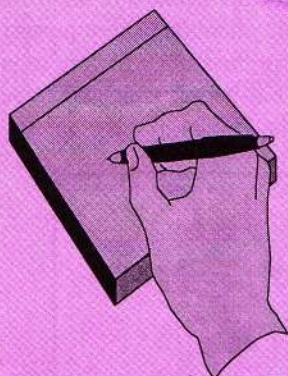




June 1998



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CHILD LABOUR

Child labour in this enlightened age, on the eve of the next millennium, is unconscionable. Nevertheless it is a major problem with a global perspective. It is not a phenomenon of the developing countries of the Third World. Child labour is reported from industrialized countries such as Italy, Portugal, Spain, the USA and East European countries. ILO reports say that 61% of child workers or nearly 153 million are found in Asia, 32% in Africa and 7% in Latin America. However the latest figures from ILO show that in developing countries the figure has increased to 25 million child workers.

The UN convention on the Rights of the Child is a treaty setting standards for children all over the world, in all areas concerning children. All but a handful of countries are signatories to it, committing themselves to improve the conditions of children especially in such areas as education, health, poverty and child labour.

The Sri Lankan government ratified this convention in July 1991 but like many other countries, implementation has been slow. Child labour had become a part of the way of life in this country until in recent years it has been highlighted as an insult to children, and most significantly a deprivation of childhood. The law as it existed making the employment of children under 14 years illegal was voiced aloud by authorities in recent years and announced in the media and the general public was alerted to this requirement. Although this had a fairly good effect on all kinds of child employers, many others found ways and means of getting behind the law and steadily continuing to use child labour, cheap and easily available.

It is a well known fact that poverty is one of the prime causes of child labour. Beginning at home a poor family, has no alternative but to 'employ' the girls in household chores to help the mother earn a living by working outside for regular wages often depriving children of their education. Boys likewise work on farms as a help

to their fathers - or in such jobs as stone quarries, brick kilns, fishing or any other work that the rural population engage in. Child labour is also related to rural under development and slum conditions.

Within the last three decades or so the adult migrant worker trend has escalated into a major problem. Sri Lankan migrant workers in the Middle East and South Asian countries leave their children with friends, relatives or affluent families to be "looked after" but, they end up as domestic aides. Even otherwise poor parents give away their children in the hope that they enjoy a better life than the parents can provide.

In short, what we need to realize is the fact that these unfortunate children are deprived of their childhood which should be a period of natural growth, mental and physical development and a stage when they should enjoy the simple joys of growing up.

Legislation does exist to restrict the employment of children between the ages of 5 and 14 years. But laws are insufficient and ineffective. During the last two years the Presidential Committee on the Prevention of child Abuse was set up to prevent economic exploitation of children. There is also a National Child Protection authority and an Advisory Council for the purpose of formulating a national policy, while the rights of the child are enshrined in the current draft constitution within the area of human rights. But like all laws, unless they are strictly enforced they cease to be effective and this is so as regards child labour.

A global awareness programme had been started in 1997 which would allow public participation. In Sri Lanka it needs to be treated as a national issue where the public will accept that child labour is morally wrong. Awareness programmes should spread through schools, religious institutions, and youth organizations, so that

(Contd. Page 2..)

PROJECTS

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF BLUE COLLAR WOMAN WORKERS AND THEIR TRAUMA

The open economic policy introduced in 1977 saw a huge expansion in the manufacturing industry. Free Trade Zones were established for export oriented companies of which the garment industry has become the most prominent.

Labour employed in these garment factories comprises 100% women.

These females for the most part have lived with family and friends in the safe environs of the village. In the new 'factory environment' they have had to face the hazards of public transport, pressures of communal living and rigours of factory working shifts. Living and working under stressful circumstances have led to serious health problems.

While this industry has become the largest foreign exchange earner for the country scant attention was paid to the human side of this economic bonanza.

WERC is carrying out a research to ascertain the levels of psychological impact that employment, relocation from home and community living has had on female blue collar workers. The research is funded by NORAD.

Obeysekerapura Nursery School

The Nursery school inaugurated in February 1997 was set up by WERC on the understanding that the Community Development Centre would take it over after one year. Accordingly, the school was handed over to the Centre this year. The full responsibility of running it, now becomes their baby.



POSTER CAMPAIGN

In response to various complaints received by WERC from women of all classes regarding sexual harassment they are subjected to in public places as well as in the domestic sphere, the Board of Directors decided to launch a poster campaign to attract public attention. These posters are now in the process of being printed and will very soon be seen in public transport and bill-boards which we hope will make the public aware of the gravity of the problem.



BIOGRAPHY OF MS. VIVIENNE GOONAWARDENA

We are happy to be engaged in the writing of Vivienne Goonawardene's biography. The story of her life and her distinguished career as a pioneer of the human rights movement and champion of women's rights in particular, should be a stimulating vision for future generations. The biography will be available in August this year.

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### **Contd from Page 1..... Child Labour**

everyone is involved in eradicating child labour. A national consciousness must be created.

The Global March against child labour commenced in Asia in January this year, with Sri Lanka also joining in. This international activity will see its finale at the ILO Convention on Child Labour in Geneva in June 1998. Discussions for drafting of new laws and their proper enforcement will become the target.

Yet poverty being the root cause of this problem, the poor will see child labour as a necessity, for they depend on children to supplement the meagre family income, and children grow up regarding it as their responsibility. Several groups are now defending child labour under certain circumstances. Young people have reiterated their "right to choose" to work. The ILO has been urged to ratify other laws regarding education and eliminating exploitative forms of labour and thereby protect children who are working. the problem perhaps, needs to be tackled at an international level with international cooperation and financial assistance.

**In his message to mark Women's International Day 1998, Kofi Annan,, Secretary General of the United Nations says that....**

*" .....Womens rights are the responsibility of all human kind; combating all forms of violence against women is the duty of all human kind; achieving the empowerment of women is the advancement of all human kind....."*

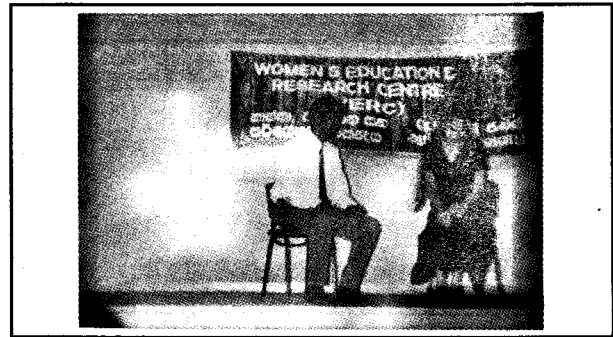
### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY - 8th March 1998**

Women's groups around the world celebrate Women's day on March 8th every year. This year the theme is 'Women's Human Rights'. Women on this day focus attention on the age long struggle to participate on an equal footing with men. To celebrate this day Women's Education and Research Centre organized three plays in Sinhala, English and Tamil media. This was held at St. Paul's Parish hall on Friday the 6th March 1998.

The first play was performed by the students of Wendy Whatmore Academy. It was an extract from Ibsen's Dolls House which depicted male chauvinism that rules the world. The words uttered by the husband "first you were a wife, then a mother and it is your first duty" reflected the traditional idea of female subordination. Her decisive reply "I have a duty to myself" brought out the realization of her subordination. Her decision to set herself free by walking out on him portrayed the thinking of an independent woman. The insensitivity of the male was vividly brought out in this play.

The Sinhala play 'Vimukthi' written by Ms. Somalatha Subasinghe again brought out the fact that even among the educated people, when it comes to domestic issues they fall back on the traditional norms of the society displaying the women's secondary position to man.

The Tamil play was a satire. Women's cry for freedom was finally heard by the males and they agreed to it. The chair which was carried shoulder high around by the men symbolised the elevated position of the woman. A male's admiration of every part of the female human body brought out the satire - how the males considered the position of the elevated woman to be. Is this the 'freedom' of the woman the males agreed to? or is it the freedom of the males to admire the female body? Here punning on the word 'freedom' was very effectively brought out



### **WHY WOMEN'S DAY?**

**BECAUSE.....**

- In spite of the UN convention on the elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- In spite of women having the right to vote and run for political office (within limits)
- In spite of the law of the land in most countries stipulating equal rights for women

**WOMEN ARE STRUGGLING .....**

- ◊ against silent Male Domination as traditional social and cultural attitudes keep women in subordination
- ◊ for Political Empowerment which would give a voice to the other 1/2 of the world's population
- ◊ To defeat Harassment and Violence against women now rampant in every sphere including domestic life.

So.... until we can walk with dignity, shoulder to shoulder with the other half of the world's population we need to have a **WOMEN'S DAY**

### **WOMEN'S PAINTINGS**

*Celebration of Women's Creativity was an exhibition of paintings to celebrate Women's Day, (organized by the Sri Lanka Women's NGO Forum). it was an attempt to win recognition of women's creative art in all its various forms which has hitherto remained in the background. It brought together women from all over the island helping them to display their contribution to the world of Art and Culture.*



## "VEHICLE NAMED WOMAN"

We had an extremely interesting experience viewing an exhibition of paintings and sculptures under the above title by Anoli Perera.

The car with an engine which rated by its "horse" power is seen by Anoli as a Masculine sign in the semi-otic code. She explains through her paintings and sculptures that the system of the car signifies power which the owner controls, manipulates and directs through its possession of the functions it is made to perform.

This is not all, the car, referred to as she and her — in feminine gender pronouns, is a fetish object which is controlled owned (generally) as an object of pleasure as well - here it signifies eroticism and Anoli sees it as an object which is appropriated and prostituted.

*In short, Anoli says*

*"My exhibition is all about reaching for this paradoxical signification that is codified in the image of a familiar object - the car which reveals the gendered phenomena and its power economics. Incorporating parts of the car in the artwork and using them as an illustration board for the female imagery was a strategy to highlight its gender construction."*

It was a novel experience, the exhibition was a first of its kind - a feminist interpretation of signifying systems of a mere vehicle, that one sees a thousand times on the streets, but it needs an acutely perceptive view of Anoli Perera to create and recreate new visions of a gendered system.

## Protection for Housemaids

The migrant employees contract introduced by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment for the first time recently expects to control the migration of women for employment as housemaids to the middle East countries according to the new item. They will not be allowed to migrate without signing this contract which will give details of the workers and the sponsor. At present there are 7 lakhs of women working overseas as housemaids. In future, missions abroad should be able to help housemaids as all information regarding their employment will be available in the copy of the contract with them.

## News of Political Empowerment

### Sri Lanka

The Government has announced that it will enact legislation to provide for a minimum of 25% women representatives in all political bodies in Sri Lanka, including Parliament, Provincial Councils, Municipal Councils, Urban Councils and Pradeshiya Sabhas.

### India

The 81st Constitution amendment Bill regarding the reservation of a maximum of 33% seats in the Lower House of Parliament and state assemblies for women, has for the 2nd time been shelved. It has been vehemently opposed by male MPs in spite of formal support by every major political party and women's demonstrations.(Dec. '96)

### Pakistan

An attempt to extend universal suffrage in N.W. Pakistan among tribal agencies instead of voting by tribal elders, was defeated by clan leaders. Women were simply not registered, their voting declared "un Islamic" and against traditional (Feb '97)

### U.A.E.

Breaking long-standing social barriers, the Gulf states have admitted women as parliamentarians. (Jan. '97)

### Paris

The Government is considering an amendment to the constitution to reserve seats for women in the National Assembly (April '97)

### Britain

Women's participation in Parliament has received a boost with the Labour government, women have received important portfolios hitherto restricted to men (May '97)

### World-wide

The Inter Parliamentary Union organized a Conference entitled "towards Partnership Between Men and Women in Politics" (Feb '97) It was attended by 77 countries. Though the Secretary General regretted the low proportion of women in politics, most countries opposed it, claiming that an attitudinal change at grass roots level is called for instead.

*(From her News Oct. 1997)*

# "Looking back ..... Looking forward....."

The South Asian Conference on Gender Issues was held from 27th to 30th April 98 at the Women's Education and Research Centre. It was WERC's first international conference and was made possible by a generous grant from the Global Fund for Women and Balance.

Several scholars drawn mainly from the SAARC countries presented papers on matters relevant to gender issues with particular emphasis on the South Asian region. The conference theme was

"Looking Back, Looking Forward, Strategies for the future", while the sub-themes were

- Construction of women within Nationalism.
- Gender representation in the media and its implications for gender violence.
- Women and politics.

The conference was organized with the intention of generating discussion and dialogue on common South Asian issues, to make policy recommendations to the state as well as strengthen the South Asia voice through networking.

The presentations included a wide range of topics such as War Widows, Gender & Ethnicity and Political Empowerment of women.

The papers which were of a high standard evoked much discussion and exchange of information and views which made each session of special interest. The papers presented will be published in book form in due course.

The last session was a meeting of the South Asian Committee for the Political Empowerment of Women. The members helped to draft the Colombo Declaration which was issued as a Press Release (given below)

## ***Press Release: The Colombo Declaration***

**South Asian Women's Conference - 1998**

• The members of the South Asian Committee for Political Empowerment of Women issued the following statement at a meeting held during the above Conference held at the Women's Education and Research Centre, from

the 27th - 30th April, 98.

- We urge the governments of our respective countries, to ensure women's participation in the processes of decision making at all levels. As an interim measure we propose that a minimum of 1/3 of reserved seats be allocated for women in all public institutions from grass roots to the national level.
- We demand that there be equal participation and representation of women and men in all electoral and decision making bodies.
- We urge all political parties to ensure equal representation of women in their party structures - and give 50% nomination for women to contest elections at local, provincial and national levels.
- We demand that all political parties should clearly declare their political commitment to gender equality and women's concerns.

*Contd.....Page 6*





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***We demand the above -***

- \* to ensure women's political participation in decision making processes at all political levels to ensure good governance.
- \* good governance is where women and men participate equally in governing themselves to build a society devoid of violence and discrimination.

***To achieve this we :***

- ◆ demand equal political power.
- ◆ demand that earth's resources and environment be protected
- ◆ urge the strengthening of democratic norms, values and institutions.
- ◆ condemn criminalization of politics
- ◆ condemn misinterpretation of religion and fundamentalism
- ◆ reject increasing violence against women
- ◆ call for peaceful resolutions of external and internal conflicts including armed conflicts.
- ◆ assert nation-building on the basis of sustainable human development
- ◆ urge the promotion of political empowerment of women for gender balance.
- ◆ work towards South Asian regional harmony, cooperation and humane world system
- ◆ propose that the National Commissions for Women of the respective governments should establish autonomous Women's Commissions with statutory powers.
- ◆ Assert nation-building on the basis of sustainable human development
- ◆ Promote political empowerment of women for gender balance.

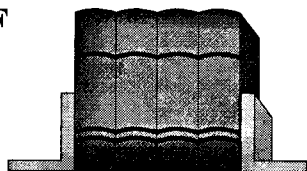
It was proposed that a National Conference be held in the respective countries of the region on the theme: Democracy, Good Governance and Political Participation" and that a session should be held on affirmative action towards equal participation of women in politics.



***Conference Dinner***

*WERC Staff met all the participants of the South Asian Conference on Gender Issues at a dinner party on the last night before foreign delegates left. It was really an informal and happy get-together on the roof-top balcony of the WERC Auditorium, under the stars with a cool evening breeze blowing. Friendly chatters, music and singing and a sumptuous dinner brought the conference gathering to a fitting close.*

## BOOK SHELF



### New arrivals.....

Facets of Rationality ed. by Daniel Andler (et al). New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1995

*This collection brings essays on Rationality. Second choice and moral theory. Multi disciplinary exploration of Rational Concerns discovering integral meaning of Rationality.*

"Jogin" Girl-Child, labour studies by V.Chandra Moowli  
New Delhi: Sterling Publishers

*A study of exploitation of child labour in India and examines the ramifications of Jogin system, reviewing the efforts made to rehabilitate the jogins (child brides) belonging to the scheduled caste.*

Communication, Contested Religion, Modernity and Secularization by Achin Vanaik. New Delhi: Vistar Publishers, 1997

*Author highlights Hindu Communalism, nationalism, secularization, Religion, Modernity and Fundamentalism and describes a number of central debates on Contemporary India Politics.*

Between Spaces of Silence: Women Creative Writers ed. by Kamini Dinesh. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1994

*This collection comprises literature written by women examines the varied modes of women's writings such as autobiographies, short stories, historical ..... and assesses whether these writers have created a viable identity as women.*

Aliens and Aliennists : Ethnic minorities and psychiatry by Roland Little Wood and Maurice Lipsedge - London: Routledge Publishers - 1997

*An Important exploration of the cross-cultural currents, misunderstand and plain prejudices hat riddle psychiatry and this society."*

*Authors examine the links between racism, psychological ill health and inappropriate treatment at Ethnic minorities through psychological legacy of colonilism, Slavarym the racist biasin psychiatric and psychological Theory diagnostics bias, role of religion and the value of anthropological and psychoenaltic insights*

\* **The Spectrum of Femininity : A Process of Reconstruction** by Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran  
New Delhi : Vikas Publishers 1998

*The book explores the meanings of femininity by means of a study of Hindu socio-cultural and religious signs through time and space. The author shows how these constructions are deeply influenced by socio-political and cultural processes and reveals how they place women in a subordinate position.*

**Available at Women's Education & Research Centre and leading bookshops in Colombo**

**Ideology, Caste, Class and Gender**  
By Selvy Thiruchandran .....Rs. 1080/=

**Life Under Milkwood: Women Workers in the Rubber Plantations, An overview**  
By Jayadeva Uyangoda ..... Rs. 150/=

**The Politics of Gender and Womens's Agency inPost-Colonial Sri Lanka**  
By Selvy Thiruchandran ..... Rs. 100/=

**The Spectrum of Femininity - A Process of Deconstruction**  
By Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran ....Rs. 500/=

**Thamil Varalartu Padimankal Silavantil Oru Pennilai Nokku**  
By Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran .....Rs. 200/=

**Nivedini - Journal on Gender Studies**

Sinhala Issue....

*Law, Sexual Harassment and children women's Rights not Recognized as Human Rights Women Discriminatied through Television*  
Rs. 75/=

Tamil Issue....

*Patriachal Manifestations in the use of the Tamil of Language  
Gender Specific Analysis of the Tamil Pro grammes in Rupavahini*

**Pravahini**

Sinhala Issue December 1997

Tamil Issue December 1997

## LIBRARY SERVICE

at  
WERC

Weekdays: 9.00a.m. to 4.30p.m.

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

Special Areas: Social Science including Women's Studies. History and Mass media.



Women's Education and Research Centre  
58 Dharmarama Road  
Colombo 6  
Sri Lanka  
☎ 590985 or 595296  
Fax : 596313

## Staff News

It is with pleasure that we welcome to our staff Ms. Shanika Dissanayake - Project Officer and Ms. Sunanda - Computer Operator.

Ms. Wasanthi Thirughanasundaram, Shiranie Mills, Deepthi Wickremasinghe, Carmen Pieris, Subhadra, Jenita Perera have left us. We wish them well.



### CONGRATULATIONS.....!!!

Ms. Pushpa Wickramaarachchi completed six years of service at WERC in October 1997. A surprise felicitation party was organised for her. The Executive Director and all the members of the staff participated. A bouquet of flowers and a memento were presented to her, wishing her many more happy years at WERC

- \* Ms Tilanthi and Mr. Suresh Fernando are today the happy parents of a bonny baby boy.
- \* We wish Mr. R. Bhaskaran and Menaka every happiness in their wedded life.

## WERC Auditorium

*For your next*

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- ◆ workshop
- ◆ Awareness Programme
- ◆ Film show
- ◆ Meeting etc.

Air conditioned and equipped with

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- ◆ Including Microphones and Ear Phones
- ◆ Overhead Projectors
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- ◆ Magi and Flip Chart boards

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 Organizations.*