

Editor's Note

In 1981, when the first IAWS meeting was held in Bombay, I decided against attending it. I was active in the anti-rape campaign, participating in morchas, debating legal amendments and attending meetings. Perhaps for the first time, I was also experiencing myself as a woman, my vulnerabilities and my strengths, my fears and hopes. In the heady excitement of activism there was hardly any room for academics. It seems to me now that I have come full circle and fortunately not arrived at my point of departure.

The divide between activists and academics continues to persist in different ways and forms. In the early '80s we were activists, helping women in distress, taking up legal reforms and confronting the police and the government. The news media discovered us and wanted newsworthy events, data and information. Many journalists wrote sympathetic articles, but 'forgot' to acknowledge us and our material. Others stayed silent when rape incidents were sensationalised by their editors.

Academics, like trainee doctors, saw it as their prerogative to examine, dissect, experiment and then opine on our actions and movements. But if we wrote or presented papers we were told that we were not 'rigorous' enough, we had little knowledge of method. These were reminders to stay within 'our boundaries' or rather, to keep out of theirs.

There is an arrogance on both sides — the arrogance of intellectualism and of activism. Each is making some relevant criticism of the other, but neither will say that it has a life of its own only as a fragmented half. Will we allow the tensions of their different forms and methods divide us, or inform the movement that both believe in? No movement in which the two have not played a role has ever been dynamic. Can you think of a better activist than Gandhi? Consider the reams of material he wrote for anyone who cared to read. What would you call Simone de Beauvoir who has influenced thousands if not millions of women with her writings? An intellectual or an activist?

For me, this recognition has gradually unfolded through the years, and attending subsequent IAWS conferences in which many activists and academics participated was part of this process. The IAWS was not only a bridge it had the potential of encouraging women's studies to become a dynamic discipline. And today Women's Studies is quite squarely on the map of academia. But my hope is that we can explore that twilight zone of feminist studies — feminist theory and practice and the different emerging feminisms within our movement. Perhaps it is this potential which draws me to this organisation.

As our contribution, the new editorial board would like to revamp the IAWS newsletter to make it a forum for discussion on different issues. We invite members and others to contribute articles on specific topics. Hopefully, we will fill in the gap left by *Manushi* and the more academic *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. The next issue of the newsletter will focus on the debate on the relations between women's groups and the State, in particular state-sponsored programmes. Subsequent issues will take up other questions and concerns, for which suggestions are welcome. We hope, in this way, to encourage an exchange of views and sharing of experience, and make the Newsletter lively, informative and relevant for activists and academics alike.

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Nandita Gandhi

6.7.94

Secretary's Note

Dear Members,

Greetings to all of you from the new Executive Committee which was elected earlier this year. Although it was with tremendous hesitation and apprehension (because of an already overflowing cup of activities and responsibilities) that I agreed to act as the General Secretary, I consider it an honour to be associated so closely with a body like the IAWS. With a membership of over 600 women and men from all parts of the country and from different kinds of disciplines and areas of work, IAWS, in my opinion, is the only organization of its kind in India and it has a tremendous potential.

We in the new EC will try our very best, during our tenure of two years, to make the IAWS a stronger and more active network of academics, researchers, activists and other feminists. However, to do this we need your active participation and guidance. As we would like the IAWS to do much more than organize a National Conference every two years, we invite you to take the initiative to suggest activities and carry them out with the support of the EC.

On our part, we have done the following in the last few months:

— Printed a new brochure, a copy of which is being sent to you with the request that you make new members. Please ask for extra copies or make photocopies to give to interested people.

— Opened an office with a full time office-coordinator. Jagori, New Delhi, has provided us space in its office (free of cost) and promised all support. Juhi Jain, a young, capable and enthusiastic activist, who has worked with Jagori and some other groups for almost ten years, has joined as our Coordinator.

— We have raised funds to meet the expenses of running an office.

— Nandita Gandhi, our Editor, is getting an editorial team together to produce the IAWS newsletter.

— Zarina Bhatti has been given the responsibility to see if all those volumes of conference papers, which should have been published long ago, should and can still be published.

— We are planning a workshop on the "Relationship of the Women's Movement with the State".

— We have started preparing for the next National Conference on Women's Studies which will be held towards the end of 1995. We have decided to focus on women's search for alternative paradigms and practices, since all of us in the EC felt it's time we define what we want, in addition to saying what we do not want. This theme, we felt, was a logical next step to our earlier conferences; it would help us review women's initiatives in the past two decades in terms of their viability as alternatives, and it would help forge stronger links between practice and theory. As in the past, there will be 10 to 12 sub-themes. We hope to finalise our draft in the next few weeks and send it to all of you for your comments. We are trying to give everyone adequate notice (almost 15 months) so that fresh research, writing, review can also take place and be presented at the Conference.

What about giving some serious thought to having at least one workshop on "Serious Alternatives to Being Serious and Taking Ourselves too Seriously"? Should we plan something on feminist humour?!

On this note, cheers friends, till our next Newsletter.

Kamla Bhasin

Knowing the IAWS

We would once again like to introduce the IAWS, to old and new members alike, so that we all — the members, the present Executive Committee and other sympathisers — can collectively further develop the Association and take it forward.

The IAWS is a voluntary, autonomous, national body consisting of academics, activists and students interested in the discipline of women's studies. It is registered under the Societies Registration Act of 1860.

Representation

Any interested person can join the Association by becoming a member in any of the following categories: Ordinary, Life, Organisation, Corporate, Student and Friends of the IAWS. All these categories form the General Body which functions according to the norms of parliamentary democracy. Every two years it elects an Executive Committee of 9 to 15 members through postal ballot for the management and control of the Association. The EC in turn elects its office bearers. Each category of members is represented on the EC.

Today we have about 528 members in the different categories from every state of India, plus a few friends

To queries on how the IAWS accommodates academics and activists, the Association has said that it sees that both are represented on the EC. But perhaps this is an issue to which more attention can be paid.

In the meantime, all of us can pitch in to widen the base of membership as well as activate it. The new EC would like to appeal to each member to enrol at least one new member. Enclosed is a brochure with full details of the IAWS. But increasing membership by itself is hardly sufficient. Members should involve themselves in whatever way they can.

What You Can Do

- * enrol a member
- * send in information on topics of interest
- * write for the newsletter
- * make suggestions for workshops, etc.
- * contribute in organising workshops

Contact Points

For the first time the IAWS has a central office. It is housed in the premises of Jagori, a women's resource and training centre in New Delhi. On the basis of mutual trust and co-operation, Jagori will share equipment and personnel. This informal arrangement was made so that the IAWS would not become top heavy with fund-guzzling infrastructure and costs. It also ensures mobility of the IAWS to another city or town.

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Proposed Activities

1. Workshops

The IAWS would like to collaborate with other members and/ or organisations to conduct small workshops on topical issues and debates having a bearing on women's studies and the women's movement.

Some proposed ones are:

- * The Family and the International Year of the Family
- * The highly controversial question of a Population Policy
- * The New Economic Policy
- * Women's Groups and State Programmes

Members are welcome to give suggestions and information on soliciting funds for the workshops.

2. Newsletter / Other publications

Usually 5-7 newsletters are brought out every two years. They are circulated to all members for the dissemination of news, events and announcements. The Tenth Anniversary issue carried several interesting personal accounts.

We would like to further broaden the scope of the newsletter to include debates and different perspectives on controversial issues.

Developments

Associates of the IAWS: A few regional and South Asian associates have recently come up through the initiative of individuals or groups. This is indeed a good sign for the development of women's studies as a field of study.

The first of these was the Maharashtra Stree Abhyas Vyaspath in 1992. It has so far organised several activities: a conference, lectures on women's studies and conducting a debate on reforms in the Rape Law.

The Gujarat Forum for Women's Studies was recently inaugurated, in May 1994, in Baroda. It will take up regional issues, networking and dissemination

of information, gender sensitisation programmes, and set up an advocacy cell for women.

The South Asian Association for Women's Studies (Nepal) had its first Regional Conference in Kathmandu in November 1993. It has appealed to member associations to send material on women and the girl child to the regional secretariat.

The Pakistan Association for Women's Studies was established in 1992 in Karachi. It brings out a biannual journal, *Alam-e-Niswan*, the first of its kind in Pakistan. It invites papers with an interdisciplinary approach to women's studies.

Publications

Given below is a list of publications brought out by the IAWS. You could write to the Central Office if you wish to refer to them or for information on where they are likely to be available.

The following books have been published by Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi

- * *Struggles of Women at Work* (ed. Sujata Gothoskar)
- * *Women's Participation in Politics* (ed. Susheela Kaushik)
- * *Women and Law: Contemporary Problems* (ed. Lotika Sarkar and B Sivaramayya)

The IAWS was also associated with the publication of a series of five volumes of papers from the Regional Conference for Asia on Women and the Household in New Delhi, 1985, published by Kali for Women and Sage Publications, New Delhi.

- * *Invisible Hands: Women in Home-based Production* (ed. Andrea Menefee Singh & Anita Kelles-Viitanen), 1987
- * *Structures of Patriarchy: State, Community and Household in Modernising Asia* (ed. Bina Agarwal), 1988
- * *Structures and Strategies: Women, Work and Family* (ed. Leela Dube and Rajni Palriwala), 1990
- * *Women and the Household Domain: Social and Cultural Dimensions* (ed. Maithreyi Krishna Raj and Karuna Chanana), 1990
- * *Finding the Household: Conceptual and Methodological Issues* (ed. K Saradamoni), 1992