



The Political Process and Gender

The Parliamentary elections 2004 have come and gone and it is with almost a sense of despair that we review this exercise with special relevance to women aspirants to parliament in particular and women in general.

It is only too well known that Sri Lankan women have had a flimsy record in politics. The percentage of women representation in local government, provincial councils and the state assembly throughout the years has shown a poor result with the figure never rising above 5%, in spite of the 52% female population, so much so, these facts have become commonplace.

Nevertheless in the run up to the elections women activists and women's movements and groups were out in full force appealing, demanding rationalising and persuading political parties and state agencies to include women in their nomination lists and the national list and the public to vote for women. The response seemed encouraging at that stage as the consensus of all parties and state organisations seemed to be a sincere demand for more women to participate in the legislative and decision making positions.

However, in the frenzy of the election campaign a woman's name hardly surfaced. Women were roundly ignored as 'no-win' figures. The same die hard attitude that has always persisted brought hardly a handful of women into the fray. Though women were very much involved in the campaigning men merely stepped on their shoulders to reach political power. So another election ended with absolutely no significant change in the position of

women vis-à-vis political empowerment.

Yet a few redeeming features were detected at the elections 2004 as far as women were concerned. Violence in various forms which was rampant in earlier years at elections was greatly reduced. The culture of election violence is one of the prime reasons which deters women from seeking nomination. Action to eliminate the display of posters and erection of larger than life monstrosities of candidates did much to keep tempers cool. Processions were minimal and should certainly be cut out completely to avoid provoking unnecessary fervour. This trend for less vociferous and less provocative features in election campaigning is a long felt need and signifies a modicum of decorum during the country's elections. This indeed lends some confidence to women who once shunned political activity. There were also the courageous women contestants, who by example gave personal encouragement to potential aspirants on the side lines and the 'all women party' who took the initiative to offer nomination to women. Though their efforts may not have made an impact the significance of their assertiveness was not lost and worthy of commendation.

The slightly more congenial election climate which emerged could help to attract more women to come forward. But these hopeful indicators are obviously not in any way sufficient to claim that women have made any worthwhile

progress. Nevertheless the trend augurs well and needs to be developed.

Rather than lamenting the fate of women after every election, obviously more aggressive strategies are called for, for more positive results. It is that commitment to gender and gender equality as a concept that is lacking in our people both at the highest levels of society and the man/woman in the street. They need to imbibe the intrinsic value of gender, which will then manifest itself in their outlook and attitude.

As it is, if one speaks to any person man or woman just beyond the influence of the women's NGOs, gender activists or women's movements one will receive that bemused look which greets one's gender-laced talks as if they were fairy tales. Basically for a traditionally patriarchal polity such as ours, it is the attitude towards gender and gender equality that has to change. A more gender friendly attitude must be aimed at to make the concept of gender equality second nature before any positive results could be expected.

This situation points to the necessity for new strategies and special measures that require attention which will lead to vigorous and sustained campaigns organised for the purpose of increasing political participation of women.

Women quotas is one such measure and the lobbying for 25% of women in the legislature and

parliament is now accepted in principle in Sri Lanka. However acceptance of a quota system in itself, is not sufficient. It has to become law to fulfil the quota system women, who feel confident and equal to take the challenge must be in readiness. Hence training women to equip themselves for leadership roles is essential and needs to be promoted. The UN resolution on Women's Political Role (Oct 2003) focuses on training them "to vote, govern and advocate effectively," and this training is seen as a "civic responsibility", so that women can compete in politics. This is one of the basic requirements our women lack and a short coming which has since become an excuse for male dominated parties to by pass women. It is indeed absolutely necessary that the government and civil society teach women how to equip themselves, how to run campaigns and combat the many obstacles that they will have to contend with. To see any worthwhile increase in women's participation in politics in Sri Lanka a great deal of basic issues yet remain to be tackled -in spite of the small vanguard of women who took up the challenge and braved the 2004 elections.

In this Issue.....

The Political Process	1
Gender Mainstreaming	2
Code of Ethics	3
India's Woman	4
Death be not proud	4
Women break through	5
Asia Pacific NGO	6
Men Tour Africa	7
Status of Women	7
Skills Training	8
Around the World	9
Staff Day Out	10
Women's Studies	10
New Arrivals	11

Gender Mainstreaming as a concept and practice

Gender mainstreaming is a very fashionable term now used by the developmentalists, NGOs and the state. It is believed that attempts, efforts are being made by well meaning people who they claim by implication are gender sensitive. In short Gender mainstreaming is the process and procedure of incorporating the gender perspective into politics as a whole. Comprehensively it means that efforts should be taken to advance gender equality in every ministry and organisation involved in decision making. Adhering to the principle of filtering down theory it is envisaged that parity of status in gender relations will be achieved not only in the polity of a country but also in the socio-economic sectors as well.

The Sri Lankan government had a "policy of focal points on gender" enunciated in all the ministries to take charge of contemporary and impending gender disparities. A woman bureaucrat was appointed/selected for this task but we never, heard of any of their activities though there were many issues that needed attention.

In taking gender mainstreaming very seriously developmental agencies such as the UNDP, ADB, World Bank and others had responded positively by having a gender component in their deliberations and went to the extent of hiring gender consultants. But the process lacked sufficient commitment. It finally resulted in adding and stirring gender initiatives into the main body of the documents prepared by gender insensitive "specialists" who were hired already before the entry of the gender specialists. The process thereafter was conflict resolution and not integrating gender.

However at the level of the Sri Lankan state and the political society there is a need to take gender mainstreaming seriously.

The example of Germany is worth illustrating – initiated by the Green party, more and more women were encouraged to enter political institutions. As members of the German Bundestag one third of seats of the 602 members are women. Most interestingly the demand for the quotas in Germany came **within the political parties**. The women's lobby succeeded in their campaign to influence the political parties. The three political parties agreed on principle to concede quotas to women members The Green party gave 50% of tickets to women. Social Democratic party(SDP) 40% and the Christian Democratic Union(CDU) 25%. The women, it has to be emphasised, crossed party lines to agree on reform/laws on typically gender issues such as marital rape, the right to abortion and separate budgetary allocation for the implementation of gender equality.

This is a lesson that male dominated political parties and trade unions in Sri Lanka must learn. Perhaps the Sri Lankan state which is headed by a woman President for the second time should also take note of this. In addition to having the Women's Bureau, National Committee on Women and a Ministry for Women's Affairs, the state has to listen to the voices of the women's movement which is lead by a number of women's organisations, and also learn from the experiences and good practices of other countries.

S.T.

Another View

Marnie Girvan, Gender Specialist Ontario, Canada titled her presentation "Mainstreaming gender in Decision making through the gender management system, at a Seminar organised by CENWOR in February 2004.

Ms. Girvan referred to the relevant paragraphs of the Beijing Platform for Action: "In addressing the inequality between men and women in the sharing of power and decision-making at all levels, Government and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively" She commented on the poor representation of women at decision making levels and the low representation in parliamentary and local bodies in Sri Lanka. She suggested that the quota system if activated would be a useful tool. She noted that there has not been any significant improvement in the situation over the last few decades.

Ms. Girvan then mentioned the 1995 Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender Development which presented a vision of "a world in which woman and men have equal rights and

opportunities at all stages of their lives, to express their creativity in all fields of human endeavour, and in which women are respected and valued as equal and able partners in establishing values of social justice equity, democracy and respect for human rights."

It is the process of bringing a gender perspective in to the mainstream activities of government at the policy programme and project levels. Gender mainstreaming she explained means "taking women into consideration in all areas of Government activity, NGO, private sector, joining initiatives with Donors: any type of initiatives involving thinking about how initiatives will affect women"

Expanding on this, she said activists should insist when any plans are being made for any activity to focus on questions such as how these would affect women and men differently in short this activity should be as open to women as to men. This Ms. Girvan pronounced as true gender mainstreaming.

Gender Sensitive Code of Ethics for the Print Media

The UK's Women's Research, Resource and Publication Centre (Islamabad) organised a regional conference in May 2004 with the aim of the Formulation and Implementation of a Gender Sensitive Code of Ethics for the Print Media. Participants came from the SAARC countries as well as Afghanistan and Iran. The conference, focussing on replacing the discriminatory attitude towards women in their country with equal participation in all spheres of activity, provided a platform for regional perspectives on gender insensitivity. It was to be an opportunity to share regional challenges and experiences and to benefit by them.

The media in Islamabad, the centre noted, has never had a well formulated code of ethics and the print media has never taken a gender sensitive approach. This conference was, therefore planned to initiate a full year's program to formulate and implement a 'gender sensitive Code of Ethics. The

project was to be guided by the following objectives:

- ☺ "To network with journalists, owners/editors of news publications to bring them on board to work towards a gender-sensitive code of ethics and create awareness for the need for a professional code of ethics.
- ☺ To highlight the gender blindness of the present Ethical Code of Practice and seek recommendations for making it gender-sensitive.
- ☺ To blend these recommendations into the present document and get commitments by the print media for its effective and continuing implementation."

The centre is looking forward to valuable lessons from the conference for drafting the Code of Ethics and achieving their goal of evolving a gender sensitised print media which will be guided by a more balanced approach to the question of gender.

Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Director of WERC attended the conference and in her presentation spoke of the poor situation of women in the print media in Sri Lanka and the lack of sensitivity to gender.

It may be mentioned here that a booklet was published by WERC in 1999 - Code of Ethics for Gender Representation in the Electronic Media. It contained suggestions and practical guidelines to help the electronic media to place themselves as educators, reformers and role models. A copy of this booklet was presented by the Director of WERC to the UK's RRP Centre. It was graciously accepted by the organisation as a model to work on.

In Sri Lanka, though the electronic media personnel accepted the suggestions laid out its impact has hardly been felt. It is indeed, a hard fight in the face of sensational and stereotyped productions which have become TV tradition.

Interesting News

Going back to the origin of books or the written word, the clay tablets of the Sumerians dating back to around 3000 B. C. are recorded as the first writings. These contain the epic of Gilgamesh which today has been translated into English and German e-books! Interestingly it is reported that the first writer in the world, by name, was a woman, Enheduanna. She lived more than 5000 years ago and wrote a poem to Goddess Inana on the wet clay tablets. Significantly, it has been found that she had also written her name on the clay tablet. It leaves a doubt, of course, whether there were others before her.

Congratulations

Sri Lanka was elected for the first time in 25 years of the World Congress sessions of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) held in Athens last week when Sri Lankan delegates Rossane Therese Koelmeyer Anderson, Associate Editor (Features), Sunday Observer and delegate from the Federation of Media Employees Trade Unions (FMETU) was elected to the post of Reserve Advisor for Ais. She was also the first Sri Lankan to be invited as a panel speaker to the Congress to speak on gender equality in journalism, building solidarity for gender equality and issues of conflict strategies for confronting the challenges of globalisation, the role of training and how gender issues could be brought into the mainstream of the IFJ programmes.

Daily Mirror 15th June 2004

Death be not proud....

Celebrating the life, work and spirit of
Kamalini Wijetilleke and
Monica Ruwanpathirana —

two women whose loss will create a large void in the women's sphere.

In their own arenas each of them expended their talents to a purpose with their focus on women, lived life to the full in the sense that they found deep satisfaction in serving society and achieved fulfilment in the limited span of years allotted to each, undaunted by the cruelty of life. We remember that they lived!

Kamalini Wijeyatilleke, a lawyer by profession was better known to us as a feminist researcher, with a variety of interests in the field of women's issues. As a founder member of Women in Need (WIN) she counselled women victims of domestic violence for several years. She later worked as a consultant in legal and gender issues and as a gender trainer to many women's organisations. She was very much involved in interacting with women from different fields organising legal/gender programmes leading to the empowerment of women.

Kamalini was also involved in the formulation of the Women's Charter of Sri Lanka and was a member of the National Committee on women. Internationally she networked with women in South – Asian countries and was a leading figure in the Sri Lanka NGO Forum. She was also a member of the delegation to the UN-CEDAW to present Sri Lanka's shadow report. She was in recent years a member of the Board of CENWOR, where she initiated a number of projects with her vast experience in the field of Violence against Women. All of her multifarious activities cannot be recounted here but are well known to those who worked with her and benefitted from her enthusiasm. Her work was characteristically without fan fare but her achievements will live after her.

Monica Ruwanpathirana has been hailed as the poetess of the 20th century in the field of Sinhala poetry, and is regarded as unsurpassed by any other since Gajaman Nona, the famed poetess of the South. Almost all of Monica's work comprised Sinhala poetry and a few other writings which have brought her three state Literary Awards.

Her anthologies are claimed as some of the best collections of poetry. Monica's poetic genius embodies a feminist facet much to be admired.

Through her poetry and her writings we see her empathy for other women, the less fortunate. This is poignantly conveyed in "Asan Pattini Devathavi" where she takes the pleading of a woman burdened by hard life to the goddess, to ask for long life to enable her to help in making life better for all.

She was a dedicated social worker as well. Attached to Konrad Adenauer Stiftung NGO as a development officer her concern for the welfare of women in the slums around the city and the remote rural villages was seen in the programmes she organised for their upliftment. She strove to better their status in life, to ward against the ill effects of the open economy that they were subjected to.

She followed it up by writing several booklets to help them which were published and distributed among the women. From this environment she gathered material for her poetic artistry.

Monica would have had a vision of much more to give both to the literary world and to humanity.. but let us celebrate the legacy she has left behind for posterity.

India's Woman - Sonia

In neighbouring India the familiar figure of Ms. Sonia Gandhi has suddenly dazzled South Asian politics. To women and especially to us her closest neighbours she stands out above all, a shining example of a true woman leader. With undaunted courage she faced innumerable challenges to her position both personal and in public life.

Sonia Gandhi is the woman of the hour, worthy to be admired, to be classically understood and emulated. It was with reluctance that she chose to enter politics and to take the leadership role, to head the Congress in the place of her husband Rajiv Gandhi. She doused her personal feelings and rose to the occasion. Congress wanted a Gandhi to boost their morale to carry the legacy left by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

And so, as leader of the opposition Congress, which for over ten years was struggling to regain its original acceptance in the hearts and minds of the people as the pioneer of the Indian independence movement, Sonia with deliberate determination but quiet endeavour reached out to the people she chose to be her allies. She led her party with a sincere vision towards the goal of secularism or religious equality no less than to a promise of economic stability – the original foundations of her party. The Congress victory took India and the world by surprise. The reasons attributed to the success of the party have been analysed by many political observers but the fact remains that a woman of the highest integrity was the non-violent force and undaunted spirit behind it all.

Then all the world waited expectantly to see her victory lead her on, in the order of political happenings, to become Prime Minister of the largest democracy. She however saw it as a challenge presented to her as her non-Indian ethnicity was blown up to prove her unsuitability for the position. With womanly intuition and political acumen she sensed the possible rift both within her party and the country at large.

She saw herself in a controversial position threatening to put into second place the ideals of secularism, economic stability and unity of the country to which she had dedicated herself. This was the moment Sonia Gandhi rose above all other leaders, putting country before self, declining the Premiership with the devastating yet ennobling words

"power in itself has never attracted me nor has position been my goal. My aim has always been to defend the secular foundation of our nation and the poor of our country."

Woman, break through the ceiling to freedom

Were you there , were you there ?

Woman vulnerable
Lies on her bed
The glass ceiling above
Through it she sees
A beautiful little girl
Dancing, Dancing - three year old
Enter the Black Beast, the White tourist
'Aids my friends, I do not want'
Innocence destroyed, the little girl coils

Were you there , were you there !

From the side dances in
The young woman draped in saree
Is she Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim
Who knows, who cares - BUT she is a Body
That is the problem, that is the solution
How asks, the woman lying on the bed
The problem how to protect her virginity
There's a war, soldiers need recreation
There's globalisation, the more you give
The more your profits.
We need foreign exchange,
Beautiful figure, the nimble fingers
The smart Secretary.

Were you there, Were you there !

What is the solution? Asks the woman lying on the bed
She is an asset, makes a good mother, a faithful wife
Continues the line, conditioned to be fooled.
The Muslim Father finds her man
The Tamil Father's son gives the dowry
The Sinhala Father sells the land
The girl no choice, invisible, only body
Very much for public sale.

Were you there , Were you there !

The scene changes
The girl still young, haggard over the kitchen fire
Little ones dancing around happy and full of fun
No space to call her own.
The night creeps in, the children sleep around
The woman at the table, with head down, half sleep
Covered food for two

She waits, she waits ...

Strides in the chief, full of life and cheer
The woman sits up, fear in her eyes
The kids wake up sleepy and afraid



Knows the routine, creeps under the table
Thunder, hell has broken loose
'Woman, my food, damn it
This meat is cold, flung at her
Followed by shots - the woman screams
The kids scream, the shutters
Of Neighbouring houses goes up
'It's family, what can we do !
'This is life' says the man
'This is our lot' says the woman

Were you there, were you there !

'You carry the sins of your previous life' it's karma
'Preserve the sanctity of the family', says the Poosari
'Submit to the will of Allah' says the Mullah
'Jesus suffered, bear up, my child' says the priest.
The woman on the bed asks
Who's sanctity, my sanctity !
What sacrifice, my life is a sacrifice
Who's will Allah's or your man ?
Karma, whose karma, his or mine.
Too many religions, too many cultures

Were you there, were you there !

The woman on the bed ponders
I, know not, I, know not, !
In anguish she cries out
No love, no compassion.

We are here, we are here

Woman, be not afraid
Break, break through the ceiling
To Freedom, to freedom

We are here, we are here

The Asia Pacific (AP) NGO Forum on Beijing+ 10 June 30 – July 3, 2004

The Opening Day

Commitments were reaffirmed, new feminists welcomed and a human rights protest marked the 30 June 2004 opening of the Asia-Pacific (AP) NGO Forum on Beijing +10. The 4-day event took place in Thailand at Mahidol University in Nakorn Pathom, about 50 kilometres west of the capital Bangkok.

The Forum sought to assess as well as analyse the efforts in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) over the past 10 years. In particular, it sought to celebrate the gains made by women actively working for the BPFA's full implementation; to identify remaining gaps that need to be worked on; and to confront emerging issues directly concerning women.

Dr. Patricia Licuanan, chairperson of the AP NGO Forum, also welcomed the participants. She said the forum was a way of "looking back" at the BPFA's achievements as it was also a "leap forward" in terms of continuing the advocacy for the women of the world. She also said the Asia-Pacific region set the standards for other regions in terms of organising such collaborative efforts around the BPFA, thus the region should also "take the lead in keeping the spirit of Beijing alive."

Simultaneous workshops were held on the first day. These were: "Lobbying and the Beijing +10 Process" by the Asia Pacific Women Watch (APWW), "Gender Mainstreaming: The True Story" by South East Asia Watch (SEAWATCH), and "Ensuring Young People's Meaningful Participation and Incorporating Their Perspectives in the Cairo and Beijing ++ Processes" by the Network of Asia Pacific Youth (NAPY).

2nd Day

The first plenary session for the day was "Celebrating Women's Gains...Confronting Women's Issues" which featured keynote speaker Patricia Licuanan from the Philippines who gave an overview of women's gains over the past 10 years in relation to Beijing+10. Dr. Licuanan said it was at the First Women's World Conference in Mexico in 1975 that violence against women (VAW), discrimination against women, and issues of equality were raised to the level of the UN. In 1995, the UN initiated the Beijing conference which became known as the largest women's world conference.

What have we gained over the years? According to Dr. Licuanan, almost all

countries in the region now have a national machinery for women to facilitate the BPFA's implementation. Gender violence has been addressed through a wide range of interventions such as special police units to handle sex crimes and nearly all countries in the region have passed laws addressing violence against women or have amended old laws to strengthen the protection of women. Data on reproductive health is now collected; and there is increasing attention on HIV/AIDS in the region. The women's movement itself has transformed over the years, creating more links across boundaries, and now has long-term plans and strategies to address the uneven power relations between men and women. There is now better understanding of identity politics, where the many aspects of discrimination against women is recognised as having intersectionality with race, ethnicity, age, class, religion, language, sexual orientation, disability, immigrant or refugee status.

Licuanan, however, pointed that there still are growing and persistent issues such as poverty, globalisation, low wages for women, declining food security as agriculture shifts to export crops, reduced social services and basic education, and the heightened commodification or objectification of women in media.

3rd Day

Issues that affect the personal, political, social and economical lives of women world-wide were discussed with vigour on 02 July 2004, the third day of the Asia-Pacific NGO Forum on Beijing +10 in Thailand.

According to Slatter, the foremost major setback in the current women's movement is the erosion of hard-fought sexual and reproductive rights with the implementation of U.S. President George W. Bush' Global Gag Rule. The Gag Rule withdraws the U.S. government's financial support to aid agencies providing "controversial" services such as the distribution of artificial contraceptives like condoms and counselling women who have undergone abortions. Motomaya seconded this observation. She said that in Japan, old anti-women regimes have come to power and are now contributing to the subtle erosion of women's rights in general, not just in their sexual and reproductive rights.

Amidst the discussion of feminism, anti-women regimes and the erosion of women's rights, Shah upped the ante by throwing the question of criticising back to

the women in the Forum, saying that the feminist movement needs a radical shift. She observed that women needed to "sharpen our critique and turn slogans around to discuss not sisterhood, but solidarity." Shah observed that perhaps women in the movement tend to be too focused on their "own little advocacies" that they forget to look at the larger picture of activism, as well as to take up the issues of anti-globalisation, anti-war and similar social justice and newly-emerging movements. She encouraged women to "take on each other's issues and go beyond our multiple identities" in order to converge women into having a common vision and not just engage on the dichotomies of differences.

4th Day

A mini-film festival capped each day of Asia-Pacific NGO Forum, drawing a crowd of women interested in seeing their issues highlighted on the audiovisual medium of film/video.

The works were a mixture of productions in film, analogue and digital video formats. Countries represented by the films were Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Philippines, India, Laos, Bangladesh, Iran, Tajikistan, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan. The genres were experimental short films, documentaries, and narrative fiction.

One anticipated film was *Unlimited Girls* written and directed by Paromita Vohra of India. The feature-length video production (94 minutes) used a fun and postmodern approach in discussing the women's movements, depicting how young women-with or without the usual "isms" (feminism, lesbianism)-figure in on all these different movements today.

Some of the filmmakers were present during the screenings and in a mini-forum, had the chance to introduce their work and entertain questions from the audience. In the film *Running with the Media* in Japan, filmmakers Asuka Tomaru and Sally McLaren of Ritsumeikan University, Japan discussed the lack of proper female representation in news broadcasts. Sri Lankan director Anoma Rajakaruna was also present to speak about her films entitled *Yet Another Five... and Out of the Shadows*. Both tackled gender-based abuse.

From the four onsite reports by Libay Linsangan Cantor of Isis International Manila in Mahidol University, Salaya Campus, Thailand from 30 June - 02 July 2004.

Men Tour Africa Against Gender Violence

Nelson Banda is a 28 year old journalist from Zambia. 58 year old Moses Mbugua is the head of United Way Kenya, a non-profit that provides support for community programs. In November last year, both men took part in the Men's Travelling Conference — a group of more than 100 men from Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa who travelled across Eastern and Southern Africa to raise awareness and mobilize other men to support gender equality and end gender-based violence (GBV). The Travelling Conference was organized by the Men for Gender Equality Now Network, an initiative by FEMNET, the African Women's Development and Communication Network. FEMNET's programme on gender-based violence has been supported by the UNIFEM Trust Fund in Support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women.

Aged 20 to 80, the Travelling Conference comprised faith leaders, policemen, lawyers, sportsmen, artists, students and persons living with HIV/AIDS. It was organized as part of the Sixteen Days of Activism — a worldwide campaign on ending violence against women that takes place each year from November 25th to December 10th. Billed as an advocacy and outreach event, participants travelled from their countries by bus to meet in Lilongwe, Malawi, stopping along the way to speak to thousands of people on issues of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS. In each town they stopped at, the men used music, dance, drama and lively debate to captivate and involve their audiences. Buses were decorated with banners proclaiming "Peace in Africa Begins At Home: Men Fight GBV", and "Men Working to Stop the Spread of HIV/AIDS". Drums and megaphones helped to make the messages heard.

Speaking about his involvement, Banda says: "As men, we need to re-assess on how we have been socialized. Gender Based Violence is barbaric and serves nobody! We are in the Gender Revolution and as men we should take the lead and live by example."

Both Banda and Mbugua are active members of the Men for Gender Equality Now Network, which started in 2001 and has members from Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, Somaliland, South Africa and Zambia. "When the network came up I joined immediately to continue in my campaign for gender equality," said Mbugua. "I have witnessed that when men talk to other men on gender equality they tend to pay more attention than when the same is coming from a woman."

Believing firmly that even in the most patriarchal of societies there are many men who believe that there can be no development, peace and justice if gender inequality persists and if violence against women continues, FEMNET targets men as partners who are critical to reach out to other men to build awareness, sensitivity, and to change attitudes about male identity and unequal power relationships between men and women. "Gender bias takes two," says Sara Longwe, former president of FEMNET. "If we use advocacy to combat it, then both sides, men and women, must be involved. When you stand up for something, and do it publicly, you can change things."

Commission on the Status of Women

Each year, for two weeks in March, women gather in New York for the annual session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). In this year's meeting, March 12, in addition to its regular discussions on Beijing + 10, the CSW will also focus on two thematic issues:

- The role of men and boys in achieving gender equality.
- Women's equal participation in conflict prevention, management and conflict resolution and in post-conflict peace-building.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) was established as a functional commission of the Economic and Social Council by Council resolution 11(II) of 21 June 1946 to prepare recommendations and reports to the Council on promoting women's rights in political, economic, civil, social and educational fields. The Commission also makes recommendations to the Council on urgent problems requiring immediate attention in the field of women's rights. The object of the Commission is to promote implementation of the principle that men and women shall have equal rights. The Commission's mandate was expanded in 1987 by the Council in its resolution 1987/22. Following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, the General Assembly mandated the Commission to integrate into its programme a follow-up process to the Conference, regularly reviewing the critical areas of concern in the Platform for Action and to develop its catalytic role in mainstreaming a gender perspective in United Nations activities.

The Economic and Social Council modified the Commission's terms of reference in 1996, in its resolution 1996/6. In 2000, a comprehensive review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the Platform for Action was undertaken by the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing +5) entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

The Commission, which began with 15 members, now consists of 45 members elected by the Economic and Social Council for a period of four years. Members, who are appointed by Governments, are elected on the following basis: thirteen from African states; eleven from Asian states; four from Eastern European states; nine from Latin American and Caribbean states; and eight from Western European and Other states. The Commission meets annually for a period of ten working days.

Skills Training Project

Funded by Konrad Adnaeur Stiftung

The project undertaken by WERC involving women from the poorest of the poor female headed households, in the Eastern Province as reported earlier, is continuing in its final stages. The fundamental objective of the project being alleviation of poverty the project focused on making them economically self-

sufficient. Using WERC's various experiences in the project area as well as in other parts of the country, the target families were guided on their way to economic and social empowerment. The project was based on two phases. The

first phase sought to determine their needs in view of the fact that as victims of war they needed to be uplifted psychologically and to be reclaimed from 'the apathetic state in which they existed. It was apparent that the components of the training had to include personality development and confidence building, inspiration and motivation and women's rights. A programme of gender sensitisation included these aspects to enable them to start life anew. This was handled by persons who had the expertise in these areas and were invited to conduct sessions through a dialogic process and the women actively participated. This was followed by television programmes on various socio-economic issues, with a coordinator to make interventions to carry the discussions further.

The second phase of training was on specific skills which would lead to economic self sufficiency. The skills gained would be used to initiate remunerative enterprises thereby improving their economic status. It was followed by discussions on cooperative management.

The women were given the choice of selecting an income generating enterprise. they picked on sewing and restaurant management for both of which they needed the expertise.



A training centre was located in the Batticaloa area, and three sewing machines were supplied. A sewing instructor from the Company was engaged to give lessons on a regular basis. The women are now able to produce items of clothing and household articles.

Restaurant training was also carried out by an expert and the women have learnt to make cakes and pastries. The classes were interspersed with video programmes for the women and group discussions were also carried out by our Coordinator.



The Project Coordinator is stationed at the project location and monitors a month's activities on the basis of the activity plan. Each month the coordinator evaluates the activities - restaurant and sewing classes. The success and failure are reported along with the evaluation.

The most recent news comes from the WERC team of two staff members led by the Director, who visited the project early in July. They report that the training courses end in August and measures have been taken to establish a sewing centre and a Restaurant which will be run by the trainees independently as a self employment venture.

Many initiatives have been taken by WERC to lay a sound foundation to the scheme. They have negotiated with the local Bank which will help the women to obtain loans to purchase equipment and their basic essentials. WERC has taken care to bring in the community to sustain the project. Their

involvement resulted in the formation of an external committee comprising officials from a Women's NGO, the Bank, the Community Centre and a member of the Eastern University staff, who have volunteered to support and monitor the progress of the project.

It is with some degree of satisfaction that we look back on our efforts which were fraught with challenges.



Female Detectives

Yan Guoqiong, living in Chengdu, China, at 38, is the executive Director of the first all female detective agency, the Women's Rights Protection Investigation Centre.

Fresh from the university, young and naïve, she had visions of a happy married life. But her personal experience with her unfaithful husband led her to collect enough evidence to win a divorce from him. She soon realised that many other women faced similar problems. She thought of women's rights and helping them became her life's ambition. Appreciating her assistance and motivated by their own experience many women joined to help in the detective agency she had set up.

The fast developing city of Chengdu with its 10 million people had new rich males indulging in traditional concubinage. Married women in all cities in China suffer the same fate. Wife beaters and unfaithful husbands all came within the ambit of the detective agency. Its modus operandi varied. Sometimes they set out in the middle of the night dressed up in costumes to hide their identity. They burst into hotel rooms and rented out apartments to take pictures which will produce evidence in the law courts. Having started only a few months ago they have already placed at least one abusive male behind bars for one year.

Yan declares that through her work she has become stronger, more independent and aware of the values of modern women.

First Woman Newspaper Editor in South Africa

Fariel Haffajee having started her career as a journalist in 1991 in time rose to be recognised as the Mail and Guardian's senior writer and opinion editor. As a weekly South African newspaper Mail and Guardian carried highly creditable

investigative reports and became popular for its anti apartheid and analytical political news. This year when South Africa celebrates its tenth anniversary of independence, 36 year old Haffajee has been promoted as Editor, the first female newspaper editor in South Africa. She calls her appointment the "fruit of South Africa's 10 years of democracy". The African National Congress, according to Haffajee, is the only party which has a firm representation of women with 40% of impressive cabinet ministers. The number of women MPs indicates the success of the ANC in putting women into important roles focussing on women's leadership, which continues to play an important part in the country's development. She claims that South Africa is a country that champions women.

(We! Feb 2004)

Women's equality in the Vatican

The Roman Catholic church it is reported has named for the first time two female theologians as Vatican Consultants. With no comment or fanfare the Vatican daily published the list of new members to the International Theological Commission among whom were sister Sara Butler of the University of Saint Mary, Chicago, and Barbara Hallensleben of Fribourg University in Switzerland, placing them among the highest ranking women in the church. However, it was remarked by Cardinal Georges Cottier that "they were not chosen because they are women. They were chosen for their competence" adding that "Women can bring their own sensitivity to certain problems where men might have a different point of view." They make mention that it was not meant to coincide with International Women's Day nor a gender issue.

Nevertheless women's competence as equal or better than men's has been recognised as well as a feminine view point being of value.

Rwanda's Women in Parliament

This news comes from a press release by the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU). Rwanda held its elections to its National Assembly and Senate in September 2003, and the results have shown that they almost reached parity between men

and women. Women now comprise 48.8% of the National Assembly of Rwanda with Sweden now in second place with 45%.

The new Rwanda constitution has been specially designed to include "many provisions guaranteeing a minimum participation of women in politics." It has reserved a quota of 24 seats for women but 6 more have been elected to the lower house, and the constitutional quota of 30% in the National Assembly was reached when 6 women out of 20 were elected to the Senate.

The IPU in collaboration with the UNDP had organised a workshop for women candidates running in the electoral campaign. It is quite clear that the constitutional allocation of seats was instrumental in the enthusiasm displayed by women in the political process, it is reported.

Rwanda now awaits the outcome of this gender sensitive result. Will a culture which values gender equality evolve, will the success of women change the traditional expectations of women, will the general recognition of the need to have women in the political process come to stay?

It gives us an uplifting feeling to read this news of Rwanda's success

Hawaii's Act 82

Our congratulations to Marilyn Lee, Hawaii State Representative as the main sponsor of Act 82 "The Act makes it a Felony Offence, with a sentence of up to five years in prison, to sell or offer to sell travel services for the purpose of engaging in prostitution and authorizes suspension or revocation of a travel agency registration for engaging in these acts." It was signed into law on May 19, 2004 by the Hawaii State Legislature. The law states that "the low status of women in many parts of the world has led to a burgeoning of the trafficking industry. The purpose of this act is to promote and protect the human rights of women and girls exploited by sex tourists."

Hawaii becomes the first State in the United States to criminalise the activities of sex tour operators.

Staff Day out

WERC staff decided to spend their annual day of fun and relaxation at 'Ambalama', a restful sylvan retreat, a few miles out of Colombo. So 18th February is a day to be remembered. Leaving early that bright morning a couple of hours drive away from the city, found us in an open parkland with shady trees, cool breezes and winding footpaths leading away to more 'jungle' areas.

We registered at the wattle and daub office which brought back recollections of a village of the dim past. We were allocated a little cabana where we dumped our bags and soon got out in little groups to explore the interesting landscape. As we wandered around we came across other cabanas, hidden away among the trees, interestingly named after traditional Sinhala landmark buildings of a village. There was the familiar *Vedagedara* and *Gurugedara*. Wandering along further on we reached the *Ulpenge* – the swimming Pool and soon several of the staff disappeared into the cool waters splashing all around.

In the meantime others enjoyed themselves on the "Kamatha" where swings provided high fun. Proceeding towards the main road to get to the river below we stopped for a while at the *Wakkalama* a mini bar – sans any fluids at that hour. A little later we were venturing down the slope to the river but that adventure was not so lucky. One false step and one of our members had a rather nasty slip resulting in a painful bruise.



As lunch was announced we gathered together at the *Attapattu Maduwa* the half walled dining hall where we enjoyed a local menu served out of clay pots.

The afternoon was full of lively music and dancing interspersed with a few hilarious indoor games. Then came cake and tea and soon we were homeward bound at the end of a pleasant day. Thank you WERC !!

Women's Studies Course Award Ceremony

The four-month Women's Studies Certificate course, which began in September 2003, was successfully concluded in January 2004. Three months was spent on course work and one month on analysing the field research. The participants chose the Free Trade Zone, Drug Addicts, Media Domestic Violence and Violence against Women as their research topics. Twelve students completed the course.

The award ceremony was held on March 26th 2004 in the WERC Auditorium. Ms. Bernadeen Silva, Member of the Board of Directors of WERC chaired the proceedings.

Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran, Executive Director of WERC welcomed the guests followed by Dr. Sepali Kottegoda, Director of Women and Media Collective who spoke on behalf of the lecturers. Dr. Carola Stein, Representative of the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung which funded this project, distributed the certificates while Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran distributed the three merit awards.

Malkanthi Rajapakse spoke on behalf of the participants while Laksiri Mallawarachchi, a Grama Seva Nildhari and the only male student in the group spoke on how much he had benefited from the course. They both thanked WERC for having conducted the course.

This Women's Studies course was not only valuable to the participants but it would also go down in history as the first women's Studies Course conducted in the Sinhala Medium. The success of the course speaks for itself, as there have already been several requests for a repeat of the course.



Participants of the Women's Studies Course

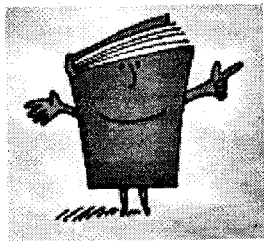
Monthly Film Show

WERC has organised, in collaboration with Vibhavi, a monthly film show at the WERC auditorium. The films selected for screening will be relevant to gender issues.

The first film show held on July 11th, 2004 was "Children of Heaven" by a famous film Director from Iran, Maji Majedi. Judged the Best Foreign Language Film 1998, it is about a brother and sister and revolves around a pair of shoes. Full of innocence, suspense, humour and fantasy it can move one to tears of joy.

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New Arrivals to the



LIBRARY

Karukku by Bama Dalit writing in translation. Tamil original translated by Lakshmi Holstroms

In this unusual autobiography a young woman, Bama looks back on her life from a moment of personal crisis in her childhood village through a series of poignant memories and reflections. Bama's is a bold account of what life is like outside the mainstream of Indian thought and function.

Women of Peace building by Dyan E Mazusana and Susan R. McKay, Montreal International Centre for Human Rights Democratic Development 1999

The need for women's full participation in peace building initiatives is stressed. One aspect of peace building that it be gender-specific and deeply involve women and women's practices, has recently garnered substantial international attention and is the topic of this essay. By keeping gender and women in focus, this essay hopes to add a needed dimension to on going debates seeking to create an inclusion multidimensional approach to peace building that does not exclude or marginalize any group.

Politics of the possible

Essays on Gender, History, Narratives, Colonial English. By Kumkum Sangaria. New Delhi. Tulika 2001.

The essays on this volume speak of Indian British, American Latin American narratives with an emphasis on forms, ideologies and class relations. May cohere around several themes like the transnational and regional production of ideologies under the ages of colonialism; ways of theorizing women's literary labour and agency and consent to patriarchal assignments and ideologies etc.

The essays can be read as mapping a politics of 'the possible'.

Women in the Kandyan Kingdom of the seventeenth Century Sri Lanka, by Kapila Pathirana, Vimaladharmasiri, Kandy, Varuni Publications

The historian researching on women in the Kandyan Kingdom has a rich legacy of sources to dip into such as contemporary Sinhalese works and accounts of foreigners who lived in the country as well as those who visited the region at the time. The book captures a certain moment in the history of Sri Lankan women and focuses attention on a regional society which was by large uncontaminated by Western influences.

Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahmanism and Caste by Gail Omvedt. London, Sage Publications 2003

This fascinating book constitutes a unique exploration of 2,500 years of the development of Buddhism, Brahmanism and Caste in India providing an entirely new interpretation of the origins and development of the caste system, which boldly challenges the Hindutva version of history. This book will attract a wider readership among all those who are concerned with the state of contemporary India's polity and social fabric.

Relevance of communist Manifesto edited by Embrose Pinto and Somen Chakraborty, Delhi Indian Social Institute 2000

The papers in this book provide critical analysis to rethink and research further on socio-economic concerns of India in the light of the Manifesto. The book will be a useful document to teachers, activists and researchers.

Freedom of Religion and a "Debate" on Religious Conversion by P.D. Mathew, S.J., New Delhi, Indian Social Institute 2002

This booklet is a modest attempt to educate the public regarding their rights related to freedom of religion. It explains the various aspects of "Freedom of Religion" guaranteed by the constitution of decisions on conversion and various offences relating to religion under the Indian Penal Code. It also contains a debate on the religious conversions and a critical study of the cause of recent attacks on Christian minorities in Gujarat.

Women's writing in Exile ed by Mary Lynn Broe and Angela Ingram London, The University of North Carolina Press 1989

These essays explore the varieties of exile women writers in Western culture have experienced over the last hundred years. Exile in this work suggests both "in exile" geographically and "exiled" (by other people's criteria) and this is as much metaphor as it is material circumstances.

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STAFF NEWS

Farewell get to together

For Chitra Abayaratna (Consultant), Romela Nevins (Project Coordinator) and Nilanthi (Secretary to the Director) in appreciation of their loyal service.

Warm welcome

to Marini de Livera as she takes up duties as Project Coordinator.

Readers Comments

are welcome!

Please write/fax/e-mail

to WERC address below.

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