

# INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

## XV National Conference on Women's Studies

Sub-theme:5

### **Cultures of Resistance**

'Culture' has become a buzz word and a challenging concept in social sciences in contemporary times. It is no longer confined to anyone field such as media, social sciences or public consciousness. A new discipline named 'Culture/Cultural Studies' has come to stay. Culture as a concept is at once chaotic and slippery; it has been invoked in the name of nation, religion, caste and gender. The challenge is to make sense of this concept in an enabling and empowering way. Modes of negotiating with culture(s) and its various ramifications deserve deep critical analysis. Culture 'marks' the differences; labels cultural practices as 'high' and 'low'; distinguishes the 'elite' from 'masses'. Culture is not a product that is produced, circulated and consumed. It is the process of understanding the life, world view and the systems at large. There is a need to address culture in more nuanced ways. Especially at a time when cultural nationalism is paraded as the most significant identity of our culture, we need to question how to understand the culture people live- in and the ethos produced around it. We need to problematise 'hierarchisation' of cultures. Knowledge about the hegemonic articulation of culture abounds. The need of the hour is to generate debates on the cultures of resistance and the language, aesthetics and power of the same. Culture which was earlier assumed as an expression of some underlying set of pre-conceived assumptions no longer makes sense. It has been fairly established that culture needs to be understood in the context of power as both are interlinked and woven together and any attempt to separate the two or see them in isolation is not only futile but robs its complexity. Another important dimension is to understand how cultural practices are becoming multiple sites of contestation over power and different social movements like feminist, black or anti-caste are attempting to subvert the power which is embodied in everyday conceptualisations and practices of culture. Resistances can take cultural forms and subvert the prevalent conceptualisation of culture and power structures legitimising it. One needs to recognise that culture can serve multiple functions. It can legitimise a system and make it acceptable as part of the common sense of the people or provide the resources for resistance. Thus studying culture is no longer limited to untangling its relationship with power alone; it has to

understand strategies of resistance and struggle manifested in cultural practices. Actually culture can be conceptualised as a space within which struggles between social forces are conducted and one needs to look at culture in a relational way.

In this subtheme we aim to analyse and explore the nexus between culture and power on the one hand and on the other would like to explore how culture can be and is a potential site for resistances. The major challenge in doing this is not to lose sight of the politicised understanding of the concept of culture and to map struggles and resistances as concrete ways of owning culture and becoming part of production of meaning which is countering the hegemonic power structures.

Within this sub- theme, gender implications of the following areas may be explored /interrogated:

- Different ways thorough which we understand the ethics of protests on the site of culture
- Culture – from rituals to oral traditions- as a site of maintaining / retaining hegemony as well as subverting to build resistance
- New cultural practices- from online videos or internet / social networking spaces as a site to contest hegemonic ideologies and build resistance
- Contested cultural space: Fundamentalist / Revivalist attempting to re-new cultural codes
- Contested cultural space: Notions of Body / Sexuality
- Performance and resistance through art and art forms
- Market, state and production of cultural commodities in neo liberal phase
- Recovery or reinterpretation of cultural practices marginalized by dominant as well as fundamentalist forces
- Denial of legitimacy to different cultural practices as denial of life and claim over knowledge production

**Coordinators:**

A. Mangai  
Department of English  
Stella Maris College, Chennai  
aramangai@gmail.com  
09940202605

Swati Dyahadroy,  
KSP Women's Studies Centre,  
Savitribai Phule Pune University, Pune  
swatidroy@gmail.com  
09168519950