What indices are there that Women's position in Society today has improved from the situation in which they found themselves before the Decade of Women was announced and ended?

Rising incidents of Abortions and increases in the number of unmarried mothers has serious social implications. With legalisation of medical termination of pregnancy in 1971, the number of abortions has skyrocketed to 3000 a month. Ignorance about adequate use of contraceptive methods and negligence in their use, is responsible to a large extent for increase in the incidents of abortion. How educated is the educated women on abortion and its implications for the status of women in society?

The recent discovery of sex determination prior to the birth of a child has also added to the exploitation and oppression of the female child even before the baby is born.

The cover page of INDIA TODAY startles us with figures -

6000 infanticides-female children aborted over a period of 10 years in one single State of India. This a good or bad omen for the Women's Movement at present and in the future?

The casual attitude of some women going in for MTP is indeed shocking. Mrs. Grewal, a gynaecologist at Marie Stoppes Clinic in Karol Bagh remarked: “Some women have one abortion and find it so comfortable that the next time they come back they get caught. In a sense they get acclimatised to the whole procedure.” Many women reveal an appalling ignorance of its repercussions, both psychological and physiological.

Is Abortion in fact, murdering half of one self and murdering half of some one else. It is desirable (i) to have a thorough debate on the pros and cons of abortion (ii) urgent need to disseminate information on adequate use of contraceptives. Have you seen the Silent Scream? If you have not, then do see it and dispel the many false notions that the unborn child and especially the foetus 4-6 weeks old, does not feel pain in the process of aborting. The debate is urgent. Can you enter the debate orally with your friends or on paper? Express your views to the Editor who will publish your comments in the next issue of the IAWS Bulletin.

Sr. Karuna Mary Braganza

Editorial Board

Sr. Karuna Mary Braganza (Editor)  Dr. Leela Duble  Dr. K. Saradamon  Dr. Sushila Kaushik
Mrs. Amrit Nikore  Miss Neeraja Chowdhary  Miss Sujata Madhok  Dr. Malshree Lal

IAWS Editorial Board, welcomes the FIRST RESPONSE to its first NEWS LETTER from Kumkum Roy. We hope this will set the ball rolling !!!
Barely a year since the UN Decade for Women has come to an end, women's struggle against injustice and inequality, for rights that have long been denied to them, have had to be intensified. The burden of a growing rate of unemployment, illiteracy and a rising cost of living has left women, and large sections of the Indian population, with no other option but to struggle for their basic rights and a life of dignity.

The roots of oppression for all women, irrespective of their religion, are common and lie in the present socio-economic structure. Hence the common demands, the common bonds and the common struggles that have marked the democratic women's movement. Today, this common bond is being eroded in the name of religion. Unfortunately, those involved in creating, rather reviving, the worst communal tensions are not just the religious fundamentalists and obscurantists but the government itself. The issue at stake is the right of a divorced woman to claim maintenance from her former husband. The recent Supreme Court judgement upholding this right in the case of a Muslim woman, sparked off a fierce controversy. Under pressure from the fundamentalists, the government introduced in Parliament a bill that exempts Muslim women from the provisions of Section 125 of the Cr.Pc and from the positive aspects of the Supreme Court judgement.

The judgement pertains to 65 years old Shah Bano of Indore who was deserted by her husband in 1975 after having lived with him for 43 years. In 1978, she filed a suit against her husband claiming maintenance under Sec. 125 Cr.Pc. in the Court of a Judicial Magistrate at the rate of Rs. 500 per month. Once she filed her case and it was listed for hearing, her husband pronounced irrevocable divorce on her and claimed that since she was no more his wife she was not entitled to any maintenance. He also claimed that he had deposited certain customary amounts in the Court—Rs. 3,000 as mehr (dower or bridal gift) and Rs. 600 for maintenance during the iddat (waiting period of three months after the divorce) period, and there was no question of paying any maintenance.

However, the District Court granted her a sum of Rs. 25 per month as maintenance. In a revision application in the Madhya Pradesh High Court, the sum was revised at Rs. 179.20 per month.

It was against this that Shah Bano's husband filed an appeal in the Supreme Court which was rejected on the ground that mehr cannot be seen as a legal substitute for maintenance but is money given as a token of respect to the woman at the time of marriage. The amount of mehr has nothing to do with the event of divorce as the husband is obliged to pay it at the time of marriage or at any time thereafter, if claimed by her. What the Supreme Court observed is borne out by many cases today, where mehr is a mere ritual and is hardly a means of support to the deserted, divorced wife. Even Shah Bano's mehr, fixed 40 years ago, hardly has any monetary value today.

The Supreme Court upheld Shah Bano's contention for maintenance beyond the iddat period under Sec. 125 Cr.Pc. This provision, which came into force in 1973, is basically social legislation meant to prevent vagrancy and destitution. It entitles divorced women (in fact any destitute person including old parents and children) to maintenance up to a maximum of Rs. 500 per month from their former husbands.

Prior to the inclusion of Sec. 125 in the Criminal Procedure Code, there was a provision of maintenance for wives in Sec. 488 of the old Cr.Pc (1898). But there was no liability of payment to a divorced wife. Taking advantage of this lacuna, many deserting husbands divorced their wives when an application for maintenance was filed and thus escaped the liability to make payment. To prevent this abuse, the Joint Select Committee of Parliament (on the Cr. Pc. Bill 1970) extended the benefit of the provision to a divorced woman who has not remarried. Accordingly a 'wife' was defined as "including a woman who has been divorced or has obtained divorce from her husband and has not remarried'.

From the time of desertion to the Supreme Court judgement, it took Shah Bano 10 long years of struggle. What is the outcome of this positive and progressive judgement? While it is a tremendous gain for the women's movement, it has been condemned by Muslim fundamentalists as anti-Islamic and an outright attack on their religion. Their argument is based on their belief that the Muslim Personal Law is divine and must not be interpreted by any human agency and that the judgement violates the Constitutional guarantee to profess and practice one's religion without any interference from the State.

There can be no doubt that the issue of maintenance goes beyond the legal or religious interpretations of Muslim Personal Law. In most cases, it is in fact a question of the woman's very survival, as most women who seek maintenance have no means of livelihood. But to reassert their hold on Muslim public opinion, the fundamen-
secularism and women's rights, it introduced in tative communal forces, the government chose to opposition not only from women's organisations compromise with them. In a blatant attack on for the withdrawal of her case. Tremendous com­
place threat of being made destitute, Shah Bano had to plead in Court the judgement, Shah Bano had to plead in Court for the withdrawal of her case. Tremendous community and social pressure was mounted on her by maulvis and others who managed to instil a sense of fear in her that if she refused to recant, she alone would be responsible for the riots that could follow.

Instead of effectively curbing such exploitative communal forces, the government chose to compromise with them. In a blatant attack on secularism and women's rights, it introduced in Parliament the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, 1986 despite severe opposition not only from women's organisations but a sizeable section of the Muslim community itself. The highlights of the Bill are that:

- The husband is exonerated from the responsibility of maintaining his divorced wife after three months (iddat period).
- A husband has to maintain his children for only two years in the event of their being with their mother.
- The divorced woman has been given the legal right to file a suit against male members of her natal family for maintenance.
- In the event of the male members (father, uncle, brother) failing to pay maintenance, the Wakf Boards (community run, charitable institutions) are to take the responsibility.

The Bill has far reaching implications not only for women but for the whole society, particularly as it has come in response to the fundamentalists' demands. It is a mockery of secularism as it takes Muslim women out of the purview or Sec. 125 Cr.PC which is a secular law meant for all women, irrespective of their religion. Freedom of religion does not mean tolerance of practices which are discriminatory and unjust. Should human rights and the Constitution be violated under the guise of religious practices?

Contrary to the government's claim that the Bill would protect Muslim women, given the declining status of women in general and Muslim women in particular, the Bill will in effect, ensure that large number of Muslim women are turned into destitutes. If the government is genuinely interested in improving the status of Muslim women, it must adopt positive policies which would reflect this interest.

The crucial issue to resolve is the social and economic dependence of women. If they had access to employment, which is their Constitutional right, would they have to fight such long legal battles for a pittance? Muslim women constitute nearly 50% of the Muslim community and no progress is possible without their cooperation.

In the event of desertion or divorce, a woman naturally turns to her own family for support and sustenance. By making her natural family legally responsible for her maintenance the Bill, in effect, encourages conflict between her and the family, closing one more door on her. The Bill proposes that where the family fails to maintain her, the Wakf Boards would fulfil the responsibility, but it is common knowledge that Wakf Boards are mostly defunct institutions. In all probability then, the Bill is pushing women out on the streets while protecting men from their responsibility to pay maintenance.

Women's organisations and a large section of progressive Muslim and non-Muslim opinion had demanded from the government that the Bill be scrapped or at least referred to a Select Committee but all this was in vain as the ruling party pushed the Bill through with haste in the first week of May, Subdiving dissent within its own rank.

What had further compounded the already complex issue was the role of the Hindu communal organisations who became particularly vociferous in their opposition on the Bill. Their attempt was to intensify the sense of insecurity among the Muslims and to create contempt and hatred against them by using this particular issue.

The storm over the Supreme Court judgement was amazing, to say the least. This was not the first time that the Court had granted maintenance to a Muslim woman under Sec. 125 Cr.PC. There have been several similar court judgements which have gone unnoticed. Why was there no controversy prior to this judgement?

The Shah Bano case has become historic for at least two reasons: firstly that the Supreme Court, in its observations on the judgement referred to Article 44 of the Constitution which calls for a uniform civil code and secondly it interpreted the Quran in the light of the judgement. This was more than enough for the fundamentalists to sit up. Moreover, the judgement came at a time when the growth of communal forces, which seem determined to divide people in the name of religion, is at its peak.

In any case, what is obvious is that the issue has gone beyond that of the Bill and has touched, rather shaken, the core of our society. Shah Bano will always be remembered for crea-
ting history. But the other side of it is to remem-
ber how easily the secular, social fabric of our
society can be disrupted or destroyed. The contro-
versy highlights the extent of communisation of
Indian society and its polity and the urgent need
to be on one’s guard against attacks on even our
Constitutional rights.

The unity and unanimity expressed in oppo-
sition to the Bill by women’s organisations,
Muslim women and the secular, democratic opinion
in general, is surely one of the most positive
aspects of the present struggle against communal,
disruptive forces.

Sahba Husain

I.A.W.S. Resolution

“This meeting of the Executive Committee of the Indian Association for
Women’s Studies resolves to request the Prime Minister to withdraw
the proposed Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill, 1986
as it violates the constitutional rights of Muslim Women and infringes
the secular frame-work of the Indian Republic as well as the Constitu-
tional commitment to justice for all citizens.”

Resolution approved by the Executive Committee of Indian Association for Women’s Studies in its
meeting held on 31st March, 1986 on Muslim Women’s Bill.

From the General Secretary

1. Enrolment as IAWS members :-

The Third National Conference on Women’s studies will be held from 1st to 4th October,
1986 at Chandigarh. The theme is Women struggles and movements. Those prospective participants
who have not enrolled themselves so far, may do so as early as possible. Those ordinary members
whose membership have expired on 31st March, 1986 may renew their membership for the current

2. Announcement of the General Election of the IAWS.

The General Election of the IAWS to elect the members of the Executive Committee for
1987-1989 will be held sometime in November 1986. The Electoral list of the members Electoral
list will include only those who enrol themselves as members upto 31st July, 1986. The members
may check that their names are in the Electoral list by writing to either the General Secretary or
the Joint Secretary.

Susheela Kaushik, Jt. Secretary
80, Dakshinapuram, J.N.U Campus
New Delhi-110 067

Lucy M. Jacob,
General Secretary
"I'm a feminist." Every time I hear a man make that remark my hackles rise. I have to curb my growing irritation as I scan his statement and his face for signs of smugness, of self-congratulation. No matter how earnest his tone, how serious his manner, I seem to detect a certain glibness in his 'more-progressive-than-the-progressive's stance. And I am instantly on guard.

"My husband is a feminist." Every time I hear a woman proclaim her spouse's virtues in this manner, I feel a certain unease. I scan her statement to sense if she truly believes it or whether it is a case of protesting too much. Is she snuggly, smugly congratulating herself for so easily, almost by sleight of hand, escaping the old patriarchal bondage of marriage? Or is it self-deception, an exercise in pulling-the-wool-over-the-eyes, because it is safer to hide under a cliche than examine a relationship too closely?

Why is it so hard for me to believe that a man can be a feminist? Do I believe that the old gender divisions are immutable? If so, what is my feminism all about, then? A utopian demand for change, along with the paradoxical belief that change can't happen? Or am I being merely pragmatic in realising that the sex role change, while revolutionary in content is evolutionary in process, that change is not instant coffee downed in a few gulps.

But if a female can change in a few years from a quiet long-suffering woman into a vocal feminist, why can't a man do the same? The answer, perhaps, lies in this business of being long-suffering. It is precisely because a woman suffers oppression at first hand that she understands patriarchy. A man may be witness to the oppression of a woman a mother or sister or friend-as a small boy he may even have experienced paternal tyranny but he is not oppressed by it in the same way as a woman. By the simple fact of being male a boy escapes much of the conditioning girls are subject to; at a subconscious level he knows that some day he can be as powerful as the father and only has to bide his time. He may reject his father's tyrannical ways and choose to use his power benevolently but he knows that the power will be his. A girl knows instinctively that she is and will be excluded from power and subject to the powerful. This is a stark analysis of the situation but who said feminism was a rose garden?

The analogy that is often used is, if a middle class person can be a Marxist, then a sympathetic male can be a feminist. But Marxism is an ideology that one adopts not because of one's class or experience but because one's mind is convinced of its rationality and justice. If one's Marxism is also fuelled by personal experience of injustice and oppression, more power to it. But it is not an essential prerequisite.

The personal experience of oppression, of discrimination, is however the core of feminism. The feminist ideology was not developed on theories of material deprivation, of economic injustice (though these enter into it) but on the experience of emotional alienation, of psychic mutilation, of personal rather than economic violence.

"The personal is the political" is hence the keystone of the movement. It is because of its emotional origins that the term feminist is for many of us so emotive. Maybe that is why it is so hard to let men have a part of it, to let any man call himself a feminist. For me, at best, he can be a sympathiser.

Sujata Madhok

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The IAWS Panel in the Eleventh World Congress of Sociology

A World Congress of Sociology is held every four years by the International Sociological Association. The eleventh of these congresses is to meet in New Delhi from 18 to 22 August 1986.

The ISA has several Research Committees, each with a specific interest. One of the most active of these is RC 32, 'Women in Society', which has members from all over the world. RC 32, which was one of the co-organizers of the 'Women and the Household' conference in 1985, has planned a series of sessions for the World Congress of Sociology.

One of these sessions is organized in collaboration with the IAWS. This will be a two-hour-long panel discussion on the theme 'The importance of a focus on women for a more purposeful social science' in the specific context of India. This is scheduled for 4 p.m. on 22 August.

There will be four brief presentations followed by the comments of a discussants. An hour or more will be available for an open discussion. It is hoped that some particularly significant issues will be raised.

18 May 1986

Leela Dube
West Bengal

March 8th, the International Women's Day, is no longer an obscure date. More women's organisations are now observing this day all over West Bengal. The number is still small but not discouraging. Previously, only women's units of the left political parties observed it. But now March 8th is observed with enthusiasm wherever there is a little consciousness of women's rights. Simultaneously with urban women's groups, small organisations like PIRA in Manosri village (Howrah), Daspur (Midnapur), Satmanirhat (Diamond Harbour) have celebrated this day.

However the history of March 8th continues to be vague by known. So this year, Nari Nirjatan Pratiradh Mancha (Forum Against the Oppression of Women), Calcutta decided to publish a leaflet in Bengali giving the background and history of March 8th. The leaflet also presented a charter of demands concerning women. It was well received by the public and members of other women's groups.

The Forum organised a procession and initiated a mass signature campaign against the proposed Muslim Women (Protection of Rights of Divorce) Bill. Two members of the Committee For the Protection of the Rights of Muslim Women, Sajida Asad and Mumtaz Choudhury, were specially invited by the Forum to address street corner meetings. They both criticised the Bill strongly, describing it as anti-woman and anti-religion.

The other demands of the Forum were for a uniform civil code granting equal status to men and women of all religions, an anti-price-rise movement, recognition of the right to health as fundamental, solution of the housing problem, speedy hearing and disposal of cases of dowry, burning, maintenance and rape, more opportunities for women to become economically independent, an end to discrimination in jobs and equal wages for equal work. A strong plea was made for the social recognition of domestic labour and establishment of creches, community kitchens and old age homes to lighten the housewife's workload.

The Bhopal gas disaster was also an issue of the March 8th campaign. The Forum demanded proper examination of all MIC affected women who had suffered from irregular periods or miscarriages and of lactating mothers who had problems of breast milk drying up. Many pregnant women had given birth to deformed babies. A demand was made for the free supply of necessary drugs and abortion facilities.

The Forum which comprises several women's organisations and individuals was formed two years ago for joint action on issues affecting women. The constituent members are Sachetona, Women's Library (a documentation centre), Mahila Pathakakra, Progotisheel Mahila Samitee, Women's Research Centre and Lahari. All are Calcutta based.

Sachetona chose to celebrate Women's Day with a two-day open air fair, a cultural programme felicitations to important women and the release of its journal Sachetona with special emphasis on women from the Third World. One of the women to be honoured was the pioneering woman trade union leader Santosh Kumari. A seminar was also organised to highlight women's changing roles in art, literature and society in post-Independence Bengal.

In Manosri village PIRA put up posters against atrocities on women and organised a procession. Sarbik Gana Unnayan Parishad in Daspur published a leaflet and organised a procession of 100 women and same men in the village.

The West Bengal Unit of the National Federation of Indian Women organised a seminar on "Women and Peace" to commemorate 1986, the Year of Peace, as well as March 8th. It stressed the importance of women's role in anti-war rallies and peace movements. Joint Women's Programme took out a procession of women in protest against the proposed Muslim Women Bill. They presented a memorandum to the Government demanding its withdrawal. Lively songs and skits were presented along the roadside, highlighting the problems of women.

Ahalya (an autonomous group) organised a seminar on the theory of feminism. Among the women's units of political parties the SUCI women's group the Mahila Sanskriti Sangha, called a protest meeting against the Muslim Women Bill where eminent Muslim scholars described the Bill as retrograde, communal and violative of the fundamental rights granted by the Constitution.

A definite trend to emerge from all the demands is the politicalisation of women's issues which are no longer restricted to typical demands like creche facilities and maternal health. The consciousness that women's movements have to be linked to broad democratic movements, while retaining the right to form separate women's organisations, will hopefully guide the future of the movement in West Bengal.

Maitreyee Chatterjee
Tamil Nadu

The first week of March saw hectic activity by a number of women’s organisations in Tamil Nadu, culminating in programmes throughout the State on International Women’s Day, March 8th.

Just like last year, the Joint Action Council for Women’s organised in the forenoon of March 8th a meet with various women’s organisations in Madras city. Representatives from different organisations spoke on the contemporary issues facing women in India today. The occasion was also used to honour the women Public Prosecutor from Madras and also an enterprising woman entrepreneur.

The Rural Women’s Liberation Movement located in Arakkonam in North Arcot District organised a long march from Arakkonam to Madras City. Comprising of women agricultural labourers and other rural women, it started on March 5th and proceeded through different towns and villages of the district until it reached Madras city, where a huge public meeting was organised. Many rural women and other speakers addressed the public meeting at Periyar Thidal. Both the March and the meeting focussed largely on the problems of rural women.

The Democratic Women’s Association submitted a memorandum protesting against the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill that is presently before Parliament. Earlier, in the wake of police firing on fishermen in Madras City in December and subsequent police harassment, the Democratic Women’s Association constituted and led a fact finding team consisting of V.R. Krishna Iyer and other concerned persons. The team highlighted the atrocities perpetrated on fisherwomen, men and children and urged the authorities to withdraw the false cases foisted on them. The other women’s organisations, Pennurimai Iyakkam and the Working Women’s Forum, also expressed their concern on this issue through a procession and site visits.

In the first week of March, members of Pennurimai Iyakkam protested outside a theatre on the obscene and vulgar portrayal of women in films.

In January a Chinese delegation visited the Working Women’s Forum and spoke to its members in different areas in Madras city.

The Joint Action Council for Women is soon setting up a shelter home for battered and destitute women. In collaboration with the Andhra Mahila Sabha they have already started Sahodri, a counselling centre for women, which has become popular in the city.

Academic women are not far behind. The Mother Teresa Women’s University in Kodaikanal held a seminar on Tamil Women Writers in March in Madurai. They also had a seminar on women and the New Education Policy in the first week of April. Tremendous concern appears to exist on women and the new education policy as even the Department of Sociology, University of Madras, recently organised a seminar on this issue.

U. Kalpagam

WOMEN & CULTURE

The national conference on culture held in Bangalore from March 9-16, 1986 to reflect and debate on “Cultural Forces shaping India today - Education’s response” has great significance at a time when we are at the crossroads. A distinguished gathering of women and men expressed concern at the failure of the present social system to reduce oppression, exploitation and class-caste-gender inequalities. What is the way out? The discussions in seminars and workshops were focussed on this.

At the outset, Sr. Braganza observed that any conference on culture that is worth its salt must include an important component on women. In a changing society, women who are the conservers of culture, can also be great impediments to social change. On the other hand, committed and enlightened women are a powerful factor of change.

Margaret Alva, minister of state for Human Resource Development, in her valedictory address stressed that a society cannot progress if its women are left behind. She urged women to rise above traditional taboos, gain self confidence and associate actively in national development.

Devaki Jain in the paper “Culture of poverty - Is equitable development possible?” brilliantly presented women’s perspective. She said that the poor in India are terribly deprived but not overpowered by poverty, being alert and capable of carving spaces for themselves against all odds. She justified her stress on women by pointing out that whether the criterion is nutrition or income women are the poorest but it is their creative energy which sustains the culture of the poor.
Development activists confirm that the poor are able to perceive, design, articulate and implement collectively their own plans for themselves. If so, why is development so troublesome? The answer lies in identifying with the poor, learning from them and allowing their own dynamics to function at a less dehumanising level. The culture of the poor, argued Ms. Jain, thus can be a model for development. Women's dynamism, hard struggle for survival and capacity for nurturance makes them central to the development process, she felt.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan’s paper on “Ecology and Indian myth” showed how the Hindu veneration of all life, be it plant, animal or human, and the belief in the cosmic order, the rhythm of the movement of earth, water, fire, ether and agni. Surya was essential to the preservation of the ecology. The Hindu emphasis on purification i.e. non-pollution and the many myths that glorify nature can be used to reassert the need to preserve the environment today, she said.

Sessions were devoted to media science and technology, tribal culture and peace.

The session on science and technology was very stimulating. Dr. Ramasashen stressed (i) Science must relate to the well-being of the masses at their micro and macro-reality. (ii) High priority by given to the needs of the poor women and men in meeting their aspirations.

Amrit Nikore’s case studies of tribal culture in the Rourkela and Bhilai areas which are faced with the onslaught of modernisation focussed on the precarious condition in which the tribals of Sundergarh and Durg region have been placed.

Dr. Anima Bose traced the historical evolution of the concept of peace in India, from the shanti and Ahinsa of the Vedas, through the Karuna spoken of by Buddha to the prem of the Bhakti movement and finally the ahinsa expounded by Gandhi.

The conference concluded with stress on priority for cultural autonomy, alleviation of poverty, improving the status of women and creating a just society where education, culture and religion grow together. "Can we do it? Can Women give the lead?" Herein lies the challenge of the conference.

Amrit Nikore

Communication

It was good to see the first newsletter of the IAWS. A publication meant exclusively for reports and news on women’s studies has become absolutely essential at present and the newsletter certainly has a great deal of potential. I would like to make a few suggestions regarding future issues of the newsletter.

It would be good if the newsletter could contain information about future conferences, workshops etc. (both those organised by the IAWS and by others). Such information, if published on a regular basis, would be extremely useful in helping readers to plan/participate in such events.

If possible, short reports (maybe a paragraph or two) should be published on recent/on-going research projects in which individual members/groups are involved, so that one has a better and more systematic idea of current developments.

If space permits, a list of recent publications of interest (journals, articles, booksets) would be useful.

Looking forward to the next issue of the newsletter,

Kumkum Roy
During the Second National Conference on Women’s Studies held at Trivandrum in April 1984 an unanimous resolution was adopted that the Indian Association for Women’s Studies should promote a national study on the Role of Women in the Freedom Struggle, since various authors of papers on this theme had commented on the acute scarcity of published material.

The few studies that existed, it was felt, were superficial and focussed on a few well known leaders. It was felt essential to probe the lives and role of the millions unknown women who took part in this struggle, making use of documentary, oral and other types of evidence. The project had to be dealt with urgently as most of the freedom fighters might not be with us for too long.

The Executive Committee of the Association at its meeting on July 28, 1984 decided to set up a task force for formulating a research project on this theme, for identifying scholars across the country who could participate in the project, and for requesting various agencies like the ICSSR, ICHR, UGC and the Indian Institute for Advanced Studies to provide supportive funds.

The Task Force Committee comprises Prof. Ravindra Kumar, Dr. Hemlata Swarup, Dr. Usha Mehta, Dr. D. P. Barua, Prof. Sunil Kr. Sen, Dr. Veena Mazumdar, Dr. Taneka Sarkar and Prof. Susheela Kaushik.

The Task Force believes the immediate task is that of consolidating and preserving the various source materials for a study of this period. Towards this, it has worked out certain proposals.

Preparation of Bibliographical Surveys

It is important that a number of bibliographical surveys listing the primary source materials on the role of women in the freedom struggle, available in archives, libraries, newspaper and periodical offices, professional and political associations, be prepared expeditiously. For this purpose, it would be advisable to zone the country into four regions, in each one of which a Project Director would be located with requisite staff and infrastructure to prepare a Regional Bibliographical Survey. The headquarters of the northern region could be Delhi, of the eastern Calcutta, of the western Bombay and of the southern region Hyderabad.

The Regional Project Directors would be required to survey repositories housing source materials pertaining to the subject. With the assistance of Senior Research Officers they would prepare comprehensive and critical bibliographical surveys relating to documentary materials illuminating the role of women in the freedom struggle. It is estimated that the examination of sources would take three years. Another two years would be required for preparing the bibliography.

Oral History

Besides conventional sources, an Oral History project could contribute substantially to the generation of new documentation on the topic. For this purpose an all-India programme similar to the one outlined above could be undertaken. The Regional Project Directors vested with the responsibility of preparing bibliographical surveys of existing sources should also prepare oral history material. Fifty percent of the research staff provided to them could be engaged in this segment of the programme.

The staff engaged in preparing oral history materials could draw profitably on the conceptual approaches outlined in the accompanying paper on Women and Nationalism which has profitable guidelines as to the manner in which interviews can be conducted.

The generation of oral history records should draw upon a perception of the freedom movement which puts as much stress on social, cultural and economic liberation as it puts upon political liberation. Besides, it would be profitable to record interviews with so-called ‘unknown’ women from different regions and social strata whose perceptions may help in generating a rounded documentation base, particularly for scholars interested in “history from below”. The Oral History programme needs to be undertaken expeditiously, since the subjects of such interviews may not be with us for very long.

Workshops and Symposia

The Task Force considered the question of organisation of workshops and symposia: (1) to discuss sources pertaining to the role of women in the freedom struggle (ii) to formulate conceptual methods through which our understanding of this field could be enhanced (iii) to initiate substantive researches regarding the role of women in India’s liberation. It was of the view that the organisation of such activities by universities, research institutions and other bodies engaged in social science research would go a long way towards generating new ideas and perceptions.

The organisation of these workshops and symposia could be an on-going activity, since the subject has wide ramifications. Further new developments in social theory have often enabled scholars to draw upon novel documentation and fresh areas of human endeavour to enrich our understanding of the subject.

The Task Force endorses the paper “Women and Indian Nationalism” as a fundamental contribution to studies in this field.

It is hoped that the above suggestions may be kept in view by the research scholars and the academic community while formulating their proposals for research both in Women’s Studies as well as in the parental disciplines. The Association would also appeal to the university authorities as well as the research funding agencies to encourage research and seminars on these lines and to accord them priority.

Susheela Kaushik
The study of the interrelationship between women and Indian nationalism poses serious problems at the level of concepts, sources and methodology. It is essential to distinguish between different issues, levels of consciousness and ideologies and their impact on different groups in society. It is necessary to look upon nationalism as a phenomenon which encompasses social, economic and cultural issues as much as the political struggle for the overthrow of colonial rule.

The articulation of the women's question has to be examined from the integrated perspective of a social revolution, wherein established norms are in a state of flux and the vision of a new society is being formulated.

The nationalist movement embraced a variety of ideological trends concerning the existing and the prescriptive roles of women-some complementary, some contradictory. There were also significant differences in the articulation and perception of these trends, just as there were marked differences in the aspirations of different groups who participated in the complex types of movements that formed the Indian people's struggle for liberation.

A re-examination of Indian nationalism from the perspective of (a) women's participation, (b) the significance of the situation of women from different classes, castes, communities and the nature of their participation in these struggles, and (c) the articulation of the debates on the women's question at various levels and stages of these struggles would provide new insights into the nature of the movements, their ideological and operational character, and their eventual influence on the status of women in past independence India.

"Women and Indian Nationalism is to be a subtheme of the Third National Conference on Women's Studies to be held from Oct. 1-4, 1986. Papers are being invited for the following panels.

1. Culture consciousness and social liberation

This panel will be devoted to an exploration of the growth and articulation of consciousness of women and about women, located in the context of the sociocultural processes which sought to contend with their exploitation and subordination which also manifested itself in forms of violence against women. The canvas would be the sociocultural movements during the colonial period-both proto-nationalist and nationalist. How did the cultural struggle, embodied in the socio-religious movements during the 19th century, look at the problem of women and formulate solutions? How did women perceive men-women relationships and their position in the family etc.? What were the socio-cultural imperatives which enabled women to participate in the national movement? Did their participation stem from a consciousness of the liberation possibilities of the movement?

2. (a) Nature of women's participation

This panel will focus on women's participation at various levels in different regions and in different forms, examining it both from the point of view of consciousness and action. Apart from documenting the actual roles played by women overtly or covertly, it is important to examine their background, their perception and the way in which their roles were perceived by their own family, the neighbourhood, the community, the leadership etc.

2. (b) Organisations, Institutions and Movements

This panel will focus on specific case studies of institutions, organisations and movements which drew on women's activism. Such case studies may focus on organisations/institutions which only included women or general organisations, such as trade unions, political parties, cultural institutions, etc. The following key questions are offered.

1. What was the nature of women's participation in various movements?
2. What did such participation mean to women from different groups who had to function within a social structure deeply influenced by class, caste, communal and regional differences?
3. How did such women, from different backgrounds, view the national movement?
4. How did women's participation affect other people and eventually the various movements?
5. How did this affect the consciousness of and about women - particularly their roles in the three sectors of family, economy and decision making? Among the political elite, the intelligentsia and the less dominant/visible groups, e.g. peasants, workers, tribals and minorities?

3. Development of Ideologies

This panel will explore the development of various ideologies regarding women's position and roles in society that affected the articulation or non-articulation of the women's question. How were these ideologies influenced in their turn by the fact of women's participation in the political struggle? It would be important to include in this examination the role of different strands within the social reform movements of the 19th century as well as the differing approaches of radical and conservative elements in the cultural and political faces of nationalism.

4. Nationalist historiography and the women's question

This panel aims to examine the social vision of the historians whose writings contributed substantially to the growth and understanding of nationalism. It may involve reviews of historical literature of that time as well as later.

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