

## **2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference: Gender Justice Trivandrum**

### **INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES**

#### **REPORT BY THE GENERAL SECRETARY ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE IAWS - FOR THE PERIOD ENDING 31<sup>ST</sup> MARCH 1984**

The Indian Association for Women's Studies was registered in 1982 on the basis of the mandate given by the first National Conference on Women's Studies held at SNDT Women's University, Bombay. in 1981. The Main objectives of the Association were adopted from the resolution passed by the first National Conference (Appendix I). The major aim of the Association is to promote the development of institutionalised women's studies and to provide a forum for interaction between members of the academic community-teachers, researchers, and students- and persons and organizations involved in action for women's development at various levels.

The National Conference had entrusted the responsibility for establishing the Association to the Organising Committee of the Conference, which was headed by Dr. Madhuri R Shah, Chairman, University Grants Commission, and included the Heads of the three founder institutions namely, the SNDT Women's University; the Centre for Women's Development Studies; and the Kanpur University. The foundation meeting decided that the Association should have both individual and institutional members. I am happy to report that up to the 31<sup>st</sup> March 1984, we had enrolled 359 persons as individual members, and 26 institutions (which includes 7 universities 9 colleges).

The rules of the Association provide for an elected Executive Committee with separate constituencies for institutional members (3seats), life members (3 seats), and individual members (9 seats). The present Executive Committee of 11 members only is drawn from the members of the old Organising Committee, and a few whose names were suggested by the first National Conference to ensure some regional representation. The list of members of the Executive Committed is given in Appendix II. This Committee was elected by the foundation meeting but we hope to conduct fresh elections during 1984 through a system of postal ballot. Members who enrolled for one year only are therefore requested to kindly renew their membership urgently so that they can participate in the forthcoming election. The Association decided to adopt April to March as its financial year; so technically speaking all annual membership ended on 31<sup>st</sup> March 1984, and will need immediate renewal. The rules of the Association adopted by the Executive Committee, are being printed, and will be sent to all members, along with notices of elections.

The Association has ambitious objectives – to develop documentation, information, and dissemination services; to organize programmed for developing women's studies perspectives in different disciplines; to develop adequate indicators for measuring women's participation in all aspects of development; to assist institutions which seek to develop teaching, research or action programmes for women's equality and development, and all such actions that “try to eliminate attitudinal, conceptual and class biases that hinder understanding of the role and situation of women and their movement towards equality”.

To start with, however, we decided to concentrate with out limited resources on the following activities:

- (a) to organise the second National Conference which we hope will provides a forum for dissemination of research and action results and assist in the expansion of number of persons and institutions committed to women's studies;
- (b) to collaborate with the Commission on Women of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological sciences, and the Research Committee 32 on Women and society of the International Sociological Association in organizing an Asian Regional Conference on women and the Household, which is scheduled to take place in January 1985 at Bhopal. Dr. Leela Dube, who is a member of our Executive Committee, and also the Chairperson of the Commission on Women of the IUAES and Member of the ISA Research Committee 32, has been appointed as the Organising Secretary of the Regional Conference. An Organising Committee has also been formed for this purpose. Members who which to obtain more information on this Conference are requested to contact Dr. Dube or other members of the Committee;
- (c) efforts at consolidation and dissemination of the results of research in various fields to provide better perspectives for new initiatives both in research and action and
- (d) to stimulate constructive thinking in opening up new areas for research, curricular reform and action through the medium of working groups.

The first National Conference had covered a number of areas relevant for women's development. The intention then was to create awareness about the range of issues and the extent of work that was already under way in different parts of the country.

The Second Conference has been designed to begin some sustained and constructive work in consolidation, documentation and communication. We hope that the three workshops will provide not only a forum for interaction between academics and activists, but will also provide a body of material which would help teaching institutions to introduce greater coverage on women's issues in their teaching programmes. Out thanks are due to the coordinators and members of the three working groups which have worked extremely hard during the last few months to organize these workshops. We are requesting them to appoint general editors to arrange for the publication of selected papers and the proceedings of these workshops.

It is our misfortune that Dr. Madhuri R Shah, the President of the Association is unable to be present at this Conference because of her illness. Her unstinted support and leadership has been of immense value in our work. We are also happy to report that through her intervention the University Grants Commission has now requested all universities to introduce teaching, research and extension activities for the promotion of

women's studies. This is a tremendous stride in our development and we hope that member institutions will pioneer this effort in the history of higher education in India.

This Conference has been made possible by the financial support that the Association has received from a number of agencies. We would like to acknowledge our gratitude to the University Grants Commission; the Indian Council of Social Science Research; the Ministry of Social Welfare, Govt. of India; the National Committee for Implementing Legal Aid Schemes; and the All India Association for Christian Higher Education, for providing grants of Rs.10,000/- each for holding this Conference. The UNICEF, which supported the first National Conference and has been consistent in its support of studies on women's development, provided a grant of Rs.48,000/- this time. The Swedish International Development Agency agreed very readily to provide a grant of Kro. 40,000/-. The Ford Foundation, which has accepted women's studies as a major educational development in this country, has provided a grant of \$ 25,000/- to support activities of the Association in the coming two years. Our gratitude to all these agencies for their support and expression of confidence in our work. This will enable us to support a few working groups and small conferences, some publication and providing advice to institutions for initiating new activities.

The Freedom From Hunger Campaign of the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Norwegian Agency for International Development, provide a grant of \$ 3,600/- which has enabled us to invite some colleagues from our neighbouring countries to participate in this conference.

The response that we have received from universities, research institutes, colleges, especially women's colleges and the funding agencies, and all of you who traveled across the length of this country to participate in this conference provides ample evidence that the development of women's studies is no longer the dream of handful of people. We stand at a critical period in our development when women's issues pose one of the major challenges to all those who bear the onerous responsibility of nation building. The new women's movement is articulating the aspirations and the consciousness of far larger sections of women in this country than ever before. It is also reacting to very grave and dangerous trends in our development – social, economic and political. While we must continue to press the need for greater attention to these issues on the government, it is essential on our part to recognise our own responsibility at the same time.

The Indian Association for Women's Studies represents a cross section of the educated in this country – women, men and institutions. Educational institutions and organizations which are committed to women's equality and development have a crucial role to play in avoiding these dangerous trends and in translating into the language of contemporary realities the vision of human equality and justice that provide the ideological foundations of our nation. Such a translation calls for deliberate, sustained and institutionalised efforts on the part of all of us, particularly those connected with the process of maintaining and developing these values. The Association will try to play its role in stimulating such efforts, but its success will depend on the efforts of its members across the country.

We had hoped to hold this conference in 1983, but our plans had to be changed for unavoidable reasons. Our gratitude is due to the University of Kerala and the Kerala Institute for Management in Government for undertaking to host this conference at very short notice, and for the excellent arrangements.

I would also like to welcome the participants from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka, as well as the observers from various international agencies, and hope that this conference will help us to build closer cooperation in future.

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## **APPENDIX I**

The Objectives of the IAWS are as follows:

1. To provide a forum for interaction amongst individuals, institutions and organizations engaged in teaching, research or action for women's development;
2. To provide, establish information centres at different parts of the country for promotion of Women's Studied and Scientific analysis of action for development of Women's equality. To this end develop network for collection of information relating to teaching, research and action programmes;
  - a. To develop documentation, bibliographic and other services;
  - b. To disseminate needed information to all agencies, engaged in teaching, research and action programmes;
3. To organize periodical conferences to carry forward the awareness and momentum generated by the first National Conference which was organized by the SNTD Women's University, Bombay, Kanpur University and Centre for Women's Development Studies, New Delhi in April 1981.
4. To organize specific action programmes for the development of women studies perspectives in different disciplines and for the development of appropriate indicators for measuring women's participation in social, economic development;
5. To mobilize necessary services and resources, with a view to strengthen and assist women scholars, writers, communicators, etc. to develop their talents;
6. To assist institutions seeking to develop programmes for teaching, research and action for women's equality and development;

7. To take all such action that may be deemed necessary, to bring about a change in social values with a view “to eliminate attitudinal, conceptual and class biases that hinder understanding of the role and situation of women and their movement towards equality”, and
8. To collaborate with institutions and agencies working for similar objectives at the national and international level.

## **APPENDIX II**

1.	Dr. Madhuri R Shah	President
2.	Dr. Hemlata Swarup	Vice-President
3.	Dr. Vina Mazumdar	General Secretary
4.	Dr. Neera Desai	Joint-Secretary
5.	Dr. Jyoti.R.Trivedi	Member
6.	Dr. Leela Dube	Member
7.	Dr. Leela Phadnis	Member
8.	Prof. Asok Mitra	Member
9.	Smt. Devaki Jain	Member
10.	Dr. Sajda Zaidi	Member
11.	Dr. Renu Devi	Member

## **IIInd National Conference, 1984: Thiruvanthapuram**

*Address of the President*

### **Madhuri R Shah**

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 SNTD 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 effort. 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 head-way.

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,