



MARCH 1997

## From the Editor.....

### *Perpetuating gendered roles.*

Despite the strength of the voices which oppose it, patriarchy still stalks the universe. The reality is that despite society's willingness to give egalitarian positions to women it is unable to, because it is still caught in the grips of patriarchy. The whole society operates on patriarchal norms which consider women as more suitable for the domestic sphere, with the roles of motherhood, childbearing and household tasks as their primary concern. This denies her the chance of operating in society the way she wants to and limits her activity in areas other than her household. Such thinking has seeped into all institutions of society and remains the base for the functions and thinking of these institutions.

Thus contrary to the voices that oppose the secondary status afforded to women are forces which reinforce these positions. These forces exist in society in the form of ideological practices. Different people understand ideology in different ways. Ideology has been described as "systems of thoughts" and "sets of ideas". Althusser in his marxist readings has sought to understand ideology as something that is connected to people's material conditions of existence. Thompson defines ideology as essentially linked to the process of sustaining asymmetrical

relations of power. Ideological practices therefore could be summed as linked to power and domination. These ideological practices which sustain power are handed down to us through generations and we cease to question them as they are handed down to us as "natural and normal." The idea of the inextricability of women from the domestic sphere has originated from early days when it was considered that "family piety for women was the law of nature." This thought was conceived from the fact that women had been given the task of childbearing and lactation. The ideology that women are frail and best suited to household tasks because of their reproductive functions has assigned tasks and roles for her which do not let her function the way she wants to.

Religion, the state, the media and literature are some of the factors which help reinforce the unequal position of woman. These portray women in glorified terms as the homemaker, food preparer and bearer of children. A commercial which shows the woman in the kitchen, serving a drink or with the washing perpetuates in the viewers minds role models which become internalized. Young minds internalize these models and see women as primarily connected to the domestic world.

Other societal practices, such as the giving of dowry at a marriage

is an ideological practice. Practices such as these too portray the woman as secondary to man.

The image of the woman as home-maker, housewife, childbearer and housekeeper works against her in the world of work too. On the argument that she is not the primary earner (often this is not so) it makes it easy to enlist and dispense with the services of the woman in the workplace. Promotions do not come her way easily and this in turn consolidates the woman's confinement to the home. One could say it is a counter-effect for she is placed second in the labour market because of her role as housewife and mother and this in turn establishes her in the home, confined to her household tasks.

One way to address this inequality in society is to cultivate in the minds of the younger generation the urge to start relooking at traditional practices and thinking which perpetuate gendered roles.

### CONTENTS....

- \* Editor's Page
- \* Seminars
- \* Women Power
- \* Ten Statements
- \* Human Rights
- \* Heroic Womanhood
- \* Bookshelf
- \* Staff News



## SEMINARS, WORKSHOPS, AWARENESS PROGRAMMES ORGANIZED BY WERC

1. On August 17th 1994 Kamalini Kathirawelayuthapillai and Mr. Jayapalan who are researching on upcountry women's articulation of a national identity arranged a workshop based on their field research. As Kamalini could not be present Ms. Thiruchandran took the session based on the paper she sent her. Discussions followed both presentations and everybody participated enthusiastically.

2. A two day Workshop on Gender Sensitization was held at H/ Don Frederick Maha Vidyalaya in Horana on 14th & 15th September 1996, on a request made by Attorney-at-Law Mr. K.D.P. Gunetilaka. This was held exclusively for some teachers in Horana Education Region. The Regional Director of Education presided over this workshop. Kumari Wickremesinghe and Vinodini de Silva of WERC were the resource persons during the sessions held on the 1st day of this workshop. They introduced the concepts of 'Gender and Sex' and gave an indepth analysis on gender constructions. The sessions on the second day were taken by Dulcy de Silva and Rocky Ariyaratne. Misrepresentation of women in the text books and how far they perpetrate gender inequality in society was the theme of their discussions.

3. A one day Seminar on 'Strategies for Organising Female Labour Force' was organized by WERC, to felicitate the veteran politician cum social reformer/worker, the late Ms. Vivienne Goonewardene, on her 80th birthday, on 18th September 1996. Dr. Ms. Kumari Jayawardene presided over this Seminar which was held in the WERC auditorium. Ramani Muttettuwegama Attorney-at - Law Kamalini Kathiravelayuthapillai, Mangalika de Silva, Kumari Wickremesinghe and Mala de Silva presented papers on 'Women in the Free Trade Zone', 'Women in the Tea Plantation', 'Women in the Trade Union Movement and 'Migrant Women' respectively. This was followed by a skit presented by Ms. Somalatha Subasinghe, the popular actress, script writer, film directress and film critic.

4. A workshop entitled Empowerment of Single Women affected by violence was held at the WERC Auditorium from 19th to 26th October. Twenty six participants of the age group 18-25 arrived from Akkaraipattu and the workshop was conducted in Tamil. The sessions at the workshop included lectures and discussions on gender sensitization, impact of religious teaching on women, basic accounts, marketing as well as critical film viewing. A

memorable feature of this programme was the way in which the participants interacted and organised dramas, dances and group activities. An evaluation session was held on the final day at which they expressed their satisfaction at gaining new insights into their situation.

5. A Gender awareness programme for the WERC staff was conducted at the WERC auditorium on - August 21st. The director, Ms. Selvy Thiruchandran presided.

Having given an introductory talk, she distributed gender related topics written on slips of paper. Each staff member then spoke on the topic he/she had picked out. Each member's experience, opinion, attitude and knowledge regarding the topic were expressed before the group. Lively discussions ensued which all found very useful and interesting. All agreed that similar discussions would be useful.

The book *Thesawalamai* - the customary laws of Jaffna Tamils from a feminist perspective by Dr. H.W. Thambiah is being published by WERC at the request of the author.

## What drew you to the women's movement?

At the International Members Meeting of the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) which was held in Amsterdam 5 - 7 October 96. The above Question was asked -

Here are answers.

*"Why did I become a feminist? Because there were men around."*

*"From my earliest recollection, I was an angry egalitarian and the anger has stayed."*

*"From the time I was very young. I could not accept that men own women."*

*"When I was a young girl I entered a raffle - the first prize was a bicycle, the second prize was a doll. I wanted the bicycle but I got the doll. I've been a feminist ever since."*

*"We were working for workers and peasants until we decided to fight for ourselves."  
-from a socialist.*

*"I was not drawn to feminism. I was driven to it."*

*"The struggle for women's rights got lost in the larger political struggle for independence. I had to reclaim it."*

*"After watching and participating in gynaecological self-help exams, there was no turning back."*

*"I've always been told that socialist women are not feminists; feminists are not socialists. I am happy to be here in both my identities."*

*"I'm celebrating 10 years of being a feminist."*

---

## Women Power

Women politicians and NGO representatives from over 20 Asia-Pacific countries met in Fiji recently to discuss ways to increase the number of women in public office. Sri Lanka was represented by Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran.

That women are grossly under represented in political leadership is reflected in the global average of 11.3% of women in national legislative bodies. The platform for Action passed at the 4th World Conference on women held in Beijing last September realises the need for "full and equal participation of women in political and economic, social and cultural life at the national, regional and international levels." The women and men who met in Fiji formulated and adopted strategies for the political empowerment of women. Good governance and democracy demanded that women be equally involved in decision making, they said.

## Nine Statements

From *New Freedoms, New Dependencies: New reproductive technologies, women's health and autonomy* by Jyotsna Agnihotri Gupta (PhD dissertation)

1. If women do not want men to decide the future for them, as they have decided and interpreted the past, women must bring feminist concerns to serious futuristic thought.
  2. Feminist academics and activists could strengthen each other's work by getting over their distrust of each other and working together.
  3. Population concerns at the international and national (macro) level are often different at the household (micro) level; even interests within the household/family differ.
  4. It is women who are faced with the effects of heterosexual intercourse, in whose bodies pregnancies take place, who, therefore, have a personal interest in safe and effective means and methods for control over their reproduction. In the case of abortion, as Janet Gallagher (1985) puts it, "given the geography of the situation, the decision-maker must be the pregnant woman."
- Janet Gallagher, *Fetal Personhood and Women's Policy*, in Saprio ed., (1985) *Women, Biology and Public Policy*. Sage Publications, London.
5. Access to contraception and abortion have liberated women from frequent child-bearing and unwanted pregnancy but they have not changed unequal gender relations.
  6. In the slogan 'a woman's right to choose' there is a lurking danger that individual freedom may become synonymous with individual consumerism.

7. Just because women have successfully proved that they **can** do everything a man can do does not mean they **have** to do everything both women and men can do.
8. In developed countries parents work to support their children and give them a good life; in developing countries generally children work to support their families to survive.
9. "All that has been written about women by men should be suspect, for the men are at once judge and party to the lawsuit."

(Poulain de la Barre, seventeenth century feminist)

---

### *TRAINING PROGRAMME ON WOMEN, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT - AT THE ROYAL TROPICAL INSTITUTE, AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS*

I was nominated by the Women's Education and Research Centre to attend the Training on Women, Gender and Development organized by the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam in November 1996.

The Training Programme of two and a half weeks was thoughtfully organized to disseminate knowledge over a wide area on Gender Studies. As a first module, Gender as a Social Relation was introduced. The objective of this session was to identify from personal experience the process of gendering, to share this in a group and distil the core issues.

Participants formed into small groups to work on contextualizing gender as a social relation.

Cont.... Pg. 05

On the following days there were reading assignments from the Reader on the Concepts of Development. There was also introduction and clarifications on the various approaches to Gender and Development. Violence against women was introduced as a development issue and it was followed by an exercise in small groups on values and attitudes to violence against women, linking it to gender, culture and development.

Every evening time was allocated for exchange of experiences. We were introduced to basic concepts and frameworks. The resource person would point out the issues and limitations of each framework, based on the group work presentations.

There were many aspects of gender discussed: Gender and Macro Economics, Gender and Livelihoods, Gender, Health and Reproductive Rights, Gender and Education, Gender and the Media, Gender, Rights and Citizenship. The resource persons guided a plenary brainstorming and elaborating the critique of the frameworks discussed.

One of the most memorable events was visiting the 'Red Light Area', the area of Prostitutes where a large number of women sat inside the show cases scantily dressed. Prostitution is legalized in Amsterdam.

There was also a visit to the Institute of Social Studies in Hague, that teaches 'Women and Gender Issues'.

On the last day there were presentations of the participants' projects before the panellists. There was also feedback from the panellists, plenary review and discussions.

Certificates were handed over to the participants by the Director, Royal Tropical Institute and a farewell followed.

Rocky Ariyaratne



## Human Rights Award - 1996

Dr. RADHIKA COOMARASWAMY, legal expert currently working as United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, has been awarded the Human Rights Award for 1996 by the Washington-based International Human Rights Law Group.

This prestigious award is made annually to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the cause of human rights internationally.'

Previous recipients of the Award have included Nobel Laureates Wole Soyinka and Aung San Suu Kyi, President Patricio Aylwin of Chile, President Alexander Dubcek of Czechoslovakia, President Raul Alfonsin of Argentina, and Sadako Ogata, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

## Human Rights

All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Their full and equal enjoyment by women and girls is a priority for Governments and the United Nations and is essential for the advancement of women.

Governments must not only refrain from violating the human rights of all women but work actively to promote and protect these rights.

Recognition of the importance of women's human rights is reflected in the fact that three quarters of the UN Member States have become parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. However, the gap between the existence of rights and their effective enjoyment derives from a lack of commitment by Governments in promoting and protecting those rights and the failure of Governments to inform women and men alike about them.

Courtesy AWID

## *"Heroic Womanhood"*

**M**s. Vivienne Goonewardena, the veteran woman leader who was celebrating her 80th birthday was felicitated by the Women's Education and Research Centre on September 18th 1996.

The felicitation took the form of a workshop on 'Women in the Labour Force', a subject dear to her heart.

Ms. Vivienne Goonewardena though not in the best of health graced the occasion. A warm welcome awaited her from a very representative gathering of women and men among whom were Dr. Kumari Jayawardena, Ms. Bernadeen de Silva, Ms. Anberiya Haniffa, Dr. Radhika Coomaraswamy and Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran. Dr. Kumari Jayawardena presided and in her welcome speech briefly traced the history of Ms. Vivienne Goonewardena's activities as an indomitable fighter for the rights of the oppressed with no distinction of race, caste or creed.

Ms. Goonewardena speaking still vehemently but in a subdued voice interspersed her talk with interesting anecdotes of her years of pioneering efforts as a champion of women's rights.

The programme continued with the presentation of papers as follows - 'Women in the Free Trade Zone' by Ramani Muttettuwegama, 'Women in the Tea Plantations' by Kamalini Kadiravelayuthapillai, 'Women in the Trade Union Movement' by Mangalika de Silva and 'Migrant Women' by Kumari Wickramasinghe and Mala de Silva.

A very interesting and topical skit by Somalatha Subasinghe brought the day's programme to a close.



It is with deep regret that we record in this same report the demise of Ms. Vivienne Goonewardena on 3rd October 1996. Thus ends her long, colourful and distinguished career as a pioneer of the human rights movement and the Nationalist Socialist Movement and above all as a woman dedicated to the cause of justice for Women.

---

Women's organisations including WERC have already made preliminary preparations to produce a documentary film on the late Ms. Vivienne Goonewardene. Her outstanding career in the human rights and nationalist movement and her figure as a champion of women's rights would be a stimulating vision for future generations of women when her life story is actually seen and heard. We are happy to be associated with this project as its main sponsor.



## New arrivals.....

- \* Women violence and non-violent change edited by Aruna Gnanadason, Musimbi Kanyoro and Lucia Ann Mc Spadden., Geneva, WCC pub., 1996.

*Little attention has yet been given to the specific contributions of women to "Conflict resolution". This books helps to fill that gap. After three analytical essays, women from thirteen countries around the world present case studies of how women's groups are confronting violence in their context.*

- \* Media Studies : A Reader edited by Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, Edinburgh University Press pub., 1996.

*This reader introduces the range of theoretical perspectives on the mass media over the past 30 years. The 54 readings are divided into two main parts as studying the media and case studies.*

- \* Nationalisms : The Nation state and nationalism in the Twentieth Century by Montserrat Guibernau UK, Polity Press 1996

*The book is marked by very thorough, perceptive and relevant discussion of the previous treatment in social theory, or the failures to treat it adequately. It will be of particular interest to under graduates and others working in the areas of sociology, international relations and political science.*

- \* Women and the state : International perspectives edited by Shirin M Rai and Geraldine Lievesly Taylon and Francis, 1996.

*This book explores the historical and structural boundaries within which women act, relate to each other and deal with the state in the third world, through the presentation of a wide - ranging selection of case studies, describing and evaluating women's political, social and economic involvement.*

- \* Paul Ricoeur : Hermeneutics and the human sciences : Essays on language, action and interpretation, edited, translated and introduced. by John B. Thompson, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

*This is a collection of translations of recent essays by Paul Ricoeur which presents a comprehensive view of his philosophical hermeneutics, its relation to the views of his predecessors in the tradition and its consequences for the social sciences.*



### Call for Papers

\* We invite readers to submit papers for publication in the English/Sinhala/Tamil Nivedini (WERC) journals which are published biannually. (June and December)

\* Manuscripts on feminist issues could be submitted for publishing to the publications committee. Publication costs will be borne by Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC)





## LIBRARY SERVICE

at  
WERC

Weekdays : 9.00am to 4.30pm

Books, Periodicals, Video-Cassettes and Documented Newspaper Clippings are available in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

\*

Special Areas: Social Sciences including Women's Studies, History and Mass Media

We are located in Wellawatte:

Women's Education and Research Centre  
58 Dharmarama Road  
Colombo 6  
Sri Lanka  
☎ 590985 or 595296

## STAFF NEWS

- \* Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Executive Director, WERC being on sabbatical leave for three months from December Ms. Shiranee Mills was appointed to act for her.
- \* Resource person Ms. Rocky Ariyaratne was sponsored by WERC for a training course in Gender and Development held in the Netherlands in November 1996.
- \* Ms. Vasanthi Thirugnanasundaram has been appointed Librarian

**Resignations** : Ms. Bhawani Loganathan  
Ms. Kumari Wickramasinghe



## WERC Auditorium

### *For your next*

- Seminar
- Workshop
- Awareness Programme
- Film Shows
- Meeting etc.

- A seating capacity of 38 available with conference tables.
- Airy and spacious dining area to accommodate 38.

*Meals/Tea could be supplied at your request.*

**Special Concessions for Women's Organisations**

### *Our Auditorium is now Equipped with*

- Public Address System
- Including Microphones and Ear Phones
- Overhead Projectors
- Translating Unit
- TV and VCR Facilities
- Magi and Flip chart boards