged into making changes. Themes like work participation and political participation, women's struggles featured prominently. Many men in the government and academics were convinced of women's cause. The autonomous women's groups gained more visibility.

By the time we met in subsequent conferences, women studies scholarship had emerged and these were reflected in the level and themes that began to dominate. Historical analysis of nationalism and patriarchy came centre stage. The activist-academic divide took the form of accusation that academics exploit activists for building their theory. While in the later years this contentiousness faded, the emergence of NGOs and funding availability for

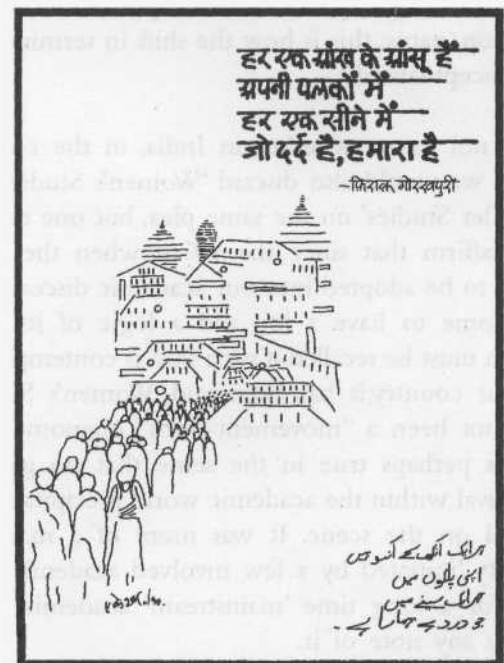
research to these groups shifted the line of disputes. Though *unacknowledged* there has been a good deal of interchange between action and academia, both drawing from each other. For example questions of unpaid work, intra-household distribution, development theories and practice, use of and critique of national data sources were fertile grounds of such beneficial exchange. Experiences of activists on how the law works, on violence, on perception of different category of women, on what is involved when one seeks to work with government or challenges improved research. Teaching of women studies promoted greater interaction as activists were often guest lecturers. It is difficult to say to what extent these were the direct fall out of IAWS is difficult to say but I perhaps it helped in creating an environment for this interaction. International conferences lent more visibility to women's issues.

Decades later, the shifts in intellectual discourses within feminism increasingly percolated into women studies- representation and difference. On the positive side, one noticed an increasing sophistication in analysis, greater rigour in understanding law, in development theories, in methodology, in mapping the diverse experiences of regions.

So, what can we count as achievements, failures, possibilities? The success score is in the regularity with which the conferences have been held; in the quality of papers and discussions; in its outreach; in the dedication with which each conference was organised by host women. The newsletter is an innovation. The flip side is that organisationally we are still weak. Mail does not reach is a constant complaint. There is no proper permanent secretariat; of course being a professional organisation this is not feasible but some skeleton office where people can contact during off- conference times is a lacuna. Elections have not brought in new workers. All EC members do not work or attend the meetings with the same sincerity. Some who are elected see it as a prestige appointment and are rarely available for actual 'housework', that invisible category because they are abroad or too busy. Some attempts have been made to have regional associations but these are still too few in number. Delhi continues to be dominant and regions such as Bihar, Assam, NE, UP have not participated adequately. Attempts at publication have not been successful. Young middle

class women, the daughters of our movement are not coming in large numbers to keep the torch aloft.

So the future? Our alliance have to go stronger; more young people must be brought in; regional associations must be built up in all parts of India as channels for grassroots women to participate. There has to be more room for discussions, less packing of sessions to the hilt that groups do not have free time for organising their own meetings outside official hours. Though IAWS has passed resolutions these remain tokens, not taken seriously by any agency. In other words IAWS is not a strong mouth piece for women's issues from the point of view of the public, though it has been a good forum for scholars and the movement. It straddles an uneasy tight rope between women's conference to focus on issues and women studies conference to generate intellectual output.



Rajasthan Kisan Sanghatana

Women's Studies: the Last Decade and Challenges for the Next

Malini Bhattacharya

The term 'Women's Studies' was invented in the U.S.A. in the 1960s and created a space for itself in the academic world of the West through the campus upheavals of the late 1960s that challenged the boundaries of established disciplines and questioned academic canons. I am told by friends in the U.S.A. that the term has already been discarded in academic circles, that like 'Feminism' it has fallen into discredit, to be replaced at most by 'Gender Studies', which is supposed to be more balanced in so far as it is a relational term. If identities of men and women are socially constructed, and if the differences between them are ideologically determined rather than absolute, then what we are really studying is 'gender' and the relationalities of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine', not just women's problems/issues/position/status; this is how the shift in terminology is conceptualised.

I do not know whether in India, in the coming years, we would also discard 'Women's Studies' for 'Gender Studies' on the same plea, but one may at least affirm that since the 1970s when the term came to be adopted into our academic discourse, it has come to have a life and a logic of its own which must be recalled if such shift is contemplated. In our country, it has been said, Women's Studies 'has not been a "movement-born" phenomenon', this is perhaps true in the sense that no general upheaval within the academic world precipitated its arrival on the scene. It was more of a marginal activity 'initiated by a few involved academicians', and for a long time 'mainstream' academia took hardly any note of it.

However, from the very beginning, 'Women's Studies' in India maintained very strong bonds with women's movements; *Towards Equality*, the text that pioneered Women's Studies in India, came out under shadow

of Internal Emergency at a time when all democratic movements were being repressed by the Government at the Centre. But in spite of having been sponsored by the same Government, *Towards Equality* made no compromises so far as the authenticity and the critical vision of the true research worker was concerned, and was thus able to give the women's movement from which it derived its issues, the consciousness of its own political relevance. Intervention by a group of academics in the Mathura rape case in the early 80's again provided the movement with weapons to wage a struggle against rampant instances of sexual violence that went with caste and class oppression. Subsequently, the movement against incidents of 'Suttee' on one hand and the so-called Muslim Women's Bill on the other was inspired and enriched by the conceptual underpinning that academics, legal experts and intellectuals brought to it. Women's Studies in India may not have come in the wake of campus activism as in the West, but it has continuously derived its *raison d'être* from and contributed to the discourse of democratic movements in the country.

Perhaps, this engagement with activist issues is one major reason why the term 'Women's Studies' retains its relevance for us in spite of the continued antagonism both from mainstream academic disciplines and from some brands of activism. For our purpose, 'woman' itself is a relational word and includes 'man'. While it is true that the significance of these terms is socially conditioned and refers to gender relationships at particular moments of our social life, it is also true that these relationships are embedded in power-structures where 'women' like 'proletariat' or 'dalit' represents a subordinated status. These power-structures also operate within settled disciplines in spite of their claim to academic neutrality and cast a veil of silence around the process

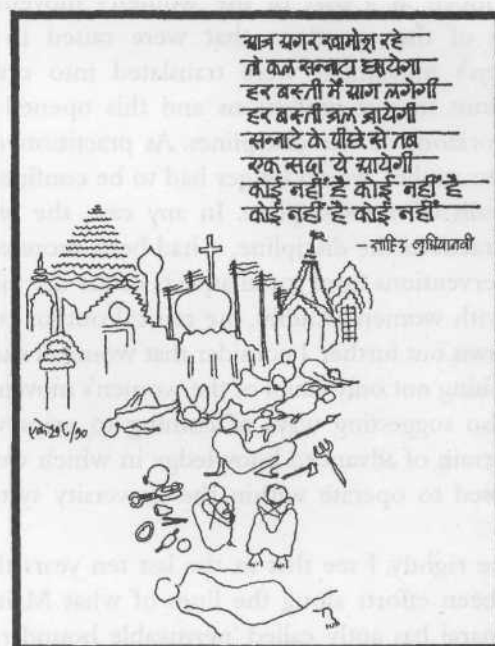
of subordination itself. The term 'Women's Studies' embodies a political thrust, that addresses some crucial gaps and silences within the discourse of settled discipline and helps to open up the inviolate power-structures within academic practice. Substitution of 'Women's Studies' by 'Gender Studies' would indicate a loss of this political thrust, and a dilution of the commitment to privilege a perspective, that has been suppressed and neglected throughout history. On the other hand, activism could also benefit from such conceptualisation. Maybe a shift from Women's Studies to Gender Studies would make it more acceptable to mainstream academia, but would also result in a loss of its political relevance.

Women's Studies in India today also reflects the fractures within the Women's movement. Ongoing debates have been there since the 1980s regarding the nature of the relations between gender-identity and other markers of identity such as class, caste and religious community. Sometimes the same people who refuse to admit 'class' as a coordinate analytical category with 'gender' because it was limited to economic differences, would privilege 'cultural' categories like caste and community as referring to differences which have more relevance for Women's Studies. The upsurge in identity-politics in the last decade has meant that we have moved away from straightforward universalist theories of gender and have begun to study the sectoral implications of other kinds of identities. But the relative absence of 'class' in the feminist discourse in our country suggests a certain gap in our thinking which also limits and hampers the analysis of other kinds of identities.

Differentiations based on caste/religious community are sometimes seen as having more 'real' implications for analysis in Women's Studies while class is seen as more of an abstraction imposed hegemonically on such analysis. When one looks at the situation in Women's Studies today, which has been created by the moribundity of the liberal secularism of yesteryears and the efforts to create a mystique out of the caste/religious identities of women by presuming such identities to be 'cultural' rather than 'political', one feels that the category of 'class' is irreplaceable for promoting the self-criticality/ self-reflexivity Women's Studies must base itself upon.

Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

Class is a diachronic category which seeks to hypothesise how all human relationships including gender relationships change over time. The outlines of the hypothesis may be open to critique, but such hypothetical effort is perhaps necessary to historicise categories like gender/caste/religious community. Will Women's Studies in the coming days be more open to such efforts?



Rajasthan Kisan Sanghatana

For someone like me and several others who I know and interact with, women's studies came across very much as a part of the women's movement. Some of the questions that were raised in the women's movement were translated into critical questions in our professions and this opened out the horizons of our disciplines. As practitioners of women studies, we no longer had to be confined to the walls of our discipline. In any case, the way I had practiced the discipline, it had been more open to interventions from social aspects of the discipline. But with women's studies, the critical output could be drawn out further. I consider that women's studies was raising not only issues of the women's movement but also suggesting ways of coming to grips with the terrain of advanced knowledge in which we are supposed to operate within the university system.

If I see rightly, I see that in the last ten years there have been efforts along the lines of what Maitreyi Krishnaraj has aptly called 'permeable boundaries'. The fact that societies in which we live are stratified has made it possible to access through gender some of the other kinds of stratification more readily and to have a more nuanced understanding of humanism. Gender is one of the major constituents in the making of inequality in the world of disciplines and of practice. Gender having being there the longest, helps the other forms of domination to hook on to it. If one can use gender as a 'tool of critique' – a lot more of the stratified society would be easier to confront. Gender as a critical tool or to use Kumkum Sangari's phrase, gender as the 'cutting edge' opens up different kinds of discrimination and is a way of interrogating the disciplines.

About women's studies in the next ten years – it is difficult to predict – so I do so with considerable hesitation. One hopes that the present technological

happenings will not completely lure away women's studies. These technologies are producing their own set of miseries and forms of polarization in society – instead of the empowerment that liberal market oriented policies were supposed to have brought in. In fact, gender is also capturing the notion of masculinity very fast and for the first time in our society too, there is a feeling that men are at the wrong end of voyeurism. I don't know, if the men feel empowered with this but looking at advertisements like 'Yeh Andar ki Baat Hai' or those of other underclothes – I don't think that masculinity is being glorified at all. So in a way, gender is in a position to question masculinity as it had the notions of femininity. But I am opposed to the term men's studies which as if suggests that gender has vanished and upsets the critical principle of gender. Ultimately one can only hope that women's studies do not get incorporated in the academic naturalization process, which kills a number of critical questions. Therefore, I am not enthusiastic about gender studies becoming 'a discipline'. I think it can be a critical perspective a cutting edge across disciplines converging on certain basic insights into the working of patriarchy and other very oppressive forms of domination, which are both modern and pre-modern. In any case both the modern and traditionalist paradigms are products of patriarchy. That is why globalization and fundamentalism nestle so happily and closely. There is nothing really global about globalization just as fundamentalism is identarian and yet so accommodative of other identarian trends. On both the fronts – globalization and fundamentalism there has been a big sell out to the system. I hope women's studies will continue to hold out against this complete sell out to the dominant system. Therefore, one hopes that women's studies will keep its space within the university set up. There is a lot of lip service being paid to gender and equity but

ultimately no system is comfortable with it. So the confrontation will have to continue.

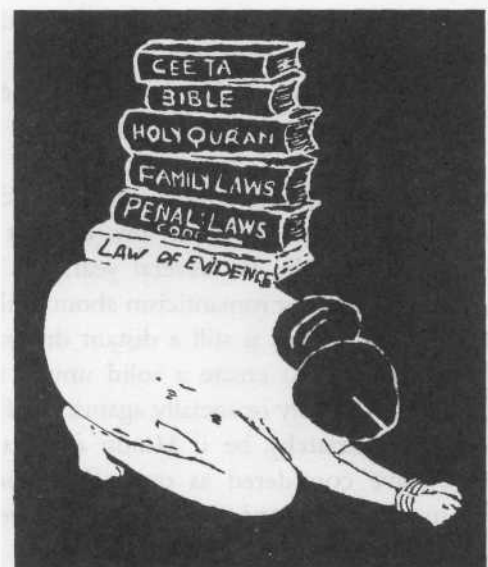
Another problem is that a lot of professionalism has come to the practices of gender and equity. There is no need to feel thwarted. There are ways in which questions may still be kept alive. Even the corporate NGO sector will have to be bothered by these questions and remain answerable to women's studies. This is a generalized hope and it's difficult to present any direct evidence for this hope. Going by recent happenings at Kampala at the third in the series of World Women's Conference, there is a lot of anger and vibrancy being expressed by the African Women's Movement and movements from other parts of the world. For instance, a group from Columbia was getting signatures against the completely destructive paths that both the extreme Left and Right had taken. In case of refugees too, women have a crucial role to play. They are the worst victims of displacement but also the people who will ultimately reconstruct daily lives. The challenges before women are so vast that I think that we cannot settle down into a comfortable niche.

As for the IAWS – its regional and international linkages – one could have done better. But the very fact that bi-annual meetings are organized – says that there is something to look forward to and connect. Organizing these meetings is not easy and to that extent the Association has done well on the networking front. It's wonderful that the whole of India can come together and that there is always a South Asia focus. We need to keep this activity going at the all India level. I am not sure if the parallel conferences of the women's movement are still going on. It's strange how there have been several configurations- there has been a kind of convergence with a critical edge of women's wings of political parties, autonomous women's groups and NGOs. Rather than just drop one's hands in despair as if all this was following the dictates of the UN Conferences and so on – we need to look at the convergence on legal and communal front. People's movements too have criss-crossed across and gathered energy from gender. Research and interventions on caste have also traveled well across the country. With all the limitations of its practice, IAWS is our association –there should be as much possible work done to keep it alive. Some of the old guard – do

feel that its no longer the same, but we need to remember that institutions do not remain the same. The last two conferences have been vibrant. For the present one, considerable trouble has been taken over making the central statement. I am pinning my hope on its potential getting realized.

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This is the text of a stimulating dialogue with Prof. Jashodhara Bagchi at the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule, Pune, September 2002



ASR (Lahore)

IAWS: What Do We Do Now?

Nirmala Banerjee

In times of crisis, a person automatically starts reviewing her resources – what associations she can fall back on, what help she can expect, what assets she can cash on. I think for all of us women of India this is indeed a period of crisis when we have had to face the breakdown of so many institutions that we had always taken for granted. For many in Gujarat it has been a very real physical assault, coupled with a sudden denial of their basic rights, not just as Indian citizens but even as members of civilized humanity. For the rest of us who have been nothing more than agonized but distant observers, this has nevertheless also been a period of a very serious moral and intellectual crisis. It has torn through the thin veneer of the secularism that we had taken for granted amongst our associates and peers. And it has made a mockery of our belief in the state as an agency for the welfare of the weak and the vulnerable. Especially for those of us who were there at the beginning of independent India and who had believed that they would make a positive contribution, however small, to building India's emerging institutions, the crisis is very real, because the events have suddenly underscored the fragility of our lifetime achievements.

Can we, as a group of desolate and bewildered citizens and feminists, reclaim any of that lost ground? True, over the last several years we have come to realize that our romanticism about building a meaningful sisterhood is still a distant dream; we have not been able to create a solid united front that can fight, politically or socially, against the forces of traditional patriarchy, be it Hindu or Muslim. What we have considered as our achievements—whether in education, or in the economy, have not really reached the really needy or vulnerable. And over years, our presence has merely worked to make those in power conscious of the necessity to contain

the challenge that feminism may pose to their way of life.

And yet this is when I would look to the IAWS as one of the few institutions that can bring together concerned scholars and activists for working out strategies for coping with this crisis of confidence. We have to our credit enough experience and research from all parts of the country for making a realistic assessment of the dimensions of the counter forces. We have our carefully nurtured traditions of intra-institution democracy and of communication at all levels. And we have the humility to approach the issues with a clear acknowledgement of our past failures. What we, as an organization have to do now is to reach out into arenas where the battle has already begun and to make our stand known. This may lose us the state patronage that we have so far enjoyed; it may also isolate us from our close associates. It is a risky venture because the rights and wrongs of the day-to-day events are no longer clearly demarcated. That is why I hope this coming conference will use the opportunity to clearly work out our long-term stand about the shape of the society that we want to live in.

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IAWS Plays an Anchoring Role for Women's Studies

Chhaya Datar

I am a member of IAWS from its inception and was elected as a general secretary for a period of 1996-98. Except three conferences, one in Mumbai, when the decision was taken to launch the IAWS, the one in Mysore in 1993 and the third one in Hyderabad in 2000, I attended all the conferences and found myself invigorated every time. In the beginning I remember I used to sit in the audience and watch with much reverence all the mothers of Indian feminism weaving the feminist discourse from the platform of biannual conferences. Their commitment to provide direction to women's studies despite the fear of being outcast from their own discipline, nurturing conviction that the women's studies provides vantage point for an interdisciplinary approach to understand reality in its complexity, and their organising capacities, everything was awe inspiring.

Later, I saw myself shouldering the responsibility of organising one such conference in Pune, in 1998. Looking back I feel it was a very productive tenure with Nirmala Banerjee as a president and Neera Desai as an ex-officio member. We organised also a mini conference in Baroda to celebrate 50 years of independence, and invited stalwarts who were part of the freedom struggle and the first generation feminists to listen to their testimonies and record them on video. On the whole we followed the same format of activities as was laid down by earlier

executive committees. Apart from these two conferences four regional workshops were sponsored during those two years. We also tried to follow the footsteps of our predecessors by inviting one South Asian speaker in every panel of the plenary. One of the major efforts undertaken by our executive was to introduce the electoral reforms. Being a veteran in the IAWS functioning, Neera Desai worked hard to identify the pitfalls in the present constitution and identified much needed changes. But I suppose that because of the lack of sufficient lobbying we could not achieve these reforms in the general body organised in Pune. The Pune conference became the most eventful due to the spontaneously organised Peace March by the participants in association with the local organisations to protest against the launching of nuclear bomb by India and Pakistan, both one after another. In fact our Pakistani contingent could not reach the venue because they were returned from the Islamabad airport after the nuclear explosion just two days before their departure for India. Credit goes to Kamala's inspiring presence in the conference. I found publishing of quarterly newsletter also plays important role of networking and reinforces the sense of belonging.

Despite having rich agenda of activities during last 22 years, I feel that progressively something is missing in this platform. Although in founding of IAWS the initiative came more from the academic stream of the women's studies, quite a few women activists



from different organisations were very active during the efforts of registration and later always provided radical activist inputs to the deliberations within the conference. I remember that always we had organised side meetings of activists to discuss the current burning issues, which could not be taken up on the official platform of plenaries. One would look forward to these events, which would refuel the activist spirit among many of us, before returning to our grassroot activities. In a way, we used to enjoy this cleavage between the activists and the academics and had strong sense that because of us the women's studies could maintain its critical edge. I must say that this spirit is lost in the recent conferences. One reason could be that the younger feminists themselves have come of age now and have started shouldering the responsibility of the IAWS, i.e. they have become a part of the establishment and cannot afford to rebel from outside. Many issues, which were not found scope within the IAWS conference agendas have now been incorporated as a part of agendas. But also, one very important observation is emerging that the second or rather third generation of the women's movement is missing, as the second generation has moved in to take reigns of the IAWS in their hands.

It needs to be also noted that meanwhile the women's movement has started convening its own conferences, where autonomous women's groups are taking initiatives. May be that cleavage has turned into a big divide and I feel very strongly that some reconciliatory action is necessary from the establishment of the IAWS.

Establishing Sisterhood Relationship with the Women's Movement

One action I had suggested earlier during Calcutta conference is that to encourage the women's movement conference organisers to use the same venue as the IAWS conference. And schedule the movement conference consecutively for two days after the IAWS conference so that many participants of the IAWS would be able to join this event, without incurring additional travel cost. It would be a good exposure to those IAWS members who are not usually a part of the women's movement activities, but are curious to know what is going on.

Women's movement conference generally focuses on the current issues requiring consistent campaigns. Agenda for campaigns are usually drawn during its deliberations. The conference is also used for thrashing out the differences of opinions, and perspectives for strategies. IAWS plenary themes and speeches address academic concerns for research and integration in the curricula of the existing disciplines. The women's movement conferences try to address immediate concerns of the grassroot women and the concerns such as lesbianism etc. which are taboo in the mainstream of academia. I certainly believe that although the platforms differ for the academic activities and the movement activities, there are overlaps of concerns and definitely overlaps of persons. If women's movement wants to influence the academics, which is one of the objectives of the women's movement, it cannot expect it to happen indirectly, through the news and literature. Women's movement activists need to be proactive and approach wider audiences.

Proactive Role to Integrate Women's Studies Centres in the Mainstream

I would like to suggest that the IAWS executive should adopt one more functional responsibility to its mandate. Apart from providing space for the emerging scholarship in women's studies and networking possibilities among the scholars and activists, I feel IAWS also should be more proactive with the women's studies centres, both UGC funded and also those which function as independent Feminist Resource Centres. My suggestion is that senior executive committee member should be assigned this exclusive responsibility of contacting the women's studies centres, particularly those which are newly established and act as a mentor to these centres. Enough budget should be provided for traveling and establishing communication with these centres. May be profiling of these centres could be done through the newsletter so that others know the areas of specialisation of those centres. They should be encouraged to publish highlights of their activities through IAWS newsletter. To bring these centres in the mainstream of women's studies is a major concern. They have funds and they should be channelised more purposefully. The liaison between the centres and the IAWS should be strengthened.

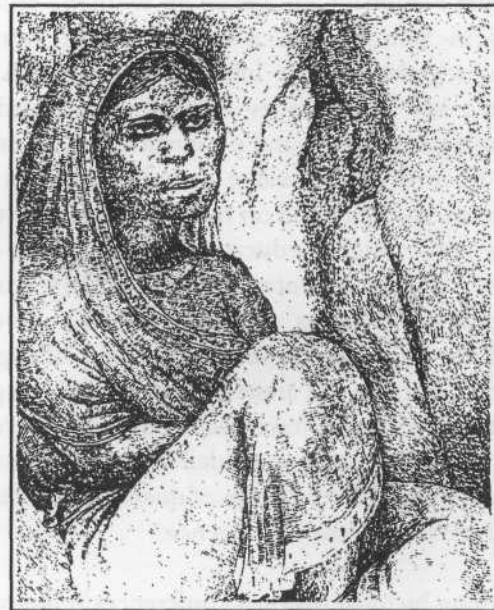
In future may be the centres could contribute some funds to the IAWS. There is a need to establish website of the IAWS to make it more accessible to all concerned with the women's studies. The Women and Child Development department of government of India and NIPCCID together are thinking of establishing a National Resource Centre accessible through net. IAWS could play a major role of communication and consolidation of women's studies through its newsletter and spearhead the process of establishment of this resource centre on NET.

Women's Studies Association in Regional Languages

Another major responsibility, which should be a part of the IAWS mandate, should be to assist and encourage associations of women's studies in regional languages. At the undergraduate level many colleges offer social sciences and humanities in the regional languages. Thus, there is a need to identify the already existing literature in the local languages with feminist perspectives and publish a list of that literature relevant to the teaching needs. The associations could undertake responsibility of translating and publishing some important classics in Indian and World feminist literature. They could encourage preparing textbooks for the specialised courses such as, "Women and Society" introduced by many universities.

In brief I would suggest that instead of focusing all the attention on festive events like conferences, which are of course necessary, the IAWS should also include promotional activities in its mandate.

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Karen Haydock

Regional Seminars and Workshops – Building IAWS’ Resources and Developing Stronger Links between Academic Pursuits and Activist Endeavours

Kumud Sharma

IAWS in the last twenty years has provided a common platform to academics, activists, policy planners, researchers and students to articulate their concerns and share ideas on alternate visions of women’s struggle for a just and equitable society.

The First National Conference on Women’s Studies (1981) in Bombay was a celebration of women coming together. It gave birth to IAWS which has over the last two decades actively contributed to developing knowledge and perspectives on women’s issues. Keen to conceptualise women’s question the first Conference focussed on mainstreaming women’s studies within higher education system. 1980s was also the time when autonomous women’s groups emerged and activists organised women around several key issues. In the 80s institutions of higher education became the arena of debates and struggle of women’s studies to take roots. The emergence of IAWS at this juncture provided it an opportunity to reflect upon a whole range of questions grounded in women’s collective experience.

Organising biennial national conferences is the main task of IAWS. The Association has organised nine



national conferences so far which have addressed issues such as – women’s struggle and movements; poverty, survival and struggle for change; religion, culture and politics; new economic policy; feminist vision and alternate paradigm and practices; survival and sovereignty; challenges to women’s studies and public policies. Some key issues of debates among the participants were the questions of women’s organisations and their relationship to broader movements, the vital but troubled relationship between researcher and activists and theory and practice, role of ideology, culture, religion and politics in gender violence, rising fundamentalism and identity politics and minority and dalit women’s perceptives on state policies and practices.

In 1985 the Association organised an Asian Regional Conference on ‘Women and the Household’ in collaboration with the Commission on Women of International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences and Research Committee 32 on ‘Women and Society’ of International Sociological association. It also organised a national seminar on ‘Organisation and perspectives on developing women’s studies in India’ in collaboration with Delhi University and UGC.

IAWS in collaboration with Centre for Women’s Development Studies organised a national seminar on ‘The early years of independent India: Women’s perspective’ to commemorate 50 years of India’s independence. A highlight of the seminar was the oral narratives of women who fought for the national liberation struggle and participated in the Telengana and Tebhaga movements. These testimonies have been published by the IAWS.

The Association also undertook to set up small task forces on specific issues and organised regional workshops on relatively neglected areas or as a preparation to the national conference.

Recognising the importance of regional histories and comparative research perspectives the association organised four regional workshops to understand parallels, continuities and disjunctions between one region and another. Regional workshops have also been organised on issues such as globalisation, identity, politics and rising violence against women, dalit feminism, issues of reservation and civil code, feminist economics, women and media and so on.

After the Trivandrum Conference (1984) a small group was formed to promote research on the 'Role of women in the Indian Freedom struggle'. In 1987 two task forces were constituted. The first one was to examine the implications of the section on 'Education for women's equality' in the National Policy on Education (1986) and the second on the 'Role of Science and Technology in promoting gender equality'.

In 1989 IAWS appointed two task forces to prepare an approach paper to women's studies in the Indian context delineating the perspective, methodology and the conceptual framework. The second task force was to review the problems experienced by women's studies centres supported by UGC.

IAWS has always been a collaborative venture encouraging institutions, women's groups, women's studies centres and activists to put their energy and resources together to make the association an active and vibrant network.

Book exhibitions, songs from the women's movements, plays, video films, on the themes of the conferences and craft exhibitions, have been regular features of the National Conferences.

IAWS is committed to promoting cooperation and solidarity between women's groups, scholars and activists working in different countries of South Asia. Each National Conference has made an effort to organise a South Asia Panel on the theme and invite delegates from the SAARC countries.

From 1985-86 the Association started bringing out a periodic newsletter to facilitate networking and dialogue on research, campaigns and concerns of the women's movement.

IAWS began its journey with a commitment to curriculum development and new and innovative ways of teaching women's studies. The need for interdisciplinary research and theorisation on women's issues, and collection and preparation of teaching material remains a big challenge. To keep women's studies grounded in prexis and the tensions between feminist scholarship and political practice is another challenge.

In the last twenty years and particularly in the 1990s the Indian scenario has changed significantly. The contemporary women's movement has taken up many challenges and voiced concerns with state policies, development paradigm, political economy, women's struggle against poverty, violence and rising fundamentalism. Recognising the complexities of changes and new threats to people's and women's movements, feminist critiques and alternative visions articulated through women's movement need to be looked afresh. The alliances built over these years to provoke debates and discussions, to do advocacy and lobbying on emerging concerns need to be strengthened. Communalisation of politics and globalisation of economy are eroding the rights of women. Children, minorities, tribals and dalits. Critical voices and struggles have to be sustained. IAWS has to continuously review its role in order to provide an interactive and vibrant forum.

Whither Women's Studies?

Mary E. John

Nobody needs to be told about the sense of crisis and insecurity that grips practitioners in the field of women's studies today. But what exactly is the nature of this crisis? How recent is it? Is it unique to women's studies? It is particularly urgent at this time to go beyond immediate versions of this crisis by placing it in historical perspective, if we are to produce effective visions for the years ahead. This newsletter represents a valuable opportunity to raise some issues, however briefly, for further discussion:

1. The experience of crisis as such is hardly new. Indeed, accounts of the inception of women's studies in the 1970s tell us that it began with a sense of crisis, due as much to conflicting pressures as to the absence of a history to build on. The interesting contrast with the present moment, however, becomes palpable when we look at the 1970s from both institutional and political points of view. Women's studies was born within the portals of higher education at a time of institutional growth and consolidation. State subsidisation of higher education was taken for granted and a secure future for university faculty, research scholars and students could be assumed, whatever else events such as the imposition of Emergency and the fundamental loss of democratic rights might have taken away. In fact, it was precisely the absence of anxiety of this kind that made it possible for a considerable number of urban middle class young women and men, fired with idealistic zeal, to leave their familiar contexts and engage wholly in social and political activity. It is thus significant that the wave of radicalism of the 1970s, including the rise of student politics and the rebirth of the women's movement, was buttressed by a stable and expanding institutional environment. This also suggests that it was this combination of radical politics and institutional security that encouraged an overarching and ambitious vision for the fledgling field of women's studies. As founder-mothers Neera Desai and Vina Mazumdar captured the dominant mood of the moment: Women's Studies was not a discipline or a field of study, least of all a special topic, but a perspective that "required articulation in every discipline, institution, in all studies and at all levels."
2. The most distinctive aspect of the emergence of women's studies in the 1970s was the new emphasis on women as subjects of *research*, especially in contrast to pre-independence emphases on women as subjects *to be educated*. A certain convergence was evident and from various quarters – activists, scholars, policy makers and international agencies – who in various ways emphasized the absence of knowledges about women, especially "invisible women" at the grassroots. Research itself was envisaged as a form of outreach, a means of revitalising the women's movement and giving a fresh direction to state policy. What remained unnoticed in all these new endeavours, however, was that education as an issue dropped out of the picture and was all but lost sight of.
3. The intervening decades of the 1980s and 90s have witnessed a veritable explosion of writing and research on women. No subject or sub-field has been spared in the process, be it development, sociology, history, literature, the law, violence, health, caste, communalism or sexuality, and even this is not an exhaustive list. This kind of impact and presence is surely unique. (The only example of the creation of a new field of scholarship due to political and

social ferment would be Marxism, and a comparative assessment of the two would surely be instructive.) However, not even the most ardent supporters of women's studies would claim that it has come anywhere close to achieving the kind of transformative effect on higher education that its founders had imagined.

4. This brings us to the present moment. Instead of simply blaming the patriarchal "malestream" for women's studies' inability to fundamentally transform the field of the social sciences and humanities, it is crucial to ask ourselves whether those in the field of women's studies gave sufficient thought to the concrete mechanisms and interventions necessary for such a task, or whether they remained with a rather overgeneral mandate. It is surely not accidental that the most visible institutional face of women's studies has taken the shape of research centres, whether autonomous or state-aided, and women's studies centres in universities, even though the founding mandate had been against separate "disciplines" or "departments" of women's studies.
5. The present crisis in women's studies has to do with its need to consolidate and ensure itself a future. While battles for recognition have already been won, the question of its institutional *reproduction* is very much at issue today. Women's Studies has come of age in the 1990s in a vastly altered climate. Higher education in the social sciences and humanities is no longer the most sought after destination for sections of the middle classes as was still the case in the 1970s, and state funding for higher education itself is in jeopardy. The "idealism" in the air a generation ago has been largely replaced by a new realism and a search for security, including the hope for jobs through women's studies. The right wing appears to have stolen the march on us by having identified education as a key site for the production of ideological consent. Isn't it therefore extremely significant that the all but forgotten question of education should have made a comeback during the last decade? Pedagogical issues, classroom politics, curriculum creation and degrees in women's studies – not just diplomas and certificate courses, but even M.A.s and M.Phil.s in Women's Studies are

being debated, planned and advertised. Does this mean that institutionally speaking, women's studies has come full circle?

6. Were we to aim for the resolution of the present crisis simply in terms of ensuring a viable and stable environment for the reproduction of women's studies through teaching and research, however, there is the danger of forgetting some of the most important lessons of the past decade. The most significant event of the 1990s to have made many feminists realise that genuine politics do not just happen at those "grassroots" located far away from the ivory tower of universities, but permeate the very corridors of our most elite institutions of higher education, was the anti-Mandal agitation that rocked many cities, especially in north India. More than anything else it focussed attention on "who" attend our classes in a way that had never happened before. If in the 1970s and 80s, it was believed that a convergence between "action" and "research", between theory and politics, could be achieved by (Hindu upper caste) women activists or researchers, making common cause with the "mass" of poor women "outside", the insufficiencies of such a model are now clearer. What about processes of exclusion from education itself? Why is it that women's studies has been institutionalised at the very apex of the educational system, reachable only by a small minority? The biggest challenge today therefore is to look at our educational system more closely to see how processes of inclusion and exclusion are at work. The Right wing has managed to get ahead by simultaneously targetting our schools and our universities. It is therefore all the more urgent that we draw upon the critical tools available, including those that take us beyond the conventional boundaries of women's studies, to address a broader constituency of men and women, boys and girls. This may well bring us closer – in these dark times – to achieving the mandate that gave birth to women's studies a generation ago.

Women's Studies: The next Decade

Chandrakala Padia

Women's Studies is undoubtedly an intellectual revolution and an academic innovation. It has travelled a long way in exposing deep-seated sexist assumptions and power structures present in literary texts, political treatises and historical documents. To illustrate, Kate Millett and Adrienne Rich systematically unearthed the gender bias in our social system; Dorothy Smith and Nancy Hartsock evolved standpoint epistemologies that revised social sciences; Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks recovered the subjugated voices of black women and called for the study of mass-mediated form of writing and representation; Trinh T. Minh Ha and Anjaldua reinvented both the social and the literary and reconceived the ways to read the social in the post colonial societies. These are only few illustrations. Women Studies has constructed new systems of knowledge, new methodologies and new perspectives.

However, despite all these achievements Women Studies has to go a long way in fighting with the monopoly and hegemony of other disciplines. Many surveys clearly indicate that many British and North American universities see Women's Studies as peripheral or temporary phenomenon. The subject and its practitioners have to live 'in an outer courtyard, far removed from the real centres of academic power and authority'. Both in India and abroad, women groups and associations have played a significant role in fighting with this situation.

Today, we have before us a two-fold task: a) to critically review the efforts made so far; and b) to redefine our priorities and agenda in that light.

On the basis of my own review and understanding of the subject I would like to submit the following agenda for the coming decade:

Rethinking the economic status of women:

A survey of literature on economic status of women reveals that most of the studies and efforts have measured the economic status of women in terms of employment, nutrition, health and literacy. A paradigm shift is required in this approach.

Women's economic status has to be measured more in terms of ownership of land and its control by them. It is a shame that Eighth five year plan (1990-97) recommendation that 'one of the basic requirements for improving the status of women is to change inheritance laws so that women get an equal share in parental property, inherited or self-acquired' has not been given any serious attention.

We must not forget that the history of women's land rights in South Asia is fraught with contest and struggle at every level – legal, administrative, social and ideological. As a result widows, divorcees, deserted women, rural and landless female labourers suffer from untold miseries. Their pains and sufferings can only be mitigated when they are provided with land and property, which would not only provide them with 'a sense of identity and rootedness within a village', but also 'a basis for continuity of kinship ties and citizenship'.

Hence, the Women's Studies in the coming decade must make this a *central point* of research and action.

Revising the syllabi and curriculum:

In spite of the fact that we could bring a shift in the conventional frame of studying women from the perspective of social status, family, marriage and socialization to examining women as a distinctly different epistemic category, we could not succeed in transferring this approach to other disciplines of arts and social sciences. Traditional meanings of the masculine and the feminine continue to persist along with the dichotomous category of nature-culture, emotional-rational and active-passive. As a result the contradictions which emerge out of her placement in a grossly male defined culture, communication, symbols and moral order against her own distinct bio-psychological foundations are not yet recognized. The university grants commission did recognize this lacunae and has tried to revise the syllabi to some extent in this direction. But a lot has to be done. Gender sensitive material has to be prepared and introduced not only at the level of higher education but also at the primary and the secondary levels. Here, the inputs must come from those 'who have struggled to bring women's voices narratives and worldviews into the academic mainstream.'

Retrieving the Indian:

In the past four decades we have passed through three phases in women studies: legal, social and feminist. In the legal phase the emphasis was on providing equal rights through law and constitution; in the social phase, the focus was to hinder the hindrances to the realization of those rights and also on building capabilities so that she may be treated with dignity; and in the feminist phase the effort is on recognizing plurality, diversity and her distinct identity. Some how this phase has been obsessed with the Western methodology, terminologies and modes of understanding. We indiscriminately borrowed the conceptual categories of the West and tried to read our history through these categories of thought. This has done considerable damage to the understanding of our own reality and intellectual traditions.

Now, it is high time that we must have a sincere study of our own sociological texts; and evolve certain indigenous approaches and methodologies

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to combat with the forces of subordination and oppression in our own country.

The challenge for Women's Studies in the coming decade is, thus, to come out of marginal theories that are inside the western frame of reference; to take into cognizance the other life forms and worldviews, articulate new positions, and to create new categories for those women who have been left out or pushed out of the existing ones. The challenge is also to recover and examine non-western modes of lives, non-rational realities and indigenous languages with a purpose of creating a new vocabulary.

चलें मिल के

चलें मिल के आओ सब चलें मिल के
कि हम सब, कि हम सब, कि हम सब
भेद भाव को छोड़ें और सब जियें मिल के
कि हम सब भेद भाव को छोड़ें और सब जियें मिल के

भेदभाव कर कर समाज ने नारी को दबाया
खुब तो उससे काम लिया और खुब ही उसे सताया
चलें मिल के ...

पूजा पाठ उपवास करके अपने को मिटाया
परलोक का है नहीं ठिकाना, मिट गई अपनी काया
चलें मिल के ...

औरत दुश्मन औरत की ये अफ्रवाहें फैलाते
एका हो न जाए कहीं बस इससे हैं घबराते
चलें मिल के ...

हममें हिम्मत, हममें ताकत, हममें पूरा दम है
कोई बता दे औरत जाति मर्दों से क्या कम है
चलें मिल के ...

(राजस्थानी लोक गीत 'पल्लो लटके' की धुन पर आधारित)
कमला भसीन

IAWS – A Retrospection

Rameswari Varma

Though I have been a member of IAWS from its early years, my active association with the IAWS is from 1993, when I was the Local Organising Secretary for the VI IAWS Conference at Mysore. IAWS is a unique organization, because it brings under its umbrella, academicians, activists, N.G.O.'s grassroots women's groups, Government and Donor personnel, women media persons and so on. I do not think we have a parallel to this in India in this respect. The steadily increasing membership of the IAWS is indicative of its popularity as well as utility. It also provides a forum for interaction among institutions and organizations working for women's causes and rights.

One of the main activities of the IAWS has been to hold biennial conferences. The IAWS also holds seminars/workshops. The IAWS conferences have covered a wide variety of themes, which have reflected the concerns of the women's movement as well. For eg., in 1993, the theme of the conference was "Dynamics of the New Economic Policy: Implications for women" – (we must remember that the new reforms were introduced in 1991. At that point of time there were large scale discussions and discourses on the NEP's implication for women). Last conference discussed "Women and Public Policy". The X Conference is discussing the question of "Sustaining democracy" – a theme that is important in the present context of fundamentalisms, atmosphere of intolerance and violence etc. Within the Main theme, the IAWS Conferences have also successfully organized sub-themes, which deliberate contemporary events/happenings that have affected women's lives, interests, and rights adversely. Thus the Conference provides a platform for learning, for enlightened discourses, for dissemination of knowledge, for networking and building solidarity among individuals and groups.

By attracting the Best in the field of Women's Studies and Women's Development to contribute and participate in its conferences/seminars/workshops as keynote speakers, sub-theme co-ordinators, panelists etc. the IAWS has contributed substantially to the building up of knowledge in the discipline. So that new comers and new talents may be encouraged to actively participate, IAWS, since recently, has followed the policy of inviting people to offer sub-themes/organize panels etc. This has encouraged many Young people to participate and contribute meaningfully. In order to spread its activities in different regions of India and so that it could be more inclusive, IAWS has been organizing regional workshops/seminars. These have been successful in attracting local talent and knowledge.

Another heartening feature of IAWS is that its membership is spread all over India and has "friends" from other countries as well. The "SAARC" panel in the conference is a special event of the conference. It has been successful in bringing together women activists, N.G.O.s and academicians from our neighbouring countries to discuss common issues of concern.



An important contribution of the IAWS has been the initiation in 1990-91 of the unique cross country study on "Girl Child and Family" – about 22 women's studies centers had participated in this study.

Since last few years the IAWS conferences have also provided a platform for "Cultural Expressions" of women's concerns and women's issues. Several films, plays, posters etc. on women's theme are exhibited. Women entrepreneurs are also encouraged to exhibit their Wares.

An important attraction of the conference is the Book Exhibition. This book exhibition is a real "window" to the latest publications which may not be available to many women scholars and activists from small towns, small universities etc.

One of the 'complaints' about the conference is that some of the papers presented do not measure upto 'excellence' or some may even lack the Necessary Perspectives. There is some truth in this. But then my personal opinion is that this happens because many women in universities and working in NGOs etc are taking up 'women's studies', because they feel it is "meaningful" and because it is "experiential". The rigor in their papers is absent because of a lack of proper guidance. Since IAWS's policy is to be 'inclusive' and not 'exclusive' – It is only proper that such papers also find a place in the conference. One suggestion that came up in this regard is worth a serious thought. The suggestion was that a "Workshop" on the 'State of Art' in Women's Studies and Feminist methodology must be offered in the biennial Conference so that new comers and others interested could be guided and helped to develop proper perspectives.

One administrative problem that IAWS faces is the absence of a permanent office/secretariat to IAWS. This is so because the office bearers keep changing with each Executive Committee and they are spread all over India and therefore there is no permanent office. The Office generally gets situated where the General Secretary is. I feel this problem has two sides to it. While it is true that having an office helps maintaining records continuity and IAWS's historical legacies etc., not having a permanent office lends a kind of 'fluidity' and 'tentativeness'. Hence it creates a kind of 'All India' image to the association.

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Though the membership is spread all over India, it is concentrated more in certain states – those where conferences have been held previously. The lesson is that in order to have more members in all states, conferences have to be held in those states where we have not held it so far.

Though in each conference "very good" papers also get presented IAWS has not been successful in editing and publishing conference volumes. Can something be done about this in the future?

Aims and objectives of IAWS are many, but it is concentrating on Biennial Conferences and some Seminars/Workshops. Can IAWS encourage/initiate more action research on the lines of 'Girl child and Family'. The IAWS has this unique location of having members from University Women's Studies Centers and Research Institutes and N.G.O.s. It can easily liason with Funding Agencies, which gives it a unique advantage for initiating/sponsoring research.

Earlier the IAWS President was also an ex-officio member of the U.G.C. standing Committee on Women's Studies. This practice helped to build a bridge between the University system and IAWS. I am afraid that this practice has been discontinued – thus, an important link is lost.

Though there is a large body of membership, very few attend the general body meeting. I wish more members would take active interest in the association and guide the IAWS to more years of Glory and Achievements.

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Mapping the Themes in the IAWS Conferences: A Journey Through the Last Two Decades

Anagha Tambe

It is the journey from the review of syllabi in the first national conference on women's studies in 1981, to the need felt in 2002 to discuss 'the doing of women's studies' in the tenth conference, that we would try to trace. We would attempt to chart out the thematic discussions at the nine odd IAWS conferences as articulated in the reports of the conferences. With the shifting contexts, challenges and pressures of the new millennium, looking back at the journey of the last two decades of the IAWS conferences seems necessary at this point. This recapitulation of earlier analyses, critiques and strategies examined in the various sub-themes would probably enable to have a more nuanced understanding of the question. This recapitulation is attempted through a content analysis of the sub-themes (called workshops in the first two conferences) floated in the different conferences. We have tried to categorize the themes in order to see how a particular theme is examined differently at different points of history. This categorization is of course overlapping as a theme could be marked for more than one category. One is also aware that there are several gaps in the way a theme is chalked out by the coordinator, worked out in the conference abstracts and actually discussed and reported in the sub-theme reports. Within these limitations, it is possible to see the themes as forming around the following categories:

- 1) Work and Economic Issues, 2) Development and Environmental Issues, 3) State, Policies and Legal Provisions, 4) Political Participation and Women's Struggles, 5) Family, Household and Issues of Demography, 6) Education and Knowledge System, 7) Culture, Religion, Media and Literature, 8) Health and Reproduction, 9) Question of Violence.

It would be interesting to trace the career of one single theme-Work and Economic Issues, which has been a recurring theme.

In the first decade of the 1980s, with the gaping hiatus between the dream of modernity and development in the post independence India, and the reality of women's continuing subordination as revealed through the CSWI report, there was an examination of questions of survival and struggle and a concern to bring together academicians, government policy makers and implementers on these issues. This pointed out to the need to establish women's studies as an academic concern and to maintain its link with women's movement. The first national conference on women's studies was convened to initiate the incorporation of women's experiences and roles in academic studies, research and curricula. Thus the effort was to underline women's studies as a serious area of academic concern. On the theme of women and work it questioned the very conception of work, sexual division of labour and 'non-working female population'. The problem of categorization, computation and remuneration of different sorts of women's work- house work, unpaid family labour, wage work- was examined in the wider context of class. Features of exploitation common to all women and those related to women of specific castes and classes were simultaneously highlighted.

The second conference outlined its aim as the consolidation of knowledge already available, with in depth discussion on a few limited areas including Women, Work and Employment. Under this theme, the attitude to women's work as secondary and the distinction between women's work within and outside home were questioned, pointing out its link to caste and class considerations. The patterns and

factors underlying the changes in rural women's work were also examined linking it with forms of organization of production. Through the micro studies, problems of women workers were highlighted and the apathy of the trade unions noted. The failure of special programmes for women of the government and the significance of women's organization was underlined. The categorization of work and worker in the census was also an important issue for discussion.

The third conference problematized women's struggles and sought to look at its relationship with women's research. In this conference the role of women in struggles in agriculture, industry, informal sector and professions was discussed in details as was the question of aligning of gender issues in it. The historical studies on the construction of the images of peasant women as sexual and militant persons revealed the need of writing oral history of women in various struggles.

The fourth conference sought to understand the social context of gender inequalities within the family and the outside. It highlighted the processes by which women and their work, within and outside the household was moulded to suit the need of capitalism by separating household from economic activities. The impact of technological change – in the domestic, agricultural and fishing industry and its implications for women's work were outlined.

The next decade was marked by two major incidents – the Shahbano and Roopkanwar case – which drew attention to the links between gender and community. The rising forces of communalism and globalization in the decade of 1990s influenced the concerns of women's studies in a major way. This led to an investigation of issues of religion and culture, which were previously not dealt, as there was overwhelming preoccupation with economic matters. The fifth conference engaged with the issues of religion, culture and politics in the context of weakening and reversing of women's rights. The significant links between culture and economy-cultural values, standard perceptions of women's role in the development programmes and women's role in economy came to be traced. This understanding was further nuanced by focusing on regional economies and the ways in which they shaped the

characteristics of cultural practices like dowry, bride price.

The sixth conference examined the effects of Structural Adjustment Programme and the New Economic Policy on various aspects of women's lives including work, employment and food security. It was now apparent that varied data had been collected through various micro studies of women workers in different sectors –agriculture, prawns processing, rag-picking, jewellery industry to name a few.

The fifteen years of struggle had yielded some noticeable changes, some failures, yet there was hope and many gray areas of complexity and confusion had been opened up. This called for a stock taking of feminist debates and alternative policies and also the development of future vision and strategies. With this in mind, the seventh conference not only assessed the changes in women's work but also discussed ways to support women workers, especially those in the unprotected zones. Discussions underlined the need to develop studied responses to globalization.

The eighth conference sought to take these challenges to women's studies further, highlighting the issues of survival and sovereignty. It examined the issue of women's work by investigating into the challenge of food insecurity among various categories of people. It examined how changing entitlements to Public Distribution System on one hand and export oriented diversification on the other influenced women's work. The need to encourage local initiatives like grain banks was also underlined.

The ninth conference took up the exercise of assessments of trends in public policies as the state seemed to be continuing on its path of retreat. Interestingly this conference talked of the role of government initiatives in promoting women entrepreneurs in small scale sector and discussed the lacunae in the implementation process.

This brief review marks at least following trends regarding the concerns of women's studies and women's movement about women's work. Firstly, with CSWI report, there was an engagement in the field of development and an effort to make visible the actual work done by women within the

household, to some extent at the methodological and conceptual level. In 1990s as the issues of culture became critical, there was a significant contribution in terms of an analysis of women's work not only in the context of political economy but that of household, kinship and cultural patterns as well. The questioning of the development policy had also led to an analysis of the environmental issues and an inquiry into the alternative paradigms of development. Secondly, women's labour force participation, especially in the unorganized sector was documented extensively and analyzed through several studies of women workers in a wide range of fields. In the last decade, there were extensive micro studies assessing the impact of globalization on women's work. However these studies remained more or less descriptive, with little empirical rigour. Thirdly, the relationship between women's studies and women's movement has been quite uneasy. Initially there were many academic activists, mainly

coming from the left circles, questioning the notion of work and development. But there emerged a kind of hierarchy on the basis of experience and theoretical rigour and a chasm between them the agenda of the women's movement and the focus of women's studies started sharpening.

Thus, the history of the interactions between women's studies and women's movement is not a unilinear but a chequered history. The debate over distinction/relationship between theory/research/women's studies and practice/activism/women's movement has repeatedly appeared in the IAWS conferences. The question of autonomous women's organizations and their relationship with the broader democratic movements and presently the debates around the nongovernmental organizations dealing with women's issues has also been a recurring theme. These questions continue in the concerns of the present.

Table 1: About the IAWS Conferences

The Main Theme	Plenary Sessions/Workshops
First National Conference 1981, Mumbai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of Syllabi
Second National Conference 1984, Trivendrum on 'Gender Justice'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Justice • The Position of Women in Kerala
Third National Conference 1986, Chandigarh on 'Women's Struggles and Movements'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Relevance of Women's Studies in the Indian Context • Alternative Perspectives on Women's Roles in Development • Problems of Women in Punjab
Fourth National Conference 1989, Waltair on 'Rural Women: Poverty, Survival and Struggle for Change'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On Feminism and Being a Feminist • Over a Decade of Research Policy and Activist Intervention: Achievement, Limitations and Future Prospects • Women in Andhra
Fifth National Conference 1991, Calcutta on 'Religion, Culture and Politics'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance of the Theme • The Emerging Self-Identity • Women in West Bengal • Comparative Perspectives
Sixth National Conference 1993, Mysore on 'The Dynamic of the New Economic Policy'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women and development in Karnataka • Violence against women • Women in SAARC Countries

The Main Theme

Seventh National Conference 1995, Jaipur on 'Looking Forward, Looking Back: In Search of Feminist Visions, Alternative Paradigms and Practices'

Eighth National Conference 1998, Pune on 'Survival and Sovereignty: Challenges to Women's Studies'

Ninth National Conference 2000, Hyderabad on 'Women's Perspectives on Public Policy'

Plenary Sessions/Workshops

- Voices of Resistance and Struggle
- Rajasthan State Panel
- Women's Visions and Strategies for a Peaceful and Democratic South Asia
- Resurgent Patriarchie

- Stable Livelihoods v/s Pursuit of Profit: Micro and Macro Issues Related to Globalization and Food Security
- Economy and Ecology
- Our Households, Ourselves: Bodies, Subsistence and Resources
- Culture and Resistance

- Women's Perspectives on Public Policy: Incomplete or Lost Agenda
- Tribal Issues and the Women's Movement
- Moving Beyond Wombs: Foregrounding Women's Health Agenda
- Reservation Policies and the Women's Movement
- Censorship and Silence: Perspectives on the Freedom of Expression

Table 2: Categorization of the sub-themes appeared in the nine IAWS conferences (1981 – 2000)

(The number in the bracket indicates the number of the conference)

Work and Economic Issues

- Women and Work (1)
- Concept of the worker (2)
- Caste, class and attitudes to women's work (2)
- Rural women, work and employment (2)
- Women in Industry (2)
- Women's organisations, income and employment generation (2)
- Women in agrarian struggles (3)
- Women and the Industrial working class movement (3)
- Women, informal sector and forms of struggle (3)
- Professional women's struggles (3)
- Technological Change, Labour Processes and Employment (4)
- Religion, Culture and Politics: The economic context (5)
- Work, employment and food security (6)
- Work and workers** (7)
- Women, work and resistance (8)
- Women in business (9)

Development and Environmental Issues

- Women and Development (1)
- Access to Productive Resources and the social organisation of production (4)
- Environmental Degradation and Regeneration (4)
- Natural Resources and the Environment (6)
- Women – centred natural resource management: Land, Water and Energy (7)

	Water and forest (8)
	Land alienation and displacement (8)
	Food security and entitlements (8)
	Meeting the evolutionary, cultural and ethical needs of communities (9)
	Engendering new and emerging community rights and responsibilities in natural resource management (9)
State, Policies and Legal Provisions	Women and Law (1)
	Constitutional equality and patriarchy (2)
	Woman and Her Body (2)
	Women and Family Law (2)
	Government policies and programmes: politics and economic Perspectives (4)
	Laws implementation and processes of legal change (4)
	State policies and their implications (5)
	Religion, Culture and politics: the impact of women's rights and legal system (5)
	State and sharing of political space (8)
	Public policy and people in prostitution and sex work (9)
Political Participation and Women's Struggles	Women's Institutions and Organisations (1)
	20th century movements for freedom from colonial rule and religio-cultural protest movements from earlier periods (2)
	Peasant/tribal/workers' movement (2)
	Participation in formal politics (2)
	Concepts (2)
	Women in youth and students struggles in India (3)
	Women and Indian nationalism (3)
	Regional and Sectional movements and women's rights (3)
	Ideology, political parties and groups and the women's question in post independence India (3)
	Political Institutions, Structures and Processes (4)
	Collective struggle for change (4)
	Political use of religious/cultural idioms (5)
	Political structures and processes (6)
	Women, political participation and politics of organizing (7)
	Women's experience in panchayats (9)
	Mobilizing for change: possibilities and challenges (9)
Family, Household and Issues of Demography	Family survival mechanisms (4)
	Family and Socialization (5)
	The demographic context and patterns of women's relationship to religion, culture and politics (5)
	Family and Social Security (6)
	Family and Women's sexuality (7)
	Intra-household access to resources (8)
Education and Knowledge Systems	Women and Education (1)
	Role of Science and Technology (1)
	Women's struggles for education with special reference to weaker sections and minorities (3)

Educational and Socialization: The formal, non-formal and informal processes (4)
The role of Education in religion, culture and politics and gender justice (5)
Creation and dissemination of knowledge and knowledge systems (7)

Culture, Media, Literature and Religion

Women and Literature (1)
Women and Media (1)
Religion, secularism and women's rights (3)
Sexist bias in media (3)
Ideology, Culture and Politics (4)
Mass-media (5)
Religious organisations and institutions, fundamentalism and reformism (5)
Education, Culture and Media (6)
Women and media (7)
Culture, Identity and Women's rights : Exploring new directions in feminist praxis (7)
Women's writings: Redefinitions, Aesthetics and future visions (7)
Culture, representations and movements (8)
Globalisation and Culture (8)

Health and Reproduction

Women and Health (1)
Women's struggles for health and nutrition with emphasis on weaker sections and minorities (3)
Health, Sexuality and Reproduction (4)
Health and Population (6)
Women and Health (7)
Women's autonomy and reproduction (8)

Question of Violence

Women and violence (3)
Gender and Violence: Role of state, community and family (4)
Violence and the community (6)
Alcoholism and Drug abuse (6)
Violence against women (8)
Gender, conflict and political violence (9)
Violence against women (9)

When Feminists Network: IAWS Newsletter in the Last Decade

Swati Dyahadroy

IAWS – the first all India level association of women's studies was established in 1982. This was a forum for interaction amongst individuals, institutions and organisations engaged in teaching, research or action for women's development. It also aimed at developing a network for collection of information relating to teaching, research and action programmes to enrich both women's studies and women's movement. Towards this purpose, various activities like national and regional level conferences, seminars, formation of working groups, publication and dissemination came to be organised. The IAWS also aimed at functioning as a pressure group. Within a short period of time the all India network was established. The need for a forum for dialogue and sharing had come to be expressed by members.

Thus the idea of a newsletter was initiated and despite the lack of infrastructure and regular funding, the IAWS took a decision to publish its newsletter.

This article is a modest effort at analysing the content of the newsletters brought out by IAWS¹. In this analysis, we begin with what the newsletter begins with – the editorial. Most often, the editorship changes biannually and hence there have been a good representation from different regions in India. This is not a matter of the representation of various regions alone but also of tracing the regional differences in our mapping of gender issues.

The following chart will give us a review of the significant themes that appeared in the Newsletter.

Year	Region of Editorial Board	Theme
January 1986	Delhi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) About IAWS 2) Report: a) Nairobi Conference 3) Women and Education
May 1986		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Muslim Women's Act- Discussion and Resolution 2) Debate – a) Male Feminists? b) Women Culture and Communication 3) Panel in World Sociological Conference
December 1986		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Report – 3rd IAWS Conference in Chandigarh – Sub themes and Plenary 2) Resolutions passed in the Conference 3) An Appeal – To Women in Punjab
September 1987		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Special Efforts: Regional Co-ordinators for the Newsletter 2) Report: Two Task Forces on the issue of a)The National Policy on Education and its Implication for Women, b) Implication of NPE for Science and Technology for Women 3) Women, Law and Development

1 Some issues are missing in this review.

Year	Region of Editorial Board	Theme
June 1988		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Reports: a) Seminar on Women and Violence, b) ICSSR Workshop on Women's Studies, c) Nari Muktee Sangharsha Sammelan 2) Announcement: Fourth national Conference of IAWS 3) About Women and Women's Studies
December 1988	Varanasi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Discussion on Government Document: a) NPP for Women – 1988-2000AD 2) Information – UGC sponsored Women's Studies Centres 3) Report – International Conference on Agricultural Technologies for Farm Women
March 1989		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Report: 4th National Conference of IAWS
July 1989		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Information: Workshops and Seminars Organised in various parts of India 2) Reports: a) Women Science and Technology, b) Sub-theme in All India Sociological Conference 3) Announcement: NARY Conference on Women
December 1990		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Women and Literacy and work 2) News from Women's Studies and Women's Movement Reports: a) Seminar on Women's Development and Literacy, b) International Seminar on Feminism across Cultures, c) National Commission on Women
January 1991 Decade Special Issue	Maharashtra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) History of IAWS 2) Memoriam: Madhuri Shah 3) Women's Studies Women's Movement at global and National Level
June 1991		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Global News of Women's Studies and Women's Movement: a) Silver Anniversary of national Organisation of Women, b) AWID International Forum on Women and Development 2) Reports: a) Women Reach Half the Sky – 4th National Conference on Women's movement in India, b) Research Project on Girl Child and the Family 3) Appeals: a) From Amnesty International action against ill treatment to women by Police and government Officials, b) By Forum for Women and Politics.
December 1991		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Report: Sub themes and Plenary in 5th National Conference 2) Resolutions passed in the Conference
July 1996	Delhi	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Review Of IAWS activities for the period of Dec 1993 to July 1996 2) Introduction of New Executive Committee of IAWS 3) Report: 7th National Conference of IAWS
Winter 1996	West Bengal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Note from the Secretary 2) Announcements: a) Theme for the Regional Conferences – Survival and Sovereignty, b) Uniform Inequality? 3) Reports: a) Seminar on In Defense of Witches, b) networking in Maitree, c) Workshop on Songs Skit and Poster Politics, d) Seminar on Beauty Bazars

Year	Region of Editorial Board	Theme
Summer 1997		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Women, Resources and New Economic Policy, 2) On the IX Plan 3) Women, media and Internet
Winter 1997		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Themes for the 8th National Conference of IAWS 2) Era of Silence or Struggle
Autumn 1998	Maharashtra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Introduction of New Executive Committee of IAWS 2) Reports: a) 8th National Conference of IAWS, b) Fact Finding Committee on Urban Displacement in Baroda 3) Announcement: Certificate Course in Women's Studies
Winter 1998		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Report: National Consultation on Sexual Harassment on University Campus 2) Note – On Women and Regional Histories 3) News from Regions – Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth
Summer 1999		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Sexual Harassment on University Campus 2) Announcement: 9th National Conference of IAWS
November 2000	Maharashtra	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Introduction of New Executive Committee of IAWS 2) Reports: a) Interim Narrative Report of the IAWS, b) 9th National Conference organise by IAWS, c) Women and Mental Health, d) Global March 2000 3) Women and Population Policy
April 2001 Special Issue on 'No Right to Say No: Violence Against Young Girls		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Presidential Address 2) Issue of Violence: Against Young Girls and Women 3) Reports: a) The Impact of Globalisation on Women's Lives, b) Seminar on Women's Studies
September 2001		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Globalisation in the context of Gender and Caste 2) Selected Bibliography on the theme 3) Reports: a) Crimes of Hate, Conspiracy of Silence: A report by Amnesty International, b) Seminar on Globalisation and Women's Identity in Orissa c) Globalisation, Identity Politics and Rising Violence
January 2002 Special Issue on Women and Politics, Guest Editor: Medha Kotwal Lele		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Women and Politics: a) Women in Panchayat Raj b) Empowerment of Women, c) Debate on 33% Reservation 2) Selected Bibliography on Women and Politics 3) Announcement: Sub theme Proposals for 10th National Conference
July 2002 Special Issue on Women and Mental Health Guest Editor: Sadhana Natu		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Women and Mental Health: a) Violence and Mental Health, b) Sexual Harassment and Mental Health, c) Communalism and Mental Health 2) Information: a) Organisations working on the issue at national and International level, b) Groups Working with Children on the issue of Child sexual abuse 3) Reports: a) Conference on State, Civil Society and women's Empowerment, b) National Seminar on Shakti: From Infringement to Empowerment, c) Interdisciplinary and the Question of Women's Studies

The above table suggests that the IAWS newsletter reflected the concerns of the women's movement and has thankfully avoided falling into a trap of the esoteric. The shifting of editorial boards across regions and reports from the regional meetings and conferences has expanded the networking beyond the premier centres.

The content analysis of the editorials shows that through the editorial various contemporary issues like female infanticide, the sexual harassment case at Jalgaon, repressive laws against women, the impact of globalisation, the threat of increasing violence and communal violence came to be discussed. Most importantly a constant dialogue, through the newsletter has been maintained by giving information about membership and activities of the IAWS. Sometimes through the editorials, issues like the place of women's studies in academics and the meaning of the terms used in feminist theorisation were discussed. In the editorial the balance has been maintained between the sharing of the routine organisational matters and addressing some important concerns of the women's movement and the women's studies.

The next important part of the newsletter is announcements and reports of various workshops, conferences held in different parts of India as well as at International level like the Nairobi and Beijing conferences. The review of the reports of the seminars shows the diversity of themes addressed in national as well as at regional level conferences. The themes of the conferences include discussions on women and development, violence, education, agriculture, law, globalisation, mental health, the role of women in freedom struggle, empowerment of women, women writings in Telgu, women's studies and mainstream academics, beauty contest, uniform civil code among others. The reports not only serve the purpose of giving information about the major events organised but also help researchers to locate the different perspectives on the issue. Through these reports, it was possible for researchers to locate the resource centres for their areas of research. Very importantly the Newsletters published the detailed reports of the biannual conference organised by IAWS².

From 1996-1997, the IAWS executive committee decided to organise a series of regional workshops, which would help to build the organisation as also the activist endeavors. Survival and Sovereignty was the theme announced for the year 1996- 1997. This was an effort to engage the work of the IAWS in the overall impact of globalisation both economic and cultural, and the general crisis of democracy. The proposals for this were invited from different regions of India namely Northeast, North, East, West and south. The response to this was overwhelming and different themes and perspectives emerged from those. Considering the response and the importance of having regional seminar the practice continued. The themes announced were Regional Histories (1998-1999), and Gender and globalisation for the year 2000-2002. The following chart will give us a map of the themes and the regions where the conference was held.

Survival and Sovereignty 1996- 1997

- a) New Economic Policy and Women's Control over Resources – Tamil Nadu
- b) Summer School in Women's Studies – Hyderabad
- c) Identifying Local Women's Issues – Thiruvanthapuram
- d) Food Security and Women's Access to Natural Resources – Mumbai
- e) Preparation of Reading Material – Pune
- f) Eastern Region perspective for the 9th Plan – Calcutta

Regional Histories Seminar 1998-99

- a) In search of pasts? History, Women's Movement and Women's Studies – Calcutta
- b) Analyses of the Impact of process of assimilation in the North East – North East
- c) Women in History: A Regional perspective from Western India – Mumbai
- d) Southern Regional Seminar – Women's space in Southern Histories – Hyderabad

2 The detail analysis of this has been done in another article by Anagha Tambe so the themes and other details are not mentioned here.

Globalisation and Gender Question 2000-2002

- a) The impact of Globalisation on Women's lives – Jharkhand
- b) Globalisation, Identity Politics and Rising Violence – Madurai
- c) State, Civil Society and Women's Empowerment – Bangalore

Along with the reports of the conferences, the editorial boards have managed to incorporate some studied articles in the newsletter. Through these articles the debates and positions on themes such as men –feminists, Muslim Women's Protection Bill, crimes against women were articulated. Women's studies, the National Perspective Plan, Shramashakti report, international restructuring in industries and services, a campaign for freedom from sexual violence, women and Internet, the political participation of women, mental health, violence against young girls, globalisation and various other themes came to be addressed.

An important aspect of the newsletter is also the sharing of the moments of joy, and the pain of loss of some of the committed voices in women's studies and the women's movement. The review of the newsletters highlights the enthusiasm and innovations of the editorial boards. Giving space to creative writing, using sketches, letters to editors, photo features and inviting people as guest editors to bring out special issues on the specific themes are only a few examples of this enthusiasm. A significant innovation was that of having regional coordinators of IAWS newsletters- who collated the information on the various activities in the field of women's studies in the concerned regions.

Review of the newsletters gives us a picture of the various activities of the IAWS; the reports help to map the themes of discussion in women's studies and the announcements of the seminars and fellowships- reveal the new vistas in Women's Studies. To conclude, one could say that as always, those working in women's studies and women's movements bring their politically committed energies to the newsletter. Thus, the newsletter becomes more than a collection of reports – it becomes a medium for meaningful communication.



Rajasthan Kisan Sanghatana

Women's Studies and the Women's Movement in the last decade of the Twentieth Century

Irina Sen

Women's Studies and the Women's Movement share many things in common, yet have a somewhat difficult relationship today.

In many ways, women's studies owes its existence to the women's movement, and to the demand that was created from among scholars who were part of the women's movement that women's issues be given a more central position and visibility in conceptualizing politics and development. The pioneering 'Towards Equality' report of the late seventies set the tone for many of the developments that were to follow, for defining the parameters of many of our intellectual queries on the women's question in India, for identifying gaps in our data systems that needed to be filled. It is important today to recall the context in which this report was produced. The political restlessness of the late sixties and early seventies, the upsurge of mass movements involving large numbers of young people like the JP movement in Bihar, the ferment in the left politics in the country, large scale participation of women in the mass struggles of the period, and the upsurge of what came to be known as the autonomous women's movement all combined to produce a watershed in the intellectual and political spaces pertaining to women.

An extremely fruitful period followed, both for the women's movement and for women's studies in the country. Out of this ferment was born Women's Studies as an academic discipline, and the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) with a mandate to take this new discipline forward. The subsequent growth of the new discipline was carefully mothered in the initial years by many of our mother figures and under the pressure of the movement and constant lobbying by the IAWS, departments and centres of Women's Studies were

begun at many Indian Universities in the eighties and nineties. The women's movement too continued to grow and consolidate itself, and women's issues had managed to find a place in the agendas of major mainstream political parties as well as other mass movements. By the decade of the nineties, some of the demands raised by the women's movement had become part of the common sense of progressive political discourse.

Why then do we characterize the relationship between women's studies and women's movement as a troubled one today? There are many reasons for this. Firstly, of course, there is the general regression in our political life and the major spread of forces of communal politics as well as globalization. In the absence of a progressive political agenda that has general legitimacy, many of the fundamentalist formations have managed to acquire large mass followings among women. Similarly, almost all the mainstream political parties have acceded to the demands of a globalized world order to a greater or lesser extent. These have been major setbacks for the secular women's movement including the role that the movement was able to play as an anchor to the discipline of women's studies.

One of the demands that many of us made during the eighties and even the nineties was for the mainstreaming of women's issues in development. Today, however, we are faced with the situation in which gender trainings, women's development policies etc have been woven into the general agenda of development to a greater extent than before. Yet we often feel that the professional 'women's development worker' has a somewhat narrow understanding and lacks a comprehensive vision of the politics of gender and women. In a similar way, many of us are disturbed about the quality of the

research coming out from many of the women's studies centers today. There can be no denying that while some of the academic work coming out of University and other research centers has been of excellent quality, with the growth in numbers of centers and their staff, much of the work that appears within this rubric only serves to dilute and trivialize the issues involved. Many of the second generation women's studies academics have no connection with the movement and very little understanding of what it represented.

A large part of the responsibility for this rests with the present state of the women's movement itself. Increasing appropriation of the movement spaces by the state structures and NGOs acting in lieu of the state, the entry of international funding into women's organizations in a major way, the confusion in secular democratic politics- all these have left the movement in a shaky condition. The women's movement was a political articulation against structures of domination at the best of times. If the politics is taken out of the articulation, only the shell remains. It is important today for us all to realize this, and to recognize the forces of patriarchal globalization that subordinate large numbers of women in the world. Only then will we be able to regroup our forces, seek out our allies, and provide necessary direction to a sister stream like women's studies.

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Women's Studies and Women's Movement: Resonating Voices or Discordant Notes?

Veena Poonacha

Women's Studies programmes developed (within and outside the University system) as the academic arm of the women's movement in the 1970s to prevent the collective amnesia of patriarchal societies about women's lived realities and struggles. For this process of forgetting women's historical struggles means that each generation of women will have to re-invent their battles. Specifically these programmes were expected to document and preserve women's knowledge, make visible women's lived experiences, and conduct research on social structures/processes that maintain the *status quo*.

The Growth of Women's Studies Research and Teaching Programmes

In India, the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS), SNDT Women's University, Mumbai, pioneered the entry of Women's Studies in universities. One of the underlying impulses of its establishment in 1974 was the insight that Dr. Neera Desai, its founder-Director, gained as the member of the National Committee on the Status of Women. Set-up by the Government of India to enquire into the status of women, the Committee's report (i.e., the *Towards Equality Report*, 1974), showed far beyond the most pessimistic predictions the dismal reality of women's lives.

Responding to these findings, the Government of India drew up the *Draft Plan of Action*. The research component of the Plan was expected to uncover the social structures/processes that hamper gender justice in the country. Taking up the challenge, the Indian Council of Social Science Research pioneered Women's Studies research to bridge the existing knowledge gaps on women's status and to develop intervention strategies. In the 1980s, the University

Grants Commission established Women's Studies Centres/Cells within the University system to break the academic isolation of higher education through research, teaching and extension.

Theoretical Challenges for Women's Studies

The impetus for Women's Studies theorizing cannot be restricted to these official efforts. It rose out of the various consciousness-raising sessions of the autonomous women's movement, wherein women attempted to conceptualize and validate their experiences. From the outset, Women's Studies scholarship posed a challenge to mainstream theories. It criticized the pretensions of 'grand' theories and demonstrated that the universal claims underlying such theories were deceptive and based on false abstractions. This critique of 'grand' theories translated itself to the emphasis on political action, avoidance of abstract theorizing, based on an understanding of the experiential basis of knowledge.

Over the years, Women's Studies scholarship has developed in multiple and different directions. In the 1970s, Women's Studies theorizing sought to understand the roots of women's subordination. Was it biologically ordained or rooted in the process of gender socialization? What was the economic basis of women's subordination and sexual division of work? Could women's subordination be traced to production or reproduction systems? The emerging feminist voices, because of their different ideological and theoretical underpinnings, came up with different explanations. Broadly it identified the prevailing production, reproduction and sexual relationships as the foundational basis of women's inequalities.

During this period, feminist political action sought to ensure better legal protections for women and stringent implementation of law while dealing with gender specific crimes of rape, domestic violence and dowry-deaths; it also aimed at enabling women to access the existing goods and services in society. The political confrontations of the women's movement aimed at making the state more accountable for the welfare of women. The dilemma for feminists was the basis on which to ground their political action: if they asked for gender neutral laws/social policies on the ground that women were the same as men, the prevailing socio-economic inequalities would prevent them from realizing the formal equality granted in the Indian Constitution and in the various instruments of human rights; if they asked for special protections on the basis of women's differences, the existing gender roles would be justified.

In the 1980s, feminist theorizing increasingly questioned the androgynous model of human nature; it aimed at recovering women's culture and critiqued masculine ideology by pointing to the interconnections between women's subordination and the destruction of the environment. These ideas infused the various environmental, peace and anti-nuke movements across the world. This rich variety of feminist thought percolated into art, culture, religion and literature to resonate in multiple voices. Women of colour and from developing countries pointed to the ways in which race, class and gender intersected in complex ways to modify their lives. These ideas breached the private/public, mind/body, nature/culture divide in western theorizing. It indicated that the habit of thinking in hierarchical binary opposites was responsible for the 'othering' of women, races and ethnic minorities.

Paradoxically these developments also challenged the foundational assumptions of feminist thought of the 1970s. Giving up the over-generalizing and over-ambitious models of liberal, radical and Marxist/Socialist feminist analysis, Women's Studies scholarship opted for an analysis of the local, culturally specific and particular. Drawing closer to the post-structural/postmodern positions, these studies became deconstructive. Seeking to destabilize, subvert and reverse some of the hierarchical binary oppositions (including those implicating sex and

gender) prevailing in the early feminist thought, these studies questioned the overconfident distinction of the earlier decade between sex and gender identities.

Politics of the Women's Movement

The politics of the women's movement has sought to dismantle state patriarchy by addressing poverty and development issues from the standpoint of women. In its confrontations in India, feminists noticed the inconsistencies in the responses of the state to gender justice. The state was quick to enact stringent amendments to the existing laws against rape and dowry deaths and legislate against amniocentesis; yet it also succumbed to political expediency and vacillated about justice for women in the Shah Bano (1985) and the Roop Kanwar Sati (1987) incidents. At the same time, the state introduced progressive policies for women, leading to the mainstreaming of gender issues. The question is has the support accorded to women's empowerment, strengthened or subverted the feminist vision of gender equality?

The question is important in the context of the changed socio-economic and political realities. The deification of free market economies since the 1990s has eroded the regulatory powers of the state; it has also undermined the notions of a welfare state, resulting in the whittling down of the social sector spending. The women's movement is thus confronted, on the one hand, with the overwhelming poverty of local communities, undermining of people's livelihood rights and the destruction of the environment; on the other, with the rising religious fundamentalism and backlash against women. Grappling with these diverse factors, feminist politics is in flux: past strategies aimed at the state are ineffective, as an unresponsive state no longer maintains the fiction of fairness and justice. Violence against women is increasing. The recent genocide in Gujarat for instance particularly attacked women and children. There is thus a need for new political strategies and theories.

The Implications of the Growing Divide between Theory and Praxis

Therefore, how effectively will Women's Studies scholarship fulfill its role and strengthen the feminist action? Feminist scholarship has acquired a degree of acceptance in the academia. Increasingly influenced by post-modern thought, the current Women's Studies scholarship has questioned the previously held definitions of power/powerless, sexuality and fixed gender identities. The challenge to 'grand' theories has developed a rich understanding of the heterogeneity of human experiences. Nonetheless the fear is, whether this legitimate critiquing of the shortfalls of the theories of the 1970s undermined the political vision of feminism's original project? Has the relativist and experiential basis of knowledge undermine the goal of accurate and systematic knowledge? And has the focus on historical heterogeneity obscured the traditional male privilege in the construction of knowledge?

Furthermore, can feminist politics survive the theoretical onslaught on the assumption of a fixed female identity? And without a shared vision of political change, can the movement oppose the current backlash against women? Thus by failing to acknowledge the legacy of the earlier feminist struggles, are the feminist of the present generation doomed to reinvent their battles? And how far has Women's Studies programmes fulfilled its role as the repository of women's knowledge?

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Karen Haydock

Relationship of Women's Studies and Women's Movement (1992-2002)

Dr. Vibhuti Patel

Close ties between women's studies (WS) and women's movement (WM) have resulted into consolidation of women's concerns in the decision-making bodies at every level. During the last decade, women's studies centres have come up in most of the states and union territories in our country. Women's rights activists have either joined these centres as researchers or teachers/trainers or become members of consultative committees/advisory boards/boards of studies of women's studies centres. At the same time, women's studies scholars act as full members/sympathisers/evaluators of the women's rights groups.

Mutual support and consistent collaboration

between WS and WM have helped women's agency to subvert patriarchal power structures in the state, civil society and the educational institutions. Constant interaction between theory and praxis, narrative style in rapid appraisal of the situation, analytical vision, day-to-day handling of reality and strategic thinking have been marked features of healthy relationship between WS and WM. Use of modern research and training methods, mass communication network and conscientisation techniques are needed both, in the activities of WM and WS for advocacy and policy intervention.

Role of IAWS in building bridges: In 1991, when structural adjustment policies were introduced in our country, women's movement mobilised public opinion against its negative implications for women. IAWS chose the same theme for its national conference in 1993. Micro and macro level researches, data base, case studies of different projects provided by the WS scholars proved to be extremely useful for advocacy work of the women's movement on socio economic implications of economic liberalisation and globalisation on Indian women. As a result of this joint effort, memorandum was given to the finance minister to provide safety net

to safeguard women's economic interests in the context of new economic policy.

Activities for Communal Harmony: After nationwide communal riots in 1992, women's movement has focussed on promoting secular humanist perspective in the civil society and in the state apparatus. Women's studies have criticized communalisation of the education system. Audio-visual material prepared by women's movement has been used by women's studies in their curricular and co-curricular activities. But most of the WS centres have failed to introduce a module on communal harmony in their gender training programmes. Relief work among victims of 1992-93 riots and the recent riots in Gujarat has been done by both, WM and WS centres.

Reservation of Women in the Panchayati Raj

Institution: Women's movement activists started providing training of elected women representatives in the local self-government bodies in 1993. It included explanation of Panchayati Raj bill in a non-jargon free language, budgetary allocation for women's development; maintenance of accounts, special needs of female-headed households. The task is enormous. Only in the state of Maharashtra, there are 100,000 women elected representatives. At present, Maharashtra Association of Women's studies and Social Work Institutions in Bombay are playing crucial role in training elected women representatives.

Supreme court Directive of Sexual Harassment at Workplace, 1994:

After 10 years of militant campaign and judicial activism, WM could pressurize the Supreme Court of India to provide Directive on Sexual harassment at workplace. All women's studies centres, under the leadership of 1200 members of IAWS have conducted research on the

subject that has been extremely useful to make a case in favour of setting up of a cell to provide socio-legal redress to women victims of sexual harassment at workplace, educational institutions, shelter homes and prisons.

CEDAW Convention: The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women adopted in the Beijing Conference, 1995 of the United Nations has proved to be a powerful tool for WM and WS for establishing universal standards for women's rights to facilitate the agency of women and to build their capacity to negotiate change at a personal and political levels. Guidelines of CEDAW have rallying point for WS and WM.

Pre Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PNDT) Act: Since 1996, women's groups have been demanding effective implementation of PNDT Act so that abuse of advance scientific technologies such as sonography, ultrasound, amniocentesis, chorion-villi-biopsy are not used for selective elimination of female fetuses. They have also criticized pre-conception elimination of girls by use of pre-selection techniques. Research material and documentation on the subject provided by women's studies has proved to be quite effective in strengthening public interest litigation filed in the supreme court of India by Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (Mumbai) and MASUM (Pune).

Empowerment of Women Policy: Year 2001 was declared by the Government of India as Women's Empowerment Year. Both women's movement and women's studies were involved in implementing the policy and women specific programmes. On environmental issues affecting women and portrayal of women in media, major collaborative efforts have been made by WS and WM.

Reproductive Rights of Women: Women's movement has played pioneering role in bringing paradigm shift in the family planning discourse. But, the mainstream academia has been obsessed with "Population Control" approach. Though WS has accepted the reproductive rights approach; it has not used its credibility to critique the sexist and racist bias of new reproductive technologies whether they are pro or anti natalist. Harmful effects of long acting, hormone based contraceptives that have been

experimented on women from the marginalized sections need to be examined by WS researches.

Future of Women's Studies and Women's Movement in India: The state of art profile of WS at the end of this exercise is not neat and clear, as women's life is also not simple. It is full of contradictions. The research activity and the debates generated in women's studies have reached the levels of compensatory research where women's perspective has been added to the conventional discipline. We need more systematic work to challenge the mainstream discipline, build new paradigms and provide significant theoretical understanding.

On the contrary, women's movement in India is far more creative, courageous and vibrant in terms of its research agenda, advocacy and policy oriented research and action plans. As a result, all those who used to say, "Women's issues can wait" are forced to accept "Every issue is a women's issue".



Saheli, Delhi 1985

Women's Studies in Gujarat

Amita Verma

An attempt has been made in this paper to provide a brief overview of women's studies in Gujarat. It is neither an exhaustive account nor is it presented in a strictly chronological sequence.

Background

Women in Gujarat played an important role in the Gandhian nationalist movement. Saralabehn Sarabhai, and Mridula Sarabhai were closely associated with the Congress, Anasuyabehn Sarabhai was deeply involved with the trade union movement; Mithubehn Petit, a lawyer, worked with mentally ill women at the ashram at Maroli, South Gujarat, Pushpabehn Mehta was a staunch Gandhian who worked on social welfare issues and initiated women's welfare organizations in Gujarat, the two sisters Vidyagauri Nilkanth and Shardabehn Mehta were pioneers in the field of women's education. These women provided the energy and zeal which led to the establishment of several education and welfare organizations like the Jyoti Sangh etc. in Gujarat. Many women from Gujarat became active members of the All India Women's Conference and several branches of AIWC can be found in cities like Ahmedabad, Baroda, Surat and Rajkot. Maharani Chimnabhai Gaekwad, the wife of Maharani Sayajirao III of Baroda involved herself in the activities of AIWC and became the president of the Association.

Following these early pioneering efforts, several individual women and organizations helped to sustain the movement eg. Indumatibehn Sheth who played a very prominent role in education, and later even became a Minister of Education in the newly formed Gujarat State; and Elabehn Bhatt started the self-employed Women's Associates which was a Trade

Union organization to begin with but expanded its activities as well as its reach, over the years. Smt. Hansabehn Mehta's name is specially noteworthy as she led a delegation to the Human Rights Convention in Geneva where the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was charted and signed. In 1949, Hansabehn was appointed the first Vice Chancellor of the M.S. University of Baroda and promoted the cause of women's education.

Soon after Independence, women's organizations which had valiantly fought during the freedom struggle, settled down to provide needed welfare services, using grants from the Government and other State and National bodies like the Central and State Social Welfare Board. The 'Women's Question' during this period focussed largely on women's status in the family, their access to equal educational opportunities, better equal rights of women through legislation etc.

In the seventies, an issue which triggered off women's anger and anguish, all across the country, was the increasing rate of crimes against women – rape, murder, dowry deaths, domestic violence etc. This was marked by spontaneous protests by women's groups all over Gujarat and led to the establishment of several women's organizations i.e. Sahiyar in Baroda, AWAG in Ahmedabad, Astitva in Valsad etc.

International events such as the Women's Decade, the Human Rights Conference in Geneva, the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Conference in 1995 provided existing women's organizations fresh agendas for action.

Women's Studies

It is against this backdrop that one has to view the situation of women's studies in Gujarat. How have academicians in Gujarat viewed the women's question? Have they responded to the challenges thrown up by the women's movement? To what extent have university departments or individual scholars, working in their own disciplines studied women's issues through research, theory building and action?

A rather cursory survey of departments of the M.S. University of Baroda in 1985-86 revealed that most of the studies carried out provided information about women or used women as subjects of inquiry. In 1986 at a meeting convened by the Centre for Women's Studies of the Department of Political Science in Delhi University, a set of guidelines were prepared for setting up women's studies cells/centres in universities with special financial assistance from the University Grants Commission. In response to this, a special women's studies cell was given to the department of rural development at Surat, South Gujarat University. The Departments of Sociology at the Gujarat College, University of Gujarat submitted a proposal to the UGC in the late 80s; as did the M.S. University of Baroda. At this time the Department of English at Gujarat University, Ahmedabad was already looking at issues of representation of women in the media, women's images in English literature etc. The Department of English at M.S. University of Baroda was also offering course on 'Feminist Literary Criticism'. Such scattered and fragmented efforts were under way in the late eighties.

The first full-fledged centre for Women's Studies Research in Gujarat was set up at the M.S. University of Baroda in 1990, with grants from the UGC. The Women's Studies Research Centre was administratively connected with the Department of Human Development and Family Studies of the Faculty of Home Science, M.S. University of Baroda from 1985 onwards, where a team of faculty from the WID office at the University of Illinois, Urbana Champaign were associated with an interdepartmental team of faculty at the M.S. University of Baroda were studying various aspects of women in households. In 1990 funding from the

US agency for International development was provided for development of innovative research methodologies for studying women, households and development. This funding helped in carrying out several small researches, bringing out occasional working papers, as well as newsletters, commissioning scholars to prepare monographs on various aspects of women's lives etc. Several faculty from the departments of Banking, Population Studies, Household Management, Nutrition, Human Development etc. were involved in this project. Seminars and workshops were organised periodically and academics from other universities in Gujarat as well as other parts of the country participated. The most significant features of the Women's Studies Research Centre was the setting up of an information and documentation centre. This centre catered not only to students and faculty members of M.S. University of Baroda but also to NGOs and individual scholars who were interested in studying women's issues in Gujarat.

The Gujarat Forum for Women's Studies

In 1993 the Women's Studies Research Centre organised a meeting at Baroda bringing together academics from Ahmedabad, Rajkot, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Bhavnagar etc. who were involved in teaching or doing research on women's issues. The meeting was planned to facilitate coordinated researches on significant issues related to women so that a much needed pool of knowledge could be built and disseminated to scholars in Gujarat. This meeting threw up the need for some kind of loose network of organizations, agencies and individuals in Gujarat who were working on women's issues, the main purpose of which would be to stimulate and promote women's studies in academic institutions of Gujarat. In 1994, the Gujarat Forum for Women's Studies came into existence. Both Neera Desai and Kamalini Bhansali of the SNDT University provided academic support for setting up the forum.

The Centre functioned under the Women's Studies Centre up to 2001, and several joint programmes were undertaken by the Forum and the Centre over the years. The most noteworthy of these programmes was the "Mahila Nyay Panch" in

February 1997 where women's activists from all over Gujarat came and shared their experiences of dealing with different forms of violence against women. Since 1995, the Forum and the Centre have been jointly conducting meetings and disseminating materials on population policies and their harmful effects on women. A study on women's response to domestic violence was carried out by members of the Forum and the Women's Studies Research Centre organised a seminar to disseminate and discuss the finding of the study, which was funded by ICRW (International Council for Research on Women).

In 1995, the Women's Studies Research Centre and Sahiyar, a Baroda-based women's organization, with partial funding from the IAWS, organised a state-level seminar to review and assess the women's movement in Gujarat. The seminar, which was attended by about seventy women's studies scholars and activists from all over Gujarat, covered historical contexts, the existing social, political and economic context, the women's movement and people's struggles, women and violence, the media, and communalism. Women's health and population issues and government policies in Gujarat were also extensively discussed. The meeting highlighted the areas of strength as well as pointed out existing gaps and urged the participants to intensify their efforts towards knowledge building. The seminar brought out the need for strengthening the theory-activism relationship inherent to women's studies. The Gujarat Forum was re-named the "Gujarat Forum for Women's Studies and Action". There was some resistance from a few members who felt that the primary objective of the Forum was to promote women's studies in academic institutions and that were already many well organised NGOs which worked at the field level on key issues. But on the basis of consensus the nomenclature was changed.

Following the 1995 seminar, several meetings were held to chalk out future activities and programmes of the forum but for various reasons the earlier momentum could not be sustained. A debate emerged on whether there really was a need for such a forum, given the other networks in the state, many of which had formed after the Beijing conference. Views were however elicited from several members who strongly felt that though there were

several large women's organizations in Gujarat, there was nonetheless a need for an autonomous umbrella organization which would respond to ongoing debates concerning various women's questions. Finally it was agreed that the Forum would not have a very ambitious plan of activities but would concentrate on 'building perspectives' on key aspects related to women and to bring out a substantive publication each year, which would also be of that nature. A beginning was made with an analysis of the 2000 National Population Policy, along with a list of demands, which were discussed at a state-level meeting and submitted by the Forum to the Peoples' Health Assembly, and brought out in the first issue of the Forum's newsletter.

The Forum has been active in state-level campaigns, such as the rape of an *adivasi* girl at the Ashram of a well known social worker, the issue of sexual harassment at the work place and on university campuses, communalisation and the recent communal violence in Gujarat, the declining sex ratio and sex-selective abortion, to name a few. The Women's Studies Research Centre at M.S. University of Baroda has played an important role in documentation of many of these events and ensuring dissemination of these reports.

Women scholars and the Indian Association for Women's Studies in Gujarat

Many women academics of Gujarat have been involved in the activities of the IAWS and have also worked as office bearers of the association. In August 1997 the Indian Association for Women's Studies, the Centre for Women's Development Studies, Delhi and the Women's Studies Research Centre at Baroda organised a seminar on 'Fifty Years of Independence and Women'. Some other programmes of the IAWS in which academicians of Gujarat have been involved are the "Multicentric Study of the Girl Child in the Family" which was funded by the Department of Women and Child Development in 1990. Another important activity with some initial funding from IAWS was the preparation of women's studies material in Gujarati. Four books in this series have been published. Several academics from M.S. University of Baroda got together and compiled a "Profile of Women in Gujarat". This could be used

as resource material by other scholars interested in carrying out studies on women's issues.

During the past two decades several researches have been carried out by women scholars in various research institutions and independent researchers in Gujarat. Some of the institutes involved in such work are IRMA, Anand; CEPT, Centre for Development Alternatives, GIDR and SETU (Ahmedabad) and the Department of Rural Studies, South Gujarat University. Many of these women scholars are members of the IAWS and have been involved seminars conducted by Women's Studies Centres and the IAWS.

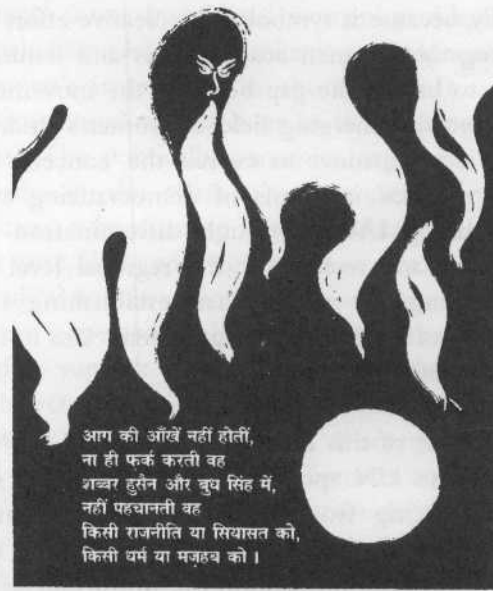
Lastly, it must be noted that women academics have also been involved in State/National level programmes, i.e. the Mahila Samakhya programme. They have helped in developing training programmes, worked as resource persons and in state and national level executive committees, and have also been involved in the periodic evaluations of the program.

In conclusion

As one looks at the present scenario, one does have a sense of satisfaction that women's studies has evolved and made considerable progress in the state. The Women's Studies Research Centre at Baroda has now started offering a course in Women's Studies at the M.S. University of Baroda which has had a very enthusiastic response from researchers. A course was also held for NGO activists from all over Gujarat on January 2001. The Centre has also initiated interactions with different university departments to undertake curriculum revisions to incorporate women's studies perspectives. The documentation centre is widely used by research scholars from all over the state. These are activities which need to be strengthened to push forward the women's studies movement in Gujarat.

■ ■

मौत और आतंक का यह सिलसिला कब तक?
धर्म प्रेम बढ़ाता है ख़ौफ नहीं !



आग की आँखें नहीं होती,
ना ही फक करती वह
शब्दर हुसैन और वृष सिंह में,
नहीं पहचानती वह
किसी राजनीति या सियासत को,
किसी धर्म या मजहब को ।

The pioneer 'Sister Organization' of IAWS Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth'

Shruti Tambe

What does establishment of a professional organization in a post-colonial society at a particular time devoted to women's issues suggest? Is it an indicator of expansion of civil society or extension of social movement in an institutionalized form? Can it be an expression of aspirations of a particular group to mobilize itself to enhance professional and intellectual concerns?

Exploring the case of Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth (Maharashtra Women's Studies Forum, hereafter referred to as MSAV) and its decade-long journey is significant in many ways. First, because it was the first regional 'sister' organization established after the first decade of IAWS was completed. Secondly, because it symbolized a creative effort to bring together women academicians and feminist activists to bridge the gap between the movement and the newly emerging field of women's studies. Thirdly, it was a move to express the 'concerns of feminist politics' in terms of democratizing and decentralizing IAWS through dissemination of information and research at the regional level in regional language rather than establishing the dominance of English-speaking academicians in the field of women's studies.

Establishment of this forum was definitely not an accident. The UN sponsored world Summits on women starting from Nairobi motivated and triggered profound and extensive discussions on 'women's question' throughout the world, especially in third world post-colonial societies like India. These discussions tried to frame the women's question outside the 'women – the – victims' and 'women – the weaker sex' discourse. During this period individual researchers from different social sciences were dealing with 'women's problems', women's issues. The term in vogue, both in the movement

and in the academic was 'Stree Mukti' – women's liberation, and not feminism till then. The government, under the pressure of different international financial institutions had declared 'New Economic Policy' with 'Structural Adjustment Program'. This meant on the one hand recognition and mobilization of women as workers in the formal and informal sector and reduction of subsidies aimed at attaining 'welfare of women'.

In Maharashtra, a comparatively progressive and developed state of India, a sizeable number of educated, employed, mobile, politically aware of women was getting consolidated. By 1990's the products of extension and expansion of higher education in all parts of Maharashtra in the post-1960 period had settled in urban professions. The ripples of women's liberation – Stree Mukti-movement were still fresh after 1975 – the international women's year. Through the 1980's many women's organizations were set up especially in urban areas addressing issues like dowry deaths, rape, battering, equal wages to women, etc. The first UGC sponsored Women's Studies Centre in SNDT; Mumbai and individual research on women's issues had prepared the ground for women's intellectual growth. Maharashtra, with its history of social reform, non-Brahmin movement and trade unionism had absorbed these changes and had ventured in the direction of activism and research related to women's issues from a new perspective. Obviously therefore, the pioneering efforts in Maharashtra to widen the spread of women's studies in the form of MSAV were not incidental. But they were a sign of institutionalization of some of the central concerns of the women's movement in Maharashtra, including the importance given to knowledge-making by women.

In this context, a few academicians and activists involved in the newly emerging field of women's Studies mainly from the metropolitan centers of education and women's activism felt the need to start an intellectual platform aiming at 'education, expansion and action' related to women. Rohini Gawankar, Divya Pande, Vibhuti Patel, Sudha Kulkarni, Medha Kotwal, Neelam Gorhe were some of the founders of this platform, which was established in March 1992.¹ The constitution of IAWS was adopted by this organization and thus it became the regional branch of IAWS with same aims and objectives. Rohini Gavankar was the first President of MSAV and under her dynamic and committed leadership MSAV marched ahead. Pushpa Bhave, Vidya Bal, Minakshi Apte and Chandrakala Bhargav have been the elected Presidents of this platform and their visions and efforts have made it a statewide organization. Eminent scholars and activists like Usha Mehata, Neera Desai, Maitreyi Krishnaraj, Sharayu Anantram, Chhaya Datar, Vidyut Bhagvat, Shaila Lohiya strengthened the organization.² Starting with a moderate number, today MSAV has more than 200 life members and an equal number of ordinary members. This was the first 'sister organization' of IAWS – a regional branch-established at the state level working in the area of women's studies, encouraging other states to have similar regional initiatives.

The first conference, after initial meetings in Mumbai and Pune, was held at Gargoti – in Kolhapur district with a history of non-Brahmin movement and social reform. In 1995 the state level conference was held at Deorukh in Konkan sub-region. One-day workshops and seminars on themes ranging from feminist theoretical approaches to feminist literary criticism were organized in different parts of Maharashtra. Ambejogai and Sangali also hosted conferences on themes like violence and impact of globalisation. Regional and sub-regional themes like the problem of Devdasis-temple prostitutes of southern Maharashtra were addressed in these gatherings.³

As the member of the present Executive Committee of MSAV, taking a self-reflexive view of our platform is relevant. In Gargoti conference, 'Research, Education, Extension and Action' on women's issues were stated as the aims of the emerging platform. Though it was an organization of educated, urban, middle-class, employed women, it never got reduced only to women's lobby. The objectives of secularism, social transformation, eradication of inequalities and establishment of a new society based on men-women's equal contribution were articulated from the outset. The vocabulary and the strategies were aimed at ensuring the journey in this direction. The very idea of establishing regional 'branches' or 'sister organizations' of IAWS emerged from a consensus on decentralization and democratization of knowledge and related power in the field of women's studies. In Maharashtra, the need was felt for such an endeavor because women's movement (popularly called as Stree Mukti Chalwal) had gone beyond the metropolitan concentric circles of concerned individuals and progressive groups. A new awakening regarding women's status, role and contribution to Indian society was observed. In district level schools and colleges leadership of women was at least thought as worthwhile and 'women's problems' were widely discussed. The dominant public discourse on 'women's issues' was in short either caught in victimological approach or in the 'making visible' phase. The politically conscious organizations and groups in the women's movement explained women's subordination in terms of structural factors like caste, class and religion and sought the solution in radical transformation of the social structure. These groups expected their comrades in the academic field to support them and reinforce their demand with facts and theories. Nonetheless, MSAV came forward at this very moment of intense academic and social discussion to give direction and it indeed was successful in giving direction. In this sense it was complementary to the women's movement in Maharashtra. It initially aimed at bringing new force and giving impetus to the women's movement by consolidating scholarship and educated, enlightened

1 Report of Gargoti conference and discussions with Rohini Gawankar have been helpful to prepare this piece.

2 Many more eminent activists and academicians were involved in expanding this platform. Due to restrictions on space, I could not note all the important names.

3 Sub-regional conferences sometimes had animated discussions on local issues, where local activists had the opportunity to show the lacuna in some academic writings. This meant an organic dialogue between intellectuals and activists and I think this is the biggest achievement of MSAV.

opinion with commitment to understanding and analyzing women's issues from women's perspective. It was expected that with growing number of educated women and with higher number of women in academics and research MSAV would go on expanding. Also it was hoped that the organization will reach to all the sub-regions and new groups of women would get a chance to participate. MSAV was visualized as a link between developing and developed regions within Maharashtra. It was also envisioned as a link between the women's movement and academicians in the field of women's studies. This was expected to support women's movement with theoretical perspective and relevant data and the field of women's studies with insights from survival struggles of working class, lower caste women from rural and urban milieu. A sensitive and politically conscious and committed scholarship in the field of women's studies was to be created through these efforts.

How far these ends have been achieved? Obviously there is no easy answer to this question. MSAV has been definitely successful in creating awareness among social scientists about the complexity and pluralism of women's ground reality and the nature and causes of their subordination in Maharashtra and in India. But it has not been equally successful in assisting the movement with data and theoretical and/ or methodological insights. Sometimes therefore the activities and even some of the conferences have hardly gone beyond conscientization or orientation of academicians. The publications of MSAV include a brochure on 'what is women's studies?' and a compilation of translations of plenary papers in the 1998 All-India Conference jointly organized by IAWS and MSAV. The first one is very useful as an introductory note for new entrants in the field of women's studies and activists. The second one serves as important resource material for students, activists and researchers dependent on Marathi sources furnishing latest data and theoretical insight into diverse themes including survival of working class women, the issue of identity, struggles of fisher women, to reducing sex-ratio in India. Since dissemination of information and knowledge in regional language was one of the aims, publications

should be given priority in future. Also MSVA should consider giving encouragement to individual researchers with feminist perspective in the coming years.⁴

One inevitable problem of MSAV has been trying to bring together members with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This also means at times bringing together different discourses on women's issues and problems- ranging from victimological approach to radical feminist concerns under one roof! Debate and dialogue become less important and possible and giving everyone a chance to speak becomes the overriding democratic principle! Members of MSAV thus do not always have a sense of collective identity, shared meanings and common goals.

The decade of MSAV has also been the period dominated by aggressive Hindutva and undaunted march of pauperizing policies of Globalization. We must, therefore, in spite of some of these shortcomings, congratulate MSAV for not allowing its platform to be appropriated by dominant right-wing intellectuals reducing women's 'problems' to the 'cultural field' and finding answers in 'benevolent patriarchy' or patronizing policies of the State.⁵

Of course, it is important to see whether the second generation of MSAV members share the same concerns with founder members and take the organization ahead.

■ ■

4 Recently, MSAV executive is discussing whether cross-regional comparative research would be feasible through MSAV network.

5 The introduction to the Women's Policy by the BJP-Shivsena Government, 1998.

I.A.W.S. Jharkhand

Vasavi

Ranchi, Jharkhand State which has recently emerged in the political map of India, has been unique form historical social and cultural points of view since time in memorial. This tribal region, which was the victim of colonial aggressions, has been the center of the study of different dimensions of socio political and economic issues of women. The academic relationship between the I.A.W.S. and Jharkhand in the areas of research and study has been as old as 16 years. The initiatives of the I.A.W.S. to undertake subaltern studies prepared the ground for such relationship.

In fact I.A.W.S. closeness with Jharkhand which has been the bastion of peoples movement was possible owing to its changing strategy of coming closure to the activists rather than the arm chair academicians. It is precisely because of I.A.W.S.'s endeavour to establish a co-ordination between the academicians and grass root activists it has been possible for the issues of women's participation in the two hundred years of historic tribal rebellions in the region to receive a right full place at the national level.

Prof. Janki Sinha became the first member of the I.A.W.S. from Jharkhand in 1986. It was the time when Jharkhand separate state movement was at its peak and this political turmoil augmented the demand for sociological studies of the movement. While Prof. Sinha who was a teacher in history at S.S.L.N.T. College Dhanbad was based in the mining and Industrial areas. Prof. Malancha Ghosh who followed her was a teacher in Zoology at the Women's College (science) of Ranchi the Cultural Center of Jharkhand. Prof. Ghosh encouraged Ms. China Moitra, Lakshmi, Renu and Prabhawati Tiwari from her won organisation, Mahila Utpiran Virodhi awam Vikas Samiti, to become the member of I.A.W.S. Prof. Ghosh and Ms. China Moitra become

its life member. Gradually more and more people started joining the organisation Prof. Renu Dewan, Prof. Maya Prasad, Kalyani, Prof. Sukhla Mohanti took the life membership. Till 2002 Ms. Payali Banerjee was the only student member of I.A.W.S. Now however there are six of them in the organisation from Jharkhand. Yet I.A.W.S. is lagging behind in well organised research study and action programmes on the different issues of women.

However Prof. Janki Sinha, Prof. Malancha Ghosh, Ms. Vasavi, and Ms. China Miotro have done several study and research on the problems of Adivasi and dalit women at their personal capacity. Prof. Renu Diwan a teacher of psychology edits a magazine called 'Nari Samvad' on women's issues. She and Prof. Maya Prasad for the first time took part in the IX national conference of I.A.W.S. I came in touch with I.A.W.S. in January 2000 when I was invited to the same conference. I was co-opted to the executive committee of the organisation after my presentation on tribal issues. I was the first Journalist activist from Jharkhand to be co-opted as the member of E.C.(2000-2002).

A two day seminar cum workshop was organised by me on "impact of globalisation on womens ; in the context of Jharkhand" with the help of I.A.W.S and Abhiyan a network of several orgnisation. This programme first of its kind in Jharkhand helped I.A.W.S. to further strengthen its grip over both academician and grass root workers. The participation of the University professor, social scientist, politicians, activists from remote villages, journalists, activists, and researcher on women issue, representatives of NGOS, human right activist, experts of tribal issues, economists etc. In the workshop helped I.A.W.S. to become known at a wider circle. Immediately after that a demand for a women's study center was raised.

Now, though on a small scale a Women Study Center has already been started. Ranchi University opened up such a center in 1986, which was closed down soon. But still it is under consideration to reopen it

and after the formation of Jharkhand the vice-chancellor has promised to take initiative in that direction soon.



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Energising Conferencing Remembering the Spirit of IAWS Conferences

Kamla Bhasin

Out of the nine National Conferences of Women’s Studies organised by the Indian Association of Women’s Studies during the last two decades, I have attended five – at Trivandrum, Chandigarh, Calcutta, Jaipur and Pune. I wish I had attended them all, because for me all these Conferences were very meaningful, creative, joyous and energising occasions. ENERGISING comes to the mind as the main experience. In a way the feminist activist in me has greyed and grown with these Conferences. There is a saying in Hindi

ijatnaa gauD Dalaaogao Jtnaa malza haogaa

(the sweetness depends on the amount of sugar you put). The women and some men behind these Conferences have put a lot of sugar (labour of love) to make them meaningful and memorable.

The coming together of 500 to 800 women and men, all involved in one way or another in the struggle for gender justice, is in itself empowering. Those who come to these Conferences from different parts of the country also bring with them the energy of their own struggles, to energise these gatherings and to get energy from them.



Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

Many aspects of these Conferences have attracted and inspired me. The first is the tremendous diversity amongst the participants. Academics, researchers, activists, lawyers, journalists, teachers, policy makers, grass root workers, artists all at one place to share, discuss, learn and grow together. In addition these Conferences are an amazing SANGAM or confluence of different regions, ages, views, perspectives, experiences.

These Conferences have also been the meeting point of **three or more generations of feminist activists and scholars**. The younger scholars and activists get an opportunity to listen to and meet women who led the women’s movement in the 50s and 60s and those who initiated the women’s studies movement in India in the 70s and 80s; the foremothers get to meet the young women who are getting ready to take their struggles forward.

For me another special aspect of the IAWS Conferences has been the presence and participation of feminists from the **neighbouring countries**. The **South Asian panels** at the IAWS Conferences, which have now become a regular feature, have enriched our struggles by extending the hand of solidarity to women’s movements in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The Sound of Music

The **sound of songs and slogans** during tea and lunch breaks, in the evenings and sometimes even within sessions has reflected the energy and joy of these Conferences. In the Chandigarh Conference we at Jagori and Kali for Women jointly organised a Workshop on “Struggles Against Sexist Media”. Singing feminist songs was interwoven in this

workshop. We brought out a small booklet containing 13 new and old songs on women's issues and solidarity and sold it for Rs. two each. The songs were written in Devnagari and Roman script so that those who couldn't read Hindi, could also sing with us. The booklet opened with the following words:

"Welcome to the Conference. Welcome to Punjab and to singing with us.

Singing has been an important part of our culture, specially of women's culture. For centuries through the medium of songs, women have expressed their fears, anxieties, frustrations, joys and dreams. Using the same old tradition, we are singing our perceptions of reality, our new consciousness and strength. Our creativity is finding new expression in these songs. The echoes of such songs are coming from different parts of our country and the world and they prove that our strength, creativity and links are growing."

The thought of being with so many friends inspired me to write three new songs on women's studies for the Chandigarh Conference. One of these songs went on to become quite popular because of its tongue and cheek humour and also because it brought some latent tensions between activists and scholars into the open. This song showed that we feminists had matured and were now able and willing to laugh EVEN at ourselves. Here are a few couplets from this song for which I used the Punjabi tappa style and melody

*laaoga marIjaoM kao laae hOM
Jnaki Kbar pDI baDvo Da^@Tr Aae hOM*

(On hearing that some doctors have come. People have brought patients to seek treatment.)

*yao dvaa[- vaalao Da^@Tr nahIM
yao iktabaoM ilaKto hO ijanhoM kao[- pZta
nahIM*

(No, no these are not medicinewala doctors. These doctors write books which no one reads)

*[tnaa maaoTa pcaa- hO
samaJaa kao[- nahIM pr jaoraoM ka cacaa- hO*

(What a fat paper this one is. No one has understood it but the discussion is loud)

*yao skaOlasa- ka maolaa hO
jaao jaaga-na na samaJao vaaO ibalkula Akolaa hO*

(This is a mela of scholars. Those not familiar with the jargon feel totally lost here)

After talking about some tensions between scholars and activists the song ends on a positive note:

*ka^Mnfonsa maoM jaaeMgao
qyaaorI p'Oi@Tsa ka hma flk- imaTaeogao*

(Let us go to the Conference. To bridge the gap between theory and practice)

Banners Banners Everywhere

The colour of the banners and the sound of music at the Jaipur Conference was quite special and in keeping with the spirit of Rajasthan. Colourful banners in Hindi and English and new posters specially made for this Conference were all around the venue giving messages like

LOOKING AT THE WORLD THROUGH
WOMEN'S EYES
WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

*naarI Sai> ijandabaad
imala jaulakr nae kanaUna banaaeM hk barabar ko
sabakao idlaaeM*

For the inaugural session at Jaipur, in typical Rajasthani style a group of musicians playing large drums and local Shehnai led all the delegates to the Conference hall. The Conference opened with a song by Mira Bai sung powerfully and beautifully by Vidya Shah. Through this song we linked our present feminist struggles to the struggles of our foremothers like Mira Bai and paid our tributes to them.

At the Jaipur Conference we had invited Rukma Bai, a singer belonging to the Maanganiyar community of Rajasthan who is the first woman in the Muslim community to give public performances. The tunes of her powerful songs made many participants break into spontaneous dancing.

An Anti Nuclear March in Pune

The spontaneity and closeness of these Conferences to real life issues and people's movements was revealed by a large Peace March in Pune, collectively organised by the Conference participants and 14 local NGOs. Dozens of participants sat in groups

Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

till late in the night making slogans and writing them on placards. Within hours hundreds of placards were ready in Hindi, English, Marathi, Urdu, Tamil, Sinhala, Bangla etc. We also received 500 copies of a new poster produced by MIND (Movement for Nuclear Disarmament), Delhi all of which were brought by the participants. The message in all these was loud and clear.

WE WANT PEACE IN SOUTH ASIA NOT PIECES OF SOUTH ASIA

This Peace March moved in total silence on the roads of Pune. The silence was very loud and effective and also infectious. Onlookers also fell into silence. The march ended in a public meeting where the IAWS resolution against nuclearisation of South Asia was read out and peace songs were sung. All of us felt strong and connected and made a commitment to carry the message of peace to our areas and organisations.

For me all the IAWS Conferences have been living examples of team work and synergy at different levels. May the IAWS and National Conferences continue to be energised by the participants and be a source of new ideas, energy, friendships and solidarity for every one who comes to them.

■ ■

Conference par tappe

*Log mareezon ko laaye hain
Unko khabar padee bade doctor aaye hain*

*Ye dawai waale doctor naheen
Ye kitaaben likhte hain jinhe koi padhta naheen*

*Workshop me jaana hai
Stove mera band pada use theek karaana hai*

*Ye workshop anokhee hai
Concepts aur theories kee yahaan marammat hoti hai*

*Conference me jaana hai
Samajha koi naheen par zoron kee charcha hai*

*Ye kaisa mela hai
Jhoole, dukaane naheen na koi the la hai*

*Ye scholars ka mela hai
Jo jargon na samjhe wo bilkul akela hai*

*Workshop me aaya karo
Data ham denge tum theory banaaya karo*

*Data sab se le lenge
Phir jhatpat likh parcha apne naam se chhapa denge.*

*Dekho buddhijeevi aate hain
Lambe lambe lafzon se hame buddhu ye banaate hain*

*Conference me jaayenge
Theory practice kaa ham farq mitaayenge*

– Kamla Bhasin



War and Peace: A Dance Ballet, Concept: Kalpana Kannabiran, Lyrics: Volga

We Were Making History: Inaugurating Conferences with Histories of Struggle

Asmita Resource Centre

What is history like when it is seen through eyes of women and judged by the values they define? What were there experiences, what was the movement for them?

My name is **Chityala Ailamma**. We are known as the people from Chityala. My husband was nobody... my sons, they too are nobody. Wherever it is and whatever it is, it is my name that is heard first. They keep coming, always, the people from the Sangam.

How old was I then, you ask. By the time the Union Army came, my child-births were over. I was that small - like that grandchild there - when I got married, and I matured four years later. My children were born from my fifteenth year. My oldest son I bore at 15. I had 5 sons and 2 daughters... a childbirth every 3 years. Oh, my goodness! Who can remember all that?

I must be more than 70 years now. Even now I have the hope that the Sangam will come to power. How can that hope die?

Only my name has remained. The Sangam folk come even today. It seems everyone says one should work like Ailamma...that's what they say.

My name is **Kamalamma**. My work in the party was in the cultural squad. My voice is quite good. I used to tell stories, sing songs and roam about. Once the doctor was taking classes in a village in Suryapet. My son was just 10 months. All of us, men and women, were listening to the class. He began to cry. I felt very bad, so many people sitting there and he was crying, I was embarrassed. The doctor said: "don't feel bad, the future is his". But I could not bear it. There was a comrade from my village. I gave him the child and said, 'take him to

my sister-in-law'. She had just lost an infant child and so she suckled my child and reared him. My milk dried up after some days.

And so it went on for a year and a half. By then I was pregnant again. I kept moving around with them. It was time for the child to be born. I delivered under a cluster of bushes, in the night. I reared that child six months as I was moving and working for the party. Then, the leaders said to me, "Kamalamma, either you must give this child away or else you must leave us"... Did you hear that? I was in no state to go. I was afraid in my belly. If I died I would rather die with them... I decided to give away the child...

It is 36 years today and I do not know what has happened to that child. How does one swallow a mother's grief?

Our village is Keshavpuram. I'm called **Kondamma**. The razakars came and surrounded us. They put the women on one side and the men on another side. The men- they stabbed them, and the women - they stripped them.

My name is **Vajramma**. In those days when they asked us to dance *bathkamma* we danced. We stripped when they asked us to strip. In those times where was the honour, where was the shame? We used to leave our babies in the cradle and run for our lives. That's all there was to it.

All of us are telling you what happened after all. Now what does it matter if I don't speak? What does it matter who it is who speaks?

Rajakka, why don't u tell them. It was near their well. She will tell you... they burnt the ones they

killed they killed the ones they burnt. All the stories are the same. They burnt... they killed... they raped. What else can I say? It is all the same story. Do you think we can tell our story? No.. We don't know how?

I'm **Salamma**. You ask why did I feed them? Why have you come here to see me? At least you can read a few letters, but me, I used to graze buffaloes I lived in the strength and faith that a communist survives on the strength of a shoulder. The struggle for gruel and water. I lived in such strength and power for it. I leaped 5 feet with Badam Ella Reddy. I- Salamma. The sound of Salamma was like the roar of a lion.

technical things I would do it for them. I would do anything, like a soldier. Right from childhood I never liked the blouses that girls wore. I used to wear shirts. I used to wear socks and shoes. I couldn't walk without them. Even to the mahila sangams I went dressed like that. Nowadays, if an instruction is given, one wants to know so many details but in those days if an order was given, we just obeyed blindly. That is the sign of a true communist.

In the prison, we had no materials to write anything with, but I was very good at picking pockets. We got pencil and wrote *burrakathas* on the jail walls. We would also dance very aggressively.



Where did I cook? Oh, fuck – cooking! No. I never cooked. I wore a dhoti like a man, wore a shirt (to cover my tattoos on my arms) and shorts, bound a kerchief around my head. I was disguised as a man. To us communism was for seven lives. It's like a low fever that never leaves you.

I was born at sunrise on a Friday and so my father called me **Udayalaxmi**. I grew up without the feeling that I was a girl. Right from childhood. So they always gave me such jobs. Even if they need

*‘These are not stories mother – (chorus) Tandana tana
These are not legends of rama and ravana – (chorus)
Tandana tana*

The women, filled with joy, would say, “Udhayam, why do you need a mike, even if there are lakhs of people!” My voice was so powerful. Even now if I shout they say, “your years are upon you, but your voice is still strong”.

Then **Acchamamba** was made to stand for an election. We were sent as a squad. The squad would split up and move around canvassing for Acchamamba. They called us the 'contract marriage gang'. Then I got upon a plan. Let us take brass water pots in our hands. The congress fellows followed us saying they would make contract marriages with us, so we let them come near and said: 'what's this? Contract marriage, tell us!' So they said 'oh don't you know? Didn't Acchamamba have a contract marriage? So I turned around and swung the brass pot at him. It cut his lip and broke his teeth. He was bleeding heavily. Now what next? They went around announcing, 'These communist women are beating up our man!'

Vidya Kannuga, a party worker from Bombay got arrested. She was a very interesting woman. In her bag she had sanitary tampons. The police found them and thought they were bombs! They called the SP and others. They asked her, "What is this, it has a fuse?" We also had never seen one; even Acchamamba didn't know what those tampons were. Vidya said to the police, "you call yourself educated, you don't even know this! Here read this," and she gave them the instructions.

There was another fighter called **Nagamma**. She was not even as tall as a rifle- she was really very short. If she slung a gun on her shoulder, it would touch the ground. She could shoot well. She used to insist on carrying a rifle everywhere. Her husband was a comrade, a squad commander. She was also in the squad. They planned a raid. The chowkidars were coming. There were always policemen with them, protecting them while they collected taxes. Coming to know this they decided to shoot them on the way. According to that plan one comrade hides in the way, then the commander, and at the very end Nagamma. So as the enemies draw near the commander they would be shot. The commander should fire his rifle. Then they would all surround him like a net. Nagamma from this side. Then they would be covered and throw their guns down. But the chowkidars came and passed. They were passing Nagamma. They must be shot when they are within range. Unable to fire his gun the commander hadn't fired. So they were going away they had passed the spot where they should be fired at and were going away. So she thought one of the 2 things had

happened. Either the rifle failed or the brain behind the rifle failed and she fired at them. The rule in the squad is that no one should fire without the commander's orders. Anyway the chowkidars who were probably unarmed ran away. The police remained in the middle. So the raid was a success. They got the guns. But she didn't keep quiet, but turned on him and asked, "Why didn't you fire on time?" they would never admit they had made a mistake.

What are we to do with women, was the question. When the struggle was over, they decided that the unmarried women should go and marry, the married ones should go back to their families! The men should study law. We didn't have a say at all. Till then we had never thought of families or children or holding on to them! They said it was not possible for us to become party commanders or area organisers. So they asked us to 'set ourselves right'. And we felt very upset. So, after the struggle they said, 'go back to your village and marry.' Marry whom? Which fellow would have the guts to marry these women?

We wanted to write about Ailamma. There are hundreds of people like Ailamma. Their history has just vanished without trace. Who can do this? Only people like us. Only the people who took part can do it. None of us have those kinds of resources. Not Ramulamma, not Satyavathi, not me- none of us wrote. Who else will write? It is because we could not write, that it came to you.

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Presidential Addresses

Compiled by Kalpana Kannabiran

I National Conference on Women's Studies, 1981, Mumbai

Inaugural Address by Prof. Madhuri Shah



I am extremely happy to be present at this historic conference and to see the extraordinary response that the Conference has received from the members of the academic community and other groups concerned with women's problems and development. When we initiated the move for this Conference five months ago, we thought we were about to begin a long struggle to persuade the educational system to take a new look at women's situation and its own role in bringing about healthy and positive changes in society, so that women do not continue to suffer from injustice, discrimination and indignity. We were prepared for indifference, reluctance and resistance, to the idea of developing Women's Studies as a new and unfamiliar venture within the educational process. The response however has been far beyond our expectation and I agree with the Vice-Chancellor of the SNDT University that this is a very hopeful indication of preparedness on the part of our academic community and others to accept a new challenge.

I am also happy to see that our colleagues in the educational system do not share the view that

anything concerning women must be left to women only. The movement for women's equality in India has enrolled many distinguished men as its followers and leaders, including the Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi. The problems that keep large masses of our women shackled to positions of inequality, inferiority and virtual exclusion from the benefits of development are not maladies for women alone. They affect the fabric of the society and influence the direction of its changes. Gandhiji had believed that it was essential for women to play an equal and expanding role in transforming the society if the out come of that transformation was to be a just and non exploitative social order. The presence of so many members of the opposite sex at this conference renews our hope that Mahatma has not been forgotten. The struggle for women's liberation, as an essential component, and instrument of people's liberation-from poverty, inequality and ignorance, can be shared by women and jointly.

Why Women's Studies?

I am often asked why, in a country like India-Which has accepted the principle of women's equality in all spheres of national life, women's studies should be considered necessary. The answer lies in the identification of substantial failures in achieving even basic equality or access to development and genuine participation of women reviews of women's situation, at national, regional or global level during the last decade reveal that women continue to suffer from a subordinate status that ignores their vital contributions to society through production and reproduction. The development of knowledge that has eliminated so many mysteries of the universe, has not managed to answer the simple question-why most societies, even the most developed ones

undervalue their women as human beings and shroud their contributions to societies' survival and development in mysteries. Why in planning for development, do women get left out in the cold, and their concerns are seen as peripheral and marginal, and not of sufficient priority?

Many of us who had the privilege to participate in the earlier movement for women's equality in this country had placed high hopes on education, equality in law and the rights to participate in the political process as the critical levers that would transform women's status. But the reviews indicate that inspite of substantial changes through these instruments, the basic problem of discrimination by society against women from their birth to death, remains unchanged. In many ways for the large majority of women, inequality and oppression have increased with the processes of economic modernisation, social change and population dynamics. The mounting tide of violence that human beings wreak on each other always affects women and children adversely. Our times, however, seem to be adding a new dimension of physical and sexual violence-against women. Which must cause concern to all who believe in a healthy society.

Efforts during the last few years to assess women's situation in different parts of the world have been hampered by inadequate information, distorted interpretations, and the absence of appropriate theories to analyse even the limited data available. Established indicators for measuring development or social change proved inadequate either to capture fully or to explain trends in women's roles and status. We have to acknowledge our debt to the distinguished Chairperson of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, Dr. Phulrenu Guha (who is with us today) and her colleagues for identifying some of the major problems in the Committee's Report. In the scattered attempts to investigate these problems further. The Indian Council of Social Science Research's Programme of Women's Studies provided a substantial contribution. I am proud to mention that the steps taken by the SNDT Women's University, to promote research and teaching on women and to directly engage in action programmes for women's development in collaboration with voluntary

organisations of women, were initiated during my tenure as Vice-Chancellor. I am also happy to inform you of the decision of the Kanpur University to develop a Centre for Women's Studies in Delhi, under the direction of Vina Mazumdar (who was Member Secretary of the Committee on the Status of Women in India and Director of the ICSSR's Programme of Women's Studies).

Such scattered efforts, however, cannot absolve the Educational system as a whole of its responsibility. As observed by the Committee on the Status of Women in India:

“The deep foundations of the inequality of the sexes are built in the minds of men and women through a socialisation process which continues to be extremely powerful. If education is to promote equality for women, it must make a deliberate, planned and sustained effort so that the new value of equality can replace the traditional value system”.

Five years later, the same plea is repeated in the World Programme of Action for the second half of the Women's Decade (1980-85) adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations.

“Instructions and interdisciplinary research on women and the implications of the goals of the Decade [must be promoted] as an input to the educational process, particularly in institutions of higher and teacher education in order to draw on the experience already acquired in some countries with women's status and to eliminate all attitudinal and conceptual biases and prejudices, especially those relating to class, that hinder understanding of the role and situation of women”.

An expert group meeting convened by the UNESCO last year, (in which I participated) recommended that programmes for teaching and research on women will not only be a “means to secure women's complete equality”, but through its complementary and corrective roles, “enrich both scholarship and social policy, demonstrating a dynamic force in the development of new forms of knowledge”

Our National Policy on Education has always viewed education as a premier instrument for promoting equality of status and opportunities between men and women and between groups divided by class, caste and other forms of historic oppression. It appears to me that Women's Studies need to be viewed as an essential method to promote our national educational objectives.

This Conference has several well defined tasks before it, which I need not repeat, I would only like to remind you of a few issues, which would be of crucial importance in educational development in the coming years.

A. How will the concept of relevance to which educational planners attach such significance, affect policies for promotion of Women's Studies? Who is going to determine what is relevant for women and for society? Is what appears to be relevant today, likely to remain so in tomorrow's society? Can we eliminate social inequality by pursuing today's apparent relevance? Is the pursuit of fundamental enquiries relating to women's status irrelevant in today's context?

B. The second issue to which I hope the Conference will give some thought is about the structure and pattern for development of Women's Studies. In some western countries, Women's Studies programmes have been developed as independent multidisciplinary courses, or a package of separate courses within individual disciplines. We have to agree that Women's Studies cannot be a discipline by itself. Its development will depend on the extent to which it acquires an intra-disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary thrust. Its future as a legitimate area of academic concern will also depend to a great extent, on its quality and its ability to shed new light and new perspectives on various areas of knowledge. In my opinion the ideal state would be reached when women's concerns, perceptions and problems have been so internalised by different disciplines at different levels of the educational process that there will be no need for promoting women's studies separately. Is it true that such integration and internalisation, faces many risks of being neglected, overlooked and starved of resources, or of receiving only token recognition. There will be problems of managing the academic

hierarchy, of overcoming the resistance of non-specialists, of getting adequate teaching time or other resources, of persuading students of significance in the face of indifference of the senior faculty. The temptation, in the face of such odds, to introduce separate courses is overwhelming. But the history of independent courses on multidisciplinary problems in India provides ample lessons of their non availability in the Indian context. I hope the Conference will provide clear directions on this matter.

C. Thirdly the Conference should examine critically the role of educational institutions and organisations which cater exclusively to women. This Conference is a unique attempt, to bring together academicians, administrators and mobilisers of people, particularly women – to search for meaningful areas of collaboration. If a consensus is achieved in some areas, I hope it will be possible for you to suggest the modalities for such collaboration. During the heyday of the women's movement in India, such co-operation did exist between women's schools and colleges and organisations of women. Over the years, the two went different ways to the detriment of both. Teaching institutions became integrated and developed the usual characteristics of units within a troubled educational system and increasingly lost touch, with the social ideology of women's lead for equality of rights, responsibilities, opportunities and status for participation in development and the political process, which had encouraged their birth, practices like dowry spread like wild fire among the educated men and women, without teaching institution making any effort to counter these trends. On their part, most organisations also tended to focus entirely on action projects of limited scope and neglected the pursuit of gathering information, social analysis and development of new perspectives in the light of their field experience and grass-root level empirical work. I am afraid, all of us, academicians, activists and administrators alike have contributed to the perpetuation of the sex role stereotypes that are the objects of such criticism today. The Conference, I hope, will prescribe some new directions to these bodies that may revitalise their activities and enrol their joint support in the cause of women's and the nation's development and transforming our society to a just and egalitarian one.

In conclusion, may I hope that this Conference will not confine itself to criticism or analysis of past failures, but also identify concrete lines of action which could provide guidelines for the future? Changing society's ideas requires persistent, sustained and courageous efforts. Changing the content and approach of an organised educational system poses an equally difficult challenge. Who should be responsible for this? Agencies like the UGC., NCERT, CSIR, ICSSR may be willing to initiate and support but without a movement for such change inside and outside the educational system, the outcome would be very limited. Our system has proved very resistant to imposed ideas. The kind of qualitative transformation that is visualised by this Conference will call for continuity of this forum – acting as the “Nation's Conscience”, and path finder.

I thank the Organising Committee for inviting me to open this Conference and wish the participants days of fruitful labour.



II National Conference, 1984, Trivandrum

Address of the President

The Association has completed two years of its life, and I am happy that it is beginning to take roots in our academic and national life. A membership of 21 institutions and 271 individuals, a record of two major conferences, some forthcoming publications, and some reserve funds, (instead of an account in the red) these are all signs of healthy growth. While I am happy to acknowledge the recognition and support that we have received from several international agencies, the fact that our activities have received support from our national agencies responsible for promotion of social research, development of higher education and for policies for women's development is, to me, an even stronger indication that the Association is fulfilling a national need. We have made a good beginning and should congratulate ourselves for that, but we should not become complacent. A great deal still remains to be done if the objectives which we set before ourselves at the First National Conference in Bombay four years ago are to be realised fully.

As you are aware, I was the Chairman of the Organising Committee of the First National Conference. I was then Vice-Chancellor of SNDT Women's University, and had tried to initiate some work in Women's Studies through our Research Unit. When Vina Mazumdar and Hemlata Swarup met me, I think it was in December 1980, we discussed how we could organise a more broad based movement to develop women's studies within the general educational system. In the standard method adopted by Indian academics wanting to do new things, we thought of organising a Conference.

We did not even know how many people in the country would be interested and initially expected only about 100 participants. We also thought that it was necessary to call persons engaged in action for women's equality and development, to make that base even stronger and more nationally relevant. We then invited some other people to join a National Organising Committee and set about writing letters. Most of you are aware of the response. In place of the 100 that we had anticipated, nearly 400 attended that Conference, and before it ended they had

resolved unanimously that an Association must be formed to sustain this efforts. The Organising Committee was entrusted with the responsibility of bringing the body into existence. It took us a little time but, I hope we have fulfilled the responsibility that was entrusted to us.

In my Opening Address to the First National Conference, I had asked the participants to think about possible ways of incorporating Women's Studies within the educational system. Some of the Working groups did very good work and came back with recommendations. By that time I had become the Chairman of the UGC, and I was very interested that virtually all the working groups had rejected the model of separate courses for women's studies, and had asked for its incorporation within the major disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences. A year later at a workshop sponsored by the UNESCO in Delhi, the same plea was put forward by some of our members.

Following these recommendations, the UGC addressed a letter to the Universities in 1983, suggesting that Universities incorporate women's issues and concerns within different disciplines through restructuring of courses, curriculum development, research activities and extension type of work.

The UGC has received some proposals in response, which are being examined by the Secretariat. From what I have seen of them so far, very few have attempted the restructuring of courses or curriculum development. Most of them have sent research proposals, a few have asked to set up Centres or Institutes for women's studies. The proposals also give evidence that the universities have not really viewed this issue either as a need to take note of new knowledge, or as a responsibility for playing a more direct role in promoting women's equality and development. To that extent I have to confess that I am disappointed by the universities' response.

I think in the coming years, this is the most important challenge facing the Association. The primary role of a movement is to articulate issues that have been neglected or marginalised and to mobilise public opinion in support of measures that would not only redress the existing injustice, but

initiate a process to prevent such injustice in future. Women's Studies, in my opinion, has emerged as a powerful challenge – (a) to the existing marginal position of women in society, and (b) to the intellectual perceptions of the most dominant section of our people, which includes both men and women, that contribute to perpetuate the marginal role of women. The UNESCO workshop defined Women's Studies as an instrument for developing the social sciences. I would like to see it as an instrument to develop our entire educational system and all the disciplines, not merely the social sciences, but also humanities, the natural sciences and professional disciplines like agriculture, medicine, technology, law etc. I have therefore, pleaded with the Government that this should be incorporated within the New Educational Policy that is currently under preparation.

Even if we were to succeed in getting the government to agree to this, it will still be necessary for all of us – members of this Association – to work out ways of operationalising this objective within educational institutions. After all the universities are autonomous institutions and unless the academic community itself takes this up as a challenge necessary for the nation's overall development, we are not going to make much headway:

The task before the members of this Association is a challenging one. The more active we are in opening this dialogue with our own institutions, the more successful will be our effort. I am delighted that a few of our universities and colleges have already enrolled as members of this Association. I would hope that they will bepace setters in this venture. But in the long run educational institutions depend on the values, the convictions and the work of their members – teachers, students, and administrators. We, as members of this Association, have to pick up the challenge of converting these three groups to our point of view. I hope the members and the new Executive Committee will devise better and more effective methods to achieve this objective.

Thank you,

Madhuri R. Shah

III National Conference, 1986, Chandigarh

Opening Address by the Vice-President



The formation of Indian Association for women's studies is truly an achievement. It has been able to bring together various groups, individuals from different professions and engaged in different activities and a variety of institutions and organisations.

This university has hosted several professional conferences and we are grateful that it has agreed to host our conference. At the same time, it will not be out of place to point out that our Association is different from other professional organisations in both composition and objectives. The participants here include not only academics and regular professionals but also social workers, activists, writers, lawyers, doctors, para medical personnel, political workers, grassroot workers, women struggling for their rights of grass roots level, persons working for women's welfare within the government, women working in the informal sectors and in various organisations. These are not exactly disparate categories. Not only that, many participants here combine in them several interests, activities and positions; all of us have one common concern: women's issues and gender relations and a firm commitment to change for the better. Thus, while Women's Studies has been accepted as a legitimate area of enquiry in the universities and research institutions, this association is not confined only to academic pursuit. Let me repeat: we are deeply committed to change, to using knowledge for action.

We have a realisation that in social sciences, language and common sense, understanding, there has been a strong androcentric bias. Women's contribution as actors in various fields throughout history and as subjects of social processes who constitute, reproduce and modify social systems defined by relations of power have been ignored; they have either been invisible or have had distorted visibility. Their voices remained silent or unheard. This studies focused on women (though not ignoring men) in various

disciplines, evolution of earlier studies and taking up new researches with a new consciousness constitute an important objective for us. We also strive for incorporating new findings in the mainstream social sciences and other subjects. However, significance and urgency of issues and themes selected for investigation do not justify shoddy research, hastily planned and casually executed. Beware that in the scholarly world, Women's Studies is often viewed either with hostility or with contempt and condescension. We have to prove our worth and the seriousness of our endeavour. Objectivity for us is not value-neutrality. The choice of subjects is guided by the need for struggle and improvement of conditions, while in actual research bias has to be avoided and proper methods are tried to be followed. Even biases have to be known biases.

The nature of our field often demands interdisciplinary collaboration and co-operation. However, care has to be taken that in the absence of a firm grounding in one's own discipline the quality of work is not diluted. It is indeed a happy sign that we have persons who, while well equipped with the skills and knowledge of their own discipline are eager to listen to people from other disciplines and there are also examples of studies – projects – involving people from many areas and disciplines. Further, efforts towards innovation of appropriate methodology have already begun.

To assume that being a woman automatically qualifies a woman to understand and capture the experiences of diverse groups of women is to practise self-deception and to resort to a kind of essentialism. We must realise our limitations and complex human diversity. A special effort is therefore required to develop understanding, empathy and insights. Further, it is alright to emphasise the study of problems of poor women, but is it enough? Some attention to middle class women (i.e. to one's own class) is equally important. Often, the conditions and nature of their limitations and disabilities and oppression remain unclear to them; their strategies are often based on notions of femininity and masculinity, ideal motherhood, and the lower worth of their own lives. There is an urgent need for consciousness-raising regarding gender disparities among both women (of all categories) and men.

For this reason, it becomes an issue as to whether women's studies should be strictly confined to women or should involve men also. Being a woman does not automatically qualify a woman to understand women's issues. And certainly gender issues are not only women's issues. At the same time, many of my colleagues strongly feel that care must be taken that with a distinct advantage of better opportunities for acquiring knowledge, skills and positions of status and power, men do not usurp the field or make it bereft of social concern which is the hallmark of Gender Studies. Another point that is made is about giving women who have a fetching voice opportunities to be vocal and express themselves without constraints.

A careful scrutiny of feminist writings from the west is called for. Blind acceptance must be avoided. There is some sense in emphasizing the importance and value of the involvement of indigenous researchers and local workers in women's issues and Gender Studies. Undoubtedly many subtle aspects of gender relations and contextuality of meaning are often difficult to grasp; so also categories of thought and nuances of behaviour. Here I may also emphasize the need for awareness of cultural diversity within our country linked to class, caste, community, region, rural-urban divide and so on. This applies to both academics and activists.

This brings me to an important, critical issue: prejudices harboured by activists and academics against one another. In point of fact, there needs to be no confrontation between the two. Women's collective action requires a sound understanding of social reality, of people, beliefs and the logic of their behaviour. Perhaps concerned academics can provide this knowledge and requisite information if they do not confine themselves to weaving theoretical webs. Activists' value, role and contribution must not be minimised at any cost. Resistance and protest as well as constructive activity and consciousness raising without adequate grasp of social reality may result in taking faulty steps, faulty planning and action and may also result in incorrect post action analysis. Academics and activists can surely learn from one another. Rather than confrontation, co-operation should be our objective. And, we also have among us a number of persons and groups who combine research and activism. Another area for genuine co-

operation or at times even merging is action research. Value of commonsense as well as genuine concern and capacity to mobilize and inspire women to action must not be undervalued. Let me repeat: resistance movements and remedial action both require a sound understanding of the culture in which the subjects are located. And this can come from both directions, academic, well-planned studies and use of commonsense, direct contacts and observation, with a capacity to reach the people.

Those of us who had taken an initiative to establish the Indian Association for Women's Studies sincerely wish that the younger generation should now come forward and please keep in mind that take over. But we are still active, and will continue to work for pursuing the objectives of the Association.

Thank you,

Leela Dube



IV National Conference, 1988, Waltair

Statement of the President



As we begin our general body meeting today a few words from me would be in order. I only want to state how I have felt as the President of the Indian Association for Women's Studies. When my name was proposed for election as per the election rules in IAWS I was, frankly, surprised. My victory in the election redoubled my surprise. But that also was nothing compared to the astonishment I experienced when the outgoing President Dr. Madhuribahen Shah proposed my name as the next President. Before I could realise what was happening, somebody had seconded the proposal and all present in the EC meeting had welcomed it. I had gone to that meeting of 31 March 1987 only to put in an appearance and develop a better understanding of the IAWS. I have formed a habit of gaining experience wherever possible. IAWS election. I thought, gave me an opportunity to wander in "fields fresh and pastures new". The as Matthew Arnold expressed in his poem 'Scholar Gipsy'.

I confess I took a long time to understand the functioning of the Association and the personalities connected with it. Even today I do not think I have grasped everything fully. But my almost two-year-long association with the persons concerned and the target we tried to achieve have developed within me a fairly clear sense of what IAWS can take on.

What is achieved during the term of this EC will be reported by our very able General Secretary Dr. Susheelabhen Kaushik and Dr. Vina Mazumdar the dynamic person who took up the onerous duties of the Treasurer. Between Susheelabhen and Vinadi the Association has been efficiently

and carefully looked after. I am only trying to put in few words about what I have seen, experienced and thought about IAWS.

It has been my feeling that as a national level Association IAWS is not sufficiently well known throughout the country. We, in Gujarat, tried to inform teachers in universities and colleges. Many responded by saying that they did not know of such an organisation and would become members. What is true of Gujarat could be true of many other states. We perhaps need an awareness-raising campaign about IAWS existence also.

The Newsletters that IAWS is publishing could be a very useful and powerful medium for us. The information we need is about what is happening in this country in the area of Women's Studies and Activism thereby keeping a track of the Women's Movement here. As one wants to know about the fresh research undertaken, so one wants to know the findings of workshops, seminars, conferences etc. convened on women's issues. We have not been able to build the network but that could be done now.

I have always wondered if researchers could be of help to activists. Just as a researcher starts working, available literature on the chosen theme is scanned and also reported. An activist needs to do that too, in a given situation it would be helpful if the activist could find out the details of any action programme undertaken by any activist group in a similar situation. Such documentation would help. But one does not know where to turn to for such help. The activist also needs to survey the socio-economic status or may be the health status of the target group. The action programme undertaken by activists to be evaluated periodically, not only to find out the impact of the programme on the target group but also for the need to change the inputs or the approach or may be the need to end the programme. However, these need to be quickly done. One cannot take 12 to 18 months, for its relevance to the activist would be lost. Could we have some specific method devised for the use of activists?

Regional seminars on Women's Studies are necessary to spread awareness and provide a wider base to the Association. Regional/Zonal Secretaries could look

after the arrangements which the General Secretary could direct. These would help the IAWS cross the barrier of language as in such seminars regional language could be used with on-the-spot translations wherever necessary. The most important would be that in such seminars activists also could participate and that would help bridge the barriers between the scholars and the activists. The Women's Movement can gain momentum only if the efforts of the researchers and activists are co-ordinated.

More interaction, more dialogue, and better understanding would help generate mutual respect and friendliness which would replace the feeling of discomfort that the activist experiences in the company of her learned sisters. Let us look forward to the future in which the paths of studies and activism meet.

Ila Pathak



V National Conference, Jadavpur, 1991

Presidential Address



On The Way To Gender Justice: A Decade of Trial and Achievements

It is a happy coincidence that the Fifth National Conference on Women's Studies organised by the Indian Association for Women's Studies is being held in Calcutta at the Jadavpur University, following the tricentenary celebration of this great city.

In retrospect, the city can boast of political, social and cultural achievements and upheavals. However, as far as the Association is concerned, this occasion and time gain greater significance as Bengal has produced strong women who have excelled in diverse fields giving lead to the women of India. On such an occasion, one cannot but help remembering these great women. To name just a few – Sarojini Naidu, Sarla Devi Choudharani, Taru Datta, Basanti Devi – the list can go on...

Members of my Executive Committee and I are grateful to Jadavpur University for agreeing to host such a large conference which is being attended by representatives from all over India and a few neighbouring countries. On behalf of IAWS I add my welcome to all the delegates and distinguished guests.

The Association is fortunate in having Ms. Qurratulain Hyder a renowned literary scholar and Gnanpeeth awardee to inaugurate the Conference. Her contribution to the cause is through her writings on women and we consider it an honour to have a woman with us of whom we are all proud. We are also grateful to Prof. Sen, Vice-Chancellor of the host University for joining us and being so supportive to the cause.

Since the Association conceived in 1981 has completed 10 years of contribution to women's studies, for my Presidential Address, I have selected the theme : "on the way to gender justice: A decade of trial and achievements". A decade, you will agree, is a special event to take stock.

Till date, four National Conferences have been organised by IAWS, touching issues and concerns relevant to women at that point of time.

Taking a kaleidoscopic review, the first and memorable conference on women's studies was held in Bombay at SNDT University in 1981. This set the pace for the movement by giving a broad focus to Women's Studies in India to review it as a critical instrument to improve our knowledge about society. It also led to the birth of the Indian Association for Women's Studies to provide a forum for interaction amongst individuals, institutions and organisations involved in teaching, research and action for women's development and promoting women's equality through periodic conferences, specific action programmes, dissemination of information and so on.

From among active pioneers, I should say founder contributors of the Association – Leela Dube, Hemlata Swarup, Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar, Lotika Sarkar, Lucy Jacob, Bina Roy, Devaki Jain, Phulrenu Ghua and many others – I am happy to see some of them with us to-day. This continuity of association has given added strength to the Association. I was also a party to the First National Conference.

This first convention was followed by three national conferences at Trivandrum in 1984, Chandigarh in 1986 and in Waltair in 1988 and now the current one at Calcutta. By a coincidence, the Conferences have circled the country.

You are aware, in each of the Conferences, we have focussed on a particular broad theme interlinked by sub-themes through workshops to give maximum opportunity to participants to voice their concerns, experiences and perceptions. The past and present themes of biennial gatherings indicate the effort that the Association has made in organising sessions

on current and pertinent themes. The First Conference being the initial gathering discussed a wide range of issues concerning women. The Second Conference primarily focussed on women and law, political participation and work, the Third on women's movements and struggles, while the fourth Conference concentrated on one issue with multifarious dimensions, such as rural women, poverty, survival and struggle. The current conference is on religion, culture and politics.

I am sure all will agree to the relevance of the theme in the present context. The way in which three facets of society, namely, religion, culture and politics are intertwined, ultimately affecting women in adverse manner is being proved by the events not only in our country but through developments occurring at global level. The ugly face of fundamentalism goes against the norm of equality and is an assault on women's freedom and identity, I need not repeat before this enlightened gathering the tragedy of the Roop Kanwars and Shah Banos. Unfortunately, even progressive legislation has not been able to blunt the edges. Fundamentalism which corrodes the fabric of society by promoting reactionary values and practices could only be combatted by conscious efforts at awareness generation and resistance to actions of retrograde measures in the name of protecting religion or maintaining cultural identity. Further, fundamentalism operates quite often in a more subtle and covert manner. Hence, women have to be on guard, all the time, so that the precious achievements which we have made so far though still in a limited manner are not wiped off. It is necessary to build unity in groups of women of different religions for collective action to achieve social and economic justice for women. This is an area in which the Association should give leadership through the spread of secular approach and I am confident the recommendations which will emerge will pave the way for the same.

On this occasion, a retrospective review giving highlights of the contributions of the women's studies movement and role of IAWS will not be out of place.

What began 10 years back as an awareness generation activity bringing together academics, activists and

researchers to develop and sustain women's studies, today has a different picture to project. The deliberations, dialogues and networking during the decade have grown wider in range as well as deeper. The beginning of women's studies were made with research, documentation and action. Today we have also encompassed the area of teaching where focus is largely on inter-disciplinary approach and integration of women's issues in the disciplines. Currently nearly 50 Women's Studies units have been operating in the Universities and about the same number of organisations outside the University system are concerned with academic and other issues for implementing Women's Studies. More and more material on women's position, problems, perceptions, movements, and other aspects is committed to cater to the growing need. In the Eighth Plan the spread is bound to increase.

When SNTD set up the programme in 1974, pioneering in this field, it did not have advantage of experience or convention or a model to go by. The paradigm was interpreted and established as the Centre progressed and fresh dimensions were added. In the contemporary scene, the newer centres are in a way in a more advantageous position having a broad frame to go by with possibilities of experimentation of focussing on specific aspects. Take the illustration of Jadavpur University. Since it has a school structure, the focus is on interdisciplinary aspects, drawing strength from various disciplines.

Women's Studies, which started as an exercise to make women analyse deeply the complexities of the status of women in the changing social pattern, today is an academic exercise where people from different disciplines contribute making it an interdisciplinary area and an act of transformation through close liaisoning with action. The decade has witnessed debates on concepts and theoretical issues touching feminism, definition of work, role of family, analysis of women's movements, and many others, orienting knowledge to be useful to changing society. In recent times women's studies is touching new parameters. The National Workshop on 'Visibility of Women in Statistics and Indicators' held at SNTD University in 1989 by the University Research Centre for Women's Studies jointly with the Department of Women and Child Development,

Government of India and International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), made participants conscious of the quality of information available and needed for fuller development of women in national policies and plans. As a consequence of the dialogues that ensued between different organisations, for the first time, the 1991 census operation will probe gender issues and quantify the work in homes and agricultural fields. This is a significant gain as it will improve the visibility of women in national statistics. It is indeed gratifying that after so much struggle and determination, gender dimension has been added in the national census.

I am happy to mention that today IAWS has been able to acquire a status as an important body representing women's interest, where its opinion and reactions are now valued by policy makers. In fact, this process was started by the Association through its President, Dr. Madhuri Shah, who as Chairperson of the apex body of higher education, the University Grants Commission, initiated women's studies at the UGC in 1985, responding to the developments occurring inside and outside the system. This has been a very major contribution. Thereafter, office-bearers and members of the Association have actively participated in the various debates concerning women at governmental and non-governmental levels.

Very recently, the Association collaborated with academic institutions and non-governmental organisations deliberating on the various clauses of the National Commission on Women Bill, 1990 and made recommendations to remove the anomalies which were considered, with recommendations from other organisations and individuals at the National Conference convened by the Department of Women and Child Development in the Ministry of Welfare. This Department has also built links with Women's Studies centres, seeking information for assigning research projects the latest being the national project. "The Girl Child and the Family" involving nearly 25 Women's Studies departments. Women's Studies scholars, several of them belonging of IAWS are included in policy recommendation bodies, to illustrate, the National Commission for Self-Employed Women, Joint Parliamentary Committee on Special Marriage Act, National Commission for

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Women and others. That too is a positive step of achievement. Further, IAWS from the beginning has been maintaining links with international women's movements and has collaborated in conferences, panels and workshops focussed on feminist issues. This contribution gains significance on the conceptual front.

The IAWS was started with certain commitments. The conference deliberations have focussed on conceptual tasks and research orientation. New dimensions are added. I am hopeful that the same dedication to the objectives of the Association will continue. Moreover, in the present times when career is the goal of life and consumerism is a way of life, Women's Studies researchers and activists will need to provide a new model of approach and understanding.

As mentioned earlier, today's Conference is coinciding with the 10th year of the IAWS. To commemorate the decade, the Association has brought out a Special Issue tracing its development and touching selected facets related to women's studies. I am confident this occasion and the document will act not only as a historical reference when future milestones of the Association are being celebrated but will be considered a cutting point to retrospect and move forward to enrich further the activities of this national forum.

A galaxy of women – academics, researchers, activists and policy makers – have contributed to the building up of the IAWS. Some of them have been pillars of strength; many have supported the cause. All categories of persons are needed for a crusade to be meaningful, relevant and effective. It is a very difficult task to identify the contributors by name as many would be missed; but on this occasion of the decade, the Association records its appreciation and gratitude to all those who have in one way or the other, helped the Association further its 'career path'.

The words sung by Poetess Jogeshwari in 19th Century Bengal became a common saying depicting typical male attitude and patriarchal values. They were: 'The boat, the horse and the women belong to whoever rides them'. Women's solidarity

programmes have brought us a long way; but we have 'many promises to keep ... and miles and miles to go' and it is only through concerted action, vigilance and joint effort that we will be able to 'strengthen our strengths'. Differences will be there; this only reflects our maturity. Women's Studies have faced difficulties and will be facing further constraints; inspite of this situation, we have to take up new challenges and give a new scope to the activities through collective deliberations, collective thinking, collective action and above all collective commitment. Let this be our clarion call.

During my tenure as president of IAWS between 1989-1991, I have received excellent support from members of the Executive Committee and we have worked closely and cohesively. Whenever I have approached friends, colleagues and the family of SNDDT – RCWS they have been with me in this challenge. I value this support. Finally my very sincere appreciation for the work put in by Dr. Jasodhara Bagchi and her supporting team of dedicated faculty, staff and friends for looking after the most difficult facet of the Conference – the 'nuts and bolts' aspects through wonderful managerial skills.

I look forward, with all of you to an exciting debate on the various issues of the theme.

Dhonnobad Jai Hind

Kamalini Bhansali



VI National Conference, 1993, Mysore

Statement of President



It is a great moment for me to be here with you on the occasion of the IAWS General Body Meeting, coinciding with the sixth National Conference of the Association. In the twelve years since the Bombay Conference, we have all grown together. Our membership has registered an impressive increase, details of which will be presented by the Secretary and the Treasurer.

I will make only a very brief statement. It has been the constant endeavour of our Executive Committee, that the IAWS should build a lobby of women's opinion on critical issues facing Indian Society. We felt that the Association should be in the centre of the Women's Studies movement and should provide legitimacy to a formation based on gender. We felt that a dialogue with mainstream social sciences should be initiated and sustained.

The choice of theme for this Conference has been an apt one from this point of view. The Association has brought out a publication of background papers on the same subject, in collaboration with many institutions and individuals. We want not only to consolidate and strengthen, but to provide space for convergence of facts, opinions and action.

The main activity of the Association has been the holding of the biennial conferences at national level. During the tenure of the last EC as well as ours, there have been certain movements, some opinion building and action, towards regionalising IAWS activities. There has been talk of forming regional Associations, of holding regional Conferences to highlight local issues and perceptions which could also feed into National meetings. There is already a

Maharashtra Association of Women's Studies. We need to clarify many issues, such as the relationship between the regional and the National Association of Women's Studies. Some spade work has been done already on this topic by the present Executive Committee.

During this EC tenure, we have been approached by two foreign institutions for collaboration. One was a proposal from the Association of Women in Development, USA (AWID) for holding of a Conference on the New Economic Policies and Women. We had to turn down this request for lack of time and other reasons. The other was a proposal from the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague for IAWS-ISS collaboration in theory building and methodology training. This is still under our consideration.

Our two year tenures as Executive Committee has been a happy, if somewhat strenuous one. We held eight EC meetings and brought out 4 issues of the Newsletter. Two volumes of selected previous Conference papers have been published by Vikas. Two more are to be brought out shortly.

As members are aware, IAWS has no permanent office establishment. We have a system of a floating secretariat, which moves along with the office bearers. Our EC has found this to be a very enervating method of management. It has taken us all of 18 months to set the house in some order. I think the time has come for IAWS to consider this situation in the light of new demands being made on us, our own pace of growth and to take decision in the matter.

I would like to place on record my deep appreciation of the co-operation extended to me by my colleagues, and of the hard work put in by all, especially the Vice President, General Secretary Treasurer, Editor and Joint Secretary. A special word of appreciation for the Local Organizing Secretary for her enthusiastic response to the challenge of mounting this conference. As you know, Maithreyi Krishnaraj's absence from India created the vacuum which I was called upon to fill. I must say, I miss her very much and want to record my sense of gratitude and appreciation for her leadership.

I would not be truthful if I did not acknowledge the energetic support given by the staff of Institute of Social Studies Trust at New Delhi for the secretariat work of IAWS. I want to thank each one of them, especially as both the Joint Secretary and I made a too many demands on their time and practice.

I must also record my deep sense of appreciation to Dr. Madaiah, the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University and Dr. Seshadri, the principal of the Regional College of Education, Mysore for giving us their unstinted co-operation in making the Conference a success. Thank you.

Devaki Jain



VII National Conference, 1995, Jaipur

Welcome Address President



Honourable Guests, Fellow Delegates and Colleagues,

I deem it a matter of great honour and privilege to offer a warm welcome to you all to the Seventh National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies. As all of you must have noticed the Conference is being organized differently. Any new step brings with it some adjustment problems. But there is a thrill in treading new paths. I therefore urge upon you to bear with some of the inconveniences you might have faced. Kindly look at the Conference as a joint venture and not as a 'we' and they' relationship. We are here to join hands in building a new vision of better society for both men and women.

We are meeting at a very critical moment in the development of Women's movement not only for Jaipur but also for the entire country. We are meeting at the time when one of the cruelest injustices has been perpetrated on a committed ardent activist Bhanvari Bai—under the guise of moralistic overtones and in the name of Indian Culture. It is not merely the fact of acquittal of the four alleged rapists but the manner in which the court arrived at the decision which reminds us of the days of Mathura Case nearly two decades ago. The blatant contention that in India society a woman cannot be raped in the presence of her husband or by the upper caste men fully expose the patriarchal, class-caste bias of the Judiciary. In fact the Judgement has come as a grave signal to us that the women's issues will have to be taken back from the government to the people. Bhanvari is here amidst us and I believe the least we can do is to assure her of all our support in her struggle.

Our Story: Twenty Years of IAWS

My presentation to day is not in the conventional manner of a President's speech; we have a full agenda where we would more like to hear the voices of women and listen to the address of our chief guest Dr. Vandna Shiva. I wish to briefly refer to some of the developments in the macro-system which have posed serious problems to all those involved in the movement. Through this exercise I wish to suggest that our search for visions is likely to be seemingly frustrating if we seek them in the conventional spheres. The glimpse of Feminist vision may not be articulated but may be hidden in the practices and alternate models we create and new ethic which we build up.

The period between the Mysore Conference and the present one has been full of dramatic events. The past president Devki Jain and the Guest speaker in the last conference referred to the enormous state the country was running into through the introduction of New Economic Policy, market as the sole determinant of the value of the products and globalization with its concomitant devastating impact on the life and behaviour of the people. During the last two years the condition has worsened. No amount of assurances about improvement in the economic situation by the Finance Minister or some of the academics can hide the stark reality of growing poverty, unemployment and destitution. Sulabha Brahme while describing the policy as anti-people, recently expressed her anxiety by stating that women across all strata of society will be the worst hit by the process of economic liberalization that is being zealously pursued by the Government. (TIO, 15 DEC, 1995). Similarly there is an alarming note coming from academics and social activists that increase of women's employment in the unorganized sector is a 'distress sale of female labour.'

The last couple of years have witnessed series of international meetings, consultations and conferences. They created an impression of debating seriously on vital issues affecting people at large, however in terms of action agenda and commitment they are extremely disappointing. The International Conference on Population and Development at Cairo where 184 Nations met and agreed on 20 year programme of action which in the final analysis throws the burden on third world countries for

coming out of the crisis is one glaring instance of imperialist attitude.

Soon after this the heads of 184 Nations met for the UN world Summit for Social Development in March 1995. They met to agree on a set of principles to alleviate poverty, generate employment and promise social integration. The conditions of people is becoming worse day by day. It has been mentioned that one out of every five people in the world—more than a billion in all live below poverty line, an estimated 13 million die every year of poverty related causes. The picture becomes darker when it is predicted that the number of those affected by extreme poverty will quadruple in one life time if the current economic and demographic trends continue. Of course all these realities were outside the scope of the Summit. There has been hardly any commitment to action. The NGO forum as it is well known had difficulties of its own with the result that the few activities and academics withdrew from the mainstream discussions and joined hands with the People's Movement.

Beijing Conference is very fresh in our memory. It was a momentous meeting of over 30,000 Women NGOs. In spite of media's silence, trivialization and quite often negative projection of the NGO deliberations, the Beijing conference has a few pay offs. It reinforced the conviction in the incessant struggles which will have to be launched against all forms of violence. The open letter of Thanks written by Asian Women's Human Rights Council and Vimochana mentions, 'We the women who came here from diverse lands and cultures write to tell you we are saying NO to all forms of violence in our societies—be it the violence born out of our own cultures not only brings women from diverse cultures together but also voices the unease about the 'stridency' and 'appropriation' or the ignorance on the part of the 'First World' where gender, race and class issues in other parts of the globe is concerned. (HUMANSCAPE) The Beijing conference has been one more evidence of the hollow and opportunistic approach to women's issues by the policy makers. The country paper which was supposed to have been jointly prepared in consultation with the social activists and academics has been seriously criticised by the women's for the non-committal stand and portrayal of the bright

picture of the women's condition in the country. As mentioned in the publication of Joint Women's Programme entitled 'Towards Beijing A Perspective from the Indian Women's Movement' 'The Paper (Country) appropriates the language of the movement while diluting its concerns.' (p.2) The wide spread feeling of distrust in the country paper subsequently led to organization of series of meetings before finalizing it. How far the changes and thrusts recommended by the women's groups will be incorporated and implemented is doubtful. The National Commission of Women established in 1990 generated a mixed reaction in the beginning about its role. However it seems to be identifying a few thrust areas for action. Strengthening of Women's Participation in the decision making structures in order to safeguard the interests of women and provide national level scrutiny and advocacy for policies if adequately followed may be able to make the Commission play the role of support institution for women's movement.

The intervening period had been witness to the strengths and tensions, rifts and differences in the Women's Movement. The time has come to accept the fact that women's movement is not a homogenous movement; feminism is not a monolithic ideology; it could have pluralistic visions and strategies. The diversities reflected in values, in analysis of socio-political scenario, in manifestations of patriarchal attitudes need to be recognised. However the commonness of concerns or commonalities of oppressive realities can not be ignored. We have to be ready to accept differences in approach and evaluations of situation provided the goal is common.

The resistance to oppression through grassroot movements has been one of the notable features of the period. In fact we have moved from the 'culture of silence' to culture of articulation and protests. The anti-arrack movement against displacement of the tribals in Easter Bihar, movement against the Bargi dam, Narmada and so many others are a few evidences of raised voices against the havoc wrought by construction of large dams, acquisition of land, deforestation and other such policies. These measures have been hitting hard the poor people but they have far more adverse impact on the life of women and children

and make them more vulnerable. The struggles undoubtedly indicate the newly gained confidence of women and their strength in resisting such formidable forces as the state, vested interests and the muscle power.

Similarly, the euphoria about the judiciary delivering justice to women has been again and again eroded. The holding of Public Hearing on Crimes against Women and the Violence of Development organised at Bangalore illustrate one such effort not merely to try the guilty but it also provided a non inhibitive atmosphere to women to give expression to the gravity of violence and indignities which they have been made to suffer. The public hearings of such accounts are not only the techniques to break the silence of centuries of acceptance of oppression but are occasions to meet out justice to them. When the established structures fail to deliver the goods parallel structures need to emerge to punish the guilty.

The scenario in the women's studies is rather baffling. Women's studies (WS) began as an alternate movement for knowledge production and knowledge dissemination. WS is not merely a subject to be studied in the class room. It attempts to understand the problems of women from a feminist perspective; it is also an instrument to change the conditions of women. The UGC by establishing centres in some of the Universities by the various departments. To day there are about 22 centres of WS in various universities and in the 9th plan some more are likely to emerge. It is necessary to note that Feminist scholarship is not only confined to the centres but the activity of knowledge production is carried on outside the Centres also. Naturally the problems of administration, dealings with other departments or answerability affect the centres more directly. Further the Centres are quite often bothered by the administrative responsibilities, getting financial support for their activities, dealing with the UGC bureaucracy and evolving strategies to survive. They find their tasks too formidable and time consuming. This situation very often comes in way of seriously making dent on the educational system through WS. Today we have a peculiar situation where knowledge is produced considerably outside the centres but for some of these scholars getting acceptance from the mainstream academic

community has high value. While there are a few centres which have been struggling to carve out a balance between theory and praxis, as usual there are a few who consider WS as a status giving discipline, providing opportunities of access to power and position; for them serious concern with the women's issues is of less significance. With the new wind blowing in the UGC it is hoped that we will have more centres with greater degree of permanence and above all more concern for developing knowledge from the feminist perspective and disseminating it not only to the academic community but making it relevant for mass of women. We have to remind ourselves constantly that when we started the movement for WS in the educational system it was not for adding one more discipline to the repertoire of disciplines. We did not plead for development of mere esoteric knowledge. We thought that it is an instrument of change. It was an effort to bring relevance to the educational process.

The scenario is also fraught with a new challenge before all of us, whether in the movement or in the studies. That challenge is the need to shake off the value free garb and be ready to take positions. The impinging of human rights is becoming a normal phenomenon. There are ecological infringements, fundamentalism is promoted through various means; instances of state violence also are increasing; there have been atrocities perpetrated on Harijan and tribal women; the uniform civil code has become a serious controversial issue. There is an urgent need to demonstrate commitment to democratic values by the policy makers, NGOs, women's groups and women's studies academics. It is in this context that commitment conference organized prior to the Beijing Conference has relevance. Concerned women are not satisfied merely with promises given by the government but they need to have assurance that they will be implemented. All of us are tired of pious policy statements which turn out to be either platitudes or instruments for political gain. The world public hearing at Hurairou was aimed at speaking out their unresolved historical grief and asked every body to grieve with them. Together they pieced together fragments of a precious collective memory. Together they dare to dream—a dreamscape.'

Thus while reviewing the situation during the last half a decade one finds that newer challenges are facing the women's movement and women's studies. There have been 'formidable forces leading quite often to frustration and pessimism. The women's movement along with other people's movement is becoming alert to the hollow statements of policy measures. With increase in violence and risk to the survival of human kind we notice a deep silence about the new visions for a better society. Visionary or utopian articulations are possible when there is some remote chance of realizing them or there is some possibility of having a better life. With the growing deprivation, erosion of ethical values, resurrection of fundamentalism and survival risks increasing the individual is exhausted in the day to day struggle with hardly any hope left for dreaming a better future. The tiredness of building utopian visions does not simply reflect a passing phase of pessimism but relates to some of the basic changes in the social system having serious impact on the people's lives and the psyche. These conditions compel one to question oneself and also to seek answers in alternate paradigms of knowledge and social behaviour. When we talk of feminist vision perhaps we may not find it expressed in clear terms. We have to locate it in the alternate structuring of organizations; in alternate ethical practices that might have been evolved; in the alternate method of sustaining relationships that might have been built up. In the introduction to the Conference theme we have referred to the pleas made by the environment and green movement for better and sustainable society; The revival of Gandhian values and the decentralised economic structure has been another alternative which seems to appeal a few. The women's movement dreams of a society which would be bereft of class and gender discriminations and where woman's dignity will be respected for its own value and not as an appendage to any other individual.

We hope that the four days we will be spending together will strengthen our endeavours for searching newer paradigms, to involve in struggles to preserve the human species and to build for a better future – may be not for us to see but for the future generation. A big thank you to all.

VII National Conference, 1995, Jaipur

Statement by the President

Fellow Members,

It gives me great joy to stand before you at the General Body Meeting which coincides with the VII National Conference of the Indian Association of Women's Studies.

From April 1981 when a decision was made to launch an Association for Women's Studies we have modest account of growth in numbers, programme thrusts and our perception of the complex milieu in which we work. During this period both Women's Studies and Women's Movement have been witness to new dilemmas.

The details about the action taken during the two year period of the Executive Committee and the financial picture will be presented by the General Secretary and the Treasurer respectively. I will make a few observations with regard to some of the new activities undertaken by the EC during the period.

We are meeting after the crucial Beijing Conference. In spite of the occasional ridicule by the Press we have to recognize that it was a momentous meeting and decades of hard work succeeded in putting women's issues at the centre stage. It has raised crucial issues especially about the role of the State vis-à-vis women's issues.

The present meeting as it has been mentioned time and again has been an effort at experimenting on organizing a conference in a different manner. It has further taken up challenges of dialoguing on a vital theme of "Alternative Visions" where not much work has been done though there has been a nebulous feeling in the minds of all of us with regard to the future we want to have. Treading on a new path has its problems but the thrill of searching for something new and doing it in a different way has its own rewards. We hope all of you found the experience exciting.

The Association during its two-year tenure took few steps to ensure larger and meaningful participation of the members. One such effort has

been to encourage regional level organizations. During the tenure of the previous EC, the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth came into existence. It recently held a successful second conference in Konkan region. Similarly the Gujarat Forum For Women's Studies and Action was formed around 1993 though it has been active since 1994, starting with organizing a workshop on "Women's Movement in Gujarat" and launching a newsletter. I am happy to inform you that there is a move to start such regional organizations in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Of course what would be the nature of the link between the National and the Regional body needs to be spelt out but what is important is the desire for local initiative and local participation.

Recognizing the imperative need to grapple with various aspects of the sub-themes we mooted the idea of organizing pre-conference workshops. We were able to organize three such workshops: one relating to the "State and Women's Movement in India", second on "Issues before the Institution of Family" and third on "Feminist Economics". We are grateful to all the organizers of the workshops. The reports are available at a very nominal price.

While working on this relatively uncharted field we realized the need to have an overall coordinator who can critically and sensitively oversee the sub-theme organizations. A background volume which could put together some of the thinking and action which has gone in the past pertaining to the future visions could be very useful for long term action. We were fortunate in having a sensitive feminist scholar Dr. Maithreyi Krishnaraj to handle these complex tasks. We are immensely grateful to Maithreyi for her valuable input.

Likewise we are thankful to AKSHARA for preparing a Resource Book documenting various type of material available on the sub-themes as well as the main theme.

You are all aware that the National Election is to be held soon. Some of the States have passed through the experience of thirty percent reservation for women in the local elected bodies. We felt that a national organization like ours cannot remain outside

the momentous event. We think that there is a need to build up a relationship with the voters. The Association realizing its limitations however agreed to participate in the awareness-raising activity for women voters by providing information and enabling them to have space for discussion which could strengthen their power. The political strength thus gained could be used to press for issues and choices which women consider significant. It is with this objective that IAWS along with other bodies decided to initiate a National Campaign for Women Voters.

All the members of the previous ECs have constantly harped on the need to have some permanent office for the IAWS. With the kind cooperation of Jagori we have been able to have some terra firma which has been of tremendous help in the efficient functioning of the organization. This time we were also able to have an office co-ordinator, Juhi Jain – helping in the varied organizational work. We offer our thanks to her for all she has done and still continues to do even though she has taken up another assignment.

The editorial team this time brought out three issues of the Newsletter and the fourth one will be published after the conference. I extend my deep felt thanks to Nandita Gandhi and her team. All of us who have been involved in organizational work appreciate the fact that no organization can work fruitfully without the full cooperation of its members. I would like to put on record the willing support given to me by all the EC members. I would however like to mention the untiring zeal, dynamic approach and resourcefulness of our young General Secretary, Kamla Bhasin. The Vice President, the Treasurer and all other members deserve very warm appreciation for giving their time thus making my tasks much simpler. I specially would like to put on record our gratitude to FAO for not merely making Kamla available for all the Association work but providing full cooperation in raising resources, contacting participants for the South Asia Panel, helping communication with them which is so difficult when it is out of the country. In fact, considerable office time and services have been provided by the FAO office. Without such cooperation, efficient organization in these days of breakdown would not

have been possible. We express our grateful thanks to FAO.

Finally even at the risk of repeating myself I would say that we are here in Jaipur and have been able to pursue our deliberations and other activities comfortably and fruitfully because of the tremendous pains taken by the host women's groups, their supporters and volunteers. I extend my very best congratulations to the entire team.

The Association can only survive with the active participation of its members. In the coming years which are likely to be times of great trial, I am sure all of you will enthusiastically make the organization throbbing with women's concerns and action.

Thank you,

Neera Desai



VIII National Conference, 1999, Pune

President's Speech



It is my pleasant duty to welcome all of you, friends and fellow-members of the Indian Association for woman's studies, to this General Body Meeting of the Association. Though we had last met in December 1995, this EC did not begin functioning till June 1996. I am rather proud of the several things that we managed to do during this short period of two years and would like to briefly mention these for your information.

Right from the beginning, this EC had felt the need to expand the network of this body. We felt sure that there were many more who were interested in gender issues in different parts of this vast country, but found it difficult to build channels of communications with a centralised organisation. Because this EC had representation from almost all regions, we could begin the process. We encouraged each member of the EC to locally initiate, on behalf of the IAWS, some activity of immediate interest in her region. As a result, in 1997, as many nine such regional initiatives, quite often held in the local language, took place. They were spread all over the country from Trivandrum to Shillong to Chandigarh. This report includes at the end a list giving details about these activities, all of which apparently had got an excellent grassroots response. I am very grateful to the Ford Foundation, whose funds mainly saw us through these modestly organised activities and to my colleagues in the EC who carried out the task with great enthusiasm. They have certainly helped the Association to reach out to many more people than ever before.

We had another purpose in mind in sponsoring these regional activities. In a rapidly changing

economy and society, many times we find that the official data system is neither fast enough nor gender-sensitive enough to keep us abreast of the diverse, region-specific changes in women's positions. The regional workshops, which had involved many local workers, filled in some of the gaps in our information. Unfortunately, in the period since, we have not had the time to publish the excellent reports that the co-ordinators had prepared from the proceedings. Only the report on the reservations workshop at Calcutta was published and is available here for sale.

Our other big activity was organising the national seminar on the "Early Years of the Independence", at Baroda in August 1997. Since we have managed to give all of you a booklet commemorating that seminar, I will not talk about it except to hope that the Association will have the resources to organise many more such in future.

Kavita Panjabi, one of the very enthusiastic members of the EC, was entrusted with the task of editing and producing the newsletters of the IAWS. She promptly put together a very impressive editorial team in Calcutta which brought out four newsletters in these two years. In spite of Calcutta's reputation for poor communications, Kavita managed to get together information from many quarters of the country to make the newsletters truly readable.

Kalpna Kannabiran, our young Joint Secretary, has performed wonders co-ordinating at the apex level the work of the organiser of the large number of sub-themes for this conference. She too found that it was not always easy to establish communications across the country - but nonetheless, she did a very efficient job of putting together whatever material she got. Most of the sub-theme co-ordinators too, readily took to their work and, as you saw in the last three days, did a wonderful job of organising the papers. I feel sure that with so much young enthusiasm coming forth, the Association has a very bright future ahead of it.

Apart from these academic activities, our very efficient General Secretary, Chhaya Datar, has managed to sort out a lot of the administrative muddles, given that the Association has no

permanent office or staff. These problems are not easy to avoid. I do know however, that in cases, Chhaya has now created simple but adequate programmes to deal on a routine basis with difficulties such as renewal of memberships. I earnestly request all of you to check carefully whether or not your own membership details have been correctly entered.

In spite of Chhaya's best efforts at mobilizing friends to help us to get income tax exemption for the Association, the file is still languishing in Delhi. I hope the next EC will follow up the matter and get the clearance soon.

We are very happy to report that the elections for the next EC went off smoothly and the new EC will be able to take the reins of the Association immediately after this conference is over. I am grateful to Dr. Usha Thakkar for the very efficient and smooth "Operation Elections" that she carried out. The list of the elected members of the new EC is given.

Reports of the Secretary and the Treasurer will give you the details of the generous grants that we have received from several donors during these two years and which made our many plans for the Association's activities and for this well-provided conference a reality. I am personally very grateful to Kamla Bhasin for her role in achieving this. Without her constant help and advice, I at least would not have known how to go about this. Chhaya, with the help of the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspeeth has managed all the details of the conference. Sitting in Calcutta, I was not of much help with any of these.

Throughout these two years, Neera Desai has been a great support for me personally. We both go back a long way in the history of Women's Studies and movement in this country. I remember the first occasion when I met her in 1978 at the IDS conference on the Subordination of Women at the Sussex University. That our ideas constantly jelled well together was perhaps due to the similarity in our ages; but it was also because we share a very live interest in the issues related to gender in India. Although Neera was not an office bearer in the EC, she has continued to put in seminal work in

the cause of the Association as witnessed by the draft she has prepared for amendments to the IAWS constitution. Rohini Gawankar, another old friend, came to this EC with considerable experience of its work. On a number of occasions, her cool common sense put the breaks on our runaway ideas. I am grateful for her continued support and friendship.

Members of the Association, I invite you to the proceedings of this general body meeting of the IAWS.

Nirmala Bannerjee



IX National Conference, 2000, Hyderabad

Presidential Address



The year 1999 was one of some very serious losses for the women's studies movement in India. Within the last five months we lost Prof. Asok Mitra, Prof. B. Shivaramayya and Prof. M.N. Srinivas. Many of the young participants may wonder why I should begin with this statement. I do so to emphasise their role as symbols of success, in the impact of women's studies on the academic and social conscience of three very senior scholars, of three different backgrounds. Asok Mitra played a major role by chairing the ICSSR's Committee on Women's Studies in the post-Emergency period and pushing a few of us into exercises in policy formulation in which we had no experience. He was also a founder of the Association for Women's Studies and in his own field, population studies, he tried to instil a gender sensitive conscience among his students and colleagues by using the declining sex ratio as a kind of a whip. Shivaramayya went on to become a gentle, but persuasive activist in highlighting the critical importance of gender issues permeating legal studies. Srinivas, while pushing the ICSSR's programme into the study of 'invisible' women i.e. women whose life experiences had remained invisible to social scientists till then, helped to strengthen the perspective and focus that enabled him years later, to acknowledge women's studies as the 'most significant development in Indian social sciences' and also as a 'challenge from below'.

This kind of open support from very senior and leading scholars from three distinct fields in the formative period of women's studies in India was a characteristic feature which provoked occasional envy among colleagues in other countries, and sometimes questioning by feminists within. Did it

demonstrate a sign of our dependence on the patriarchal establishments?

Our generation did not think so. There were also some very senior members of the governmental establishment who were equally disturbed by the report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India and became allies of our movement from the beginning. Whatever efforts were stirred up within the government to modify, change or look for alternative policies would never have taken place without the help of these insiders.

I used to refer to this generation as the freedom generation i.e. of persons who were already full adults at the time of, or a decade before independence, I believed that some of them had accepted the value of gender equality – at least at the intellectual level, and their acts of omission or commission were not worse than those of us – women in professions – academic, administrative, or political. The Constitutional promise of equality had foundered because no body including women activists, was aware of its greatest obstacle – *the social construction of gender*. Being academics ourselves, we identified the education system – **influenced as it was by social hierarchy and colonial influence – as a major culprit for directing the content of education very far away from the lives of the majority of women – thereby rendering them invisible. If the social construction of gender was to reflect Indian social reality in all its diversity and promote the values propagated by the new Constitution then the education system had to be made aware of its positive potential as well as misdeeds.**

The first National Conference on Women's Studies brought together various sections of the Indian middle class – government functionaries, voluntary organisations, trade unions, political activists, and other sections in civil society 'to initiate the long overdue process of incorporating women's roles and experience in academic studies' by promoting a pressure group of academics and activists, government functionaries and university representatives, women's organisations and trade unions, specialists and generalists from different sections of society.

Running through the massive list of 19 working group reports, desperately seeking to make concrete recommendations, was **'a rather nebulous idea that what was necessary was a transformation of structures, of ethos, of quality and behaviour through the unity of scientific studies, mobilising action, and spreading awareness – among the public, within educational, health and legal systems, among the media and the worlds of creative literature, science and technology. It is this underlying idea that made participants feel that they were taking part in a movement and not just a conference – and the decision to form the Association for Women's Studies to maintain the momentum.**

That Conference focussed on a broad range of public policies **'as they affect women and their roles in society'**. This time we are discussing women's *perspectives* on public policy. So the movement – to a considerable extent – **the creation of that 'happening' nineteen years ago, has moved in strength and ideology – from the politics of recommendations to the politics of assertion and participation.** I would call this an exercise in political responsibility in a democracy. But in the current jargon of human rights – this is part of the Right to Development.

In the decade after the Emergency, some of us working in cooperation with like-minded officials within the government produced both critiques and alternatives to existing policies with very little or no result. In the mid-80s however, while the women's movement suffered a severe defeat over the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, **the Women's Studies movement scored its success in getting Education for Women's Equality incorporated in to the new National Policy on Education.** It was to take us several years to realise that getting a policy, like getting a legislative amendment, was not enough to ensure its implementation. I would however like to mention that the national goal of equality was retained within the NPE only because of this intervention, Government policy otherwise was very busy eroding the concept of equality from the education system at that point. The Chapter was forced to mention minorities, scheduled castes and

scheduled tribes having made space for women's equality as part of a new thrust.

What I am trying to emphasise through these old stories is that **in the eyes of the political establishment at least, women's studies came to acquire a political identity as well as an ideology which challenged the statusquo and vested interests, in academia and society at large – at the theoretical/philosophical – or the purpose, value or content, as well as at the operational, organisational or structural levels.**

I am not too sure how many new entrants into women's studies understood or accepted this tag at that point of time. I would however claim that *the genesis of the identity and ideology can be traced to the collective articulation of concerns at the first National Conference itself and in the selection of themes in successive National Conferences.*

The political context within which women's studies in India was born and nursed through its infancy and adolescence is however very different today. In the last three successive conferences – we tried to address the realities and implications of globalisation as a process affecting the lives of every citizen of this country, but women in particular, with increasing inequalities or negative trends at various levels. But *the situation we face today presents a clear threat to the survival of women's studies as an organised movement.*

The dream of education being the greatest catalyst for creating a new nation, a new society, and new rights for the people as a whole – including all those groups which had been excluded from any notion of rights – to equality, justice or dignity in our inherited past – looks like an illusion that cannot even qualify to be recognised as a mirage in the context of today. Within education itself, higher education is in a state of acute crisis – where academic freedom, university autonomy, or the pursuit of knowledge are all being regarded as dispensable – in the search for the highest bidder in a rapidly changing auction market. As far as the school system is concerned, particularly in the area of social studies – the whole series of recent reports in the press are enough indications of what is being planned. Women's Studies has been involved in

reconstructing the past to remove the barriers of invisibility and suppression of accounts of women's agency, but the process of deconstruction of history that from reports has already reached a fairly advanced stage makes it imperative for women's studies to reexamine and redefine its role and strategies in future.

Any struggle or movement has to respond to major changes in the broader environment if it wants to survive. It calls for vigilance, broad-based participation and organisational strength. **Above all it needs allies in all groups who stand to lose their dreams for a future in a world and a nation threatened by too many destructive forces and sharpening inequalities.** It is not for me to advise you of how you should deal with

these challenges. All I can say is that my life, like that of some others here was enriched and extended by the explosion of creative energy at various levels, but particularly at the grassroots unleashed by the twin movements by women in this country. In that creativity, energy and confidence I shall stake my beliefs for the future.

Veena Mazumdar

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For copies contact:

Dr. Lakshmi Lingam

General Secretary, IAWS

C/o Unit for Women's Studies

Tata Institute of Social Sciences

Sion-Trombay Road, Deonar

Mumbai - 400 088

Phone: +91-22-5567717, 5563290-96

E-mail: lakshmil@tiss.edu



Indian Association for Women's Studies
www.iaws.org