



Peace – Where from ... ?

Hostilities have ceased. We listen intently hoping we will not hear even the muffled sound of war drums. Instead the air resounds with a thousand, thousand sighs of relief echoing from the furthest corners of the country. Looking back we see the devastation wrought by nearly 20 years of a bitter war. The human lives lost – killed, maimed, broken- the land laid waste, its resources in shambles – the spirits, the very hearts and minds of the people hardened and embittered by hatred and fear, mistrust and suspicion.

The present is throbbing with expectation – expectations of Peace though on the far horizon. Seeking to establish a lasting peace, the process in its many varied forms has taken over as a part of daily life. Meetings, talks, negotiations, agreements are items of topical interest everywhere. Leaders, politicians, state officials, facilitators and activists are all involved in the pursuit of peace. It is the immediate and necessary consequence of the 'ceasefire'. The people who bore the brunt of the war, the civil society are standing by on the periphery waiting, watching with anxious uncertainty.

Yet this time notably a certain civic consciousness which has been characteristically lacking in our people, is much in evidence. They are stepping forward to get involved and be participants in the peace process where they feel it behoves them to make a contribution in some way. And the civil society includes women who through the grim reality of war have suffered the worst of war horrors. They are 'the other victims of war', yet they are also the agents of peace. They have been campaigning for peace, participating in meetings and demonstrations, working with displaced women of all communities. But it is the men who are predominant in the peace efforts. Women's voices are yet to be heard. Women's organizations have gathered together and have been insisting that they be participants in the peace process. Women's perspectives in this critical national endeavour need to be given due recognition. While these major moves,

extremely complex and fraught with difficulties are in progress, the people on whose behalf peace is being negotiated need to be the supporters of the process. The back up for such critical negotiations to succeed and survive must come from the people. Hence the peace process has provoked a multifaceted approach – one such aspect of peace building devolving on the people.

But the people are still deeply divided by suspicion and fear in spite of the common desire for peace. It is a change in attitude that has to transform them. Reconciliatory moves are essential between the North and the South.

Peace will come when people
see
all people as the same
and no one has to live in fear
in ignorance and shame.

Peace will come when people
learn to listen and to care
about the rights and dignity
of people everywhere.
Amanda Bradley

Here is the opportunity for women to engage in a forceful women – centred drive to bring together the people of the country, North and South, East and West. Their hearts and minds need to be touched – a return to humanistic ideals pursued. Women's natural tendencies for sharing and caring need to be exploited.

Movements from the south to the north and vice versa are gaining momentum. The peace train, the pada yatras, religious processions, the peace missions are a spontaneous outflow of the desire to see the bonding of a nation's people. The meeting of disabled soldiers from the south with their counterparts of the North must thaw the coldest human heart. The meeting of academics can evolve new lines of thinking. Face to face encounters, personalised meetings or groups or even crowds mingling together with their counterparts can help greatly to diffuse tensions. Reports indicate an amazing amount of goodwill on both sides. Can not this fund of goodwill form the base of a very solid foundation to this aspect of peace building ?

Editorial

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Men in Women's Spaces

The question of exclusive women's spaces appears to have run dry in conversations within the women's movement. Particularly in the Asia Pacific, but also in Africa, women who identify with the women's movement, both feminists and gender advocates, have insisted that without bringing men into our dialogues and engage them in our discourses, we will not be able to advance the agenda of women's empowerment. This has been a particularly strong assertion with the rise of gender analyses and concepts of gender mainstreaming within both academic and development worlds.

Women's organisations, like Isis International-Manila, are often asked why we do not employ men as part of our regular staff, and why we describe our information and communications work as being in support of the women's movement. It appears that maintaining a women-centric focus is not any longer pursued by some sectors of the women's movement. While our agenda stand on the foundation of the feminist and human rights frameworks, we are very conscious of the fact that there are many women now engaged in different social movement who are also fighting for gender equality and fundamental social transformation. The women's movement itself, particularly that located in the South has begun to work on issues of globalisation, the impact of structural adjustment policies in the South, and the specific realities of nationalist and fundamentalist agendas in the South. We now see our role as also including the reaching out to other social actors, both women and men, and building bridges as it were, between the women's movement and other social movements.

We believe that the question of autonomous women's spaces is still very much a debate that we should have. While gender mainstreaming pushes for the inclusion of men as an effective strategy in pursuing the goal of empowerment, and there are indeed many more men now working on programmes and work, we cannot immediately conclude that maintaining physical and ideological spaces where only women engage is an outdated strategy. We do think that it is crucial that men become engaged in women's issues, and many more men need to do this, but, as Patricia McFadden, one of our contributors to this issue argues, not to reassert old heterosexist and nationalistic claims of women and men being located and engaged in the same spaces. In this issue of *Women in Action*, there are several contributors who have shared the ways in which they have sought to engage men in

their programmes on reproductive rights and domestic violence with varying degrees of success. There is also an interview with an exceptional man, Paul Sinnapan, who has himself been radically transformed by gender analyses and now actively seeks to educate other men in the cooperative movement in Malaysia to confront sexism within their movement.

Clearly, there is a desire amongst feminists and gender advocates to get men involved in our struggles, and there are many ways in which this can happen. And there are clearly exceptional men out there, feminist in their thinking and demeanour, who have taken on the challenge that their women comrades have posed to them. These men have overcome the pressures of the roles placed upon them as a result of societal construction of men and women, while giving up some of the traditional privileges conferred to them through centuries of entrenched patriarchal dominance. However, we would argue that this is still the exception rather than the rule. In our conversations with women from the region, we hear about how women have to fight a very personal struggle for democracy and justice within their homes and within the most intimate relationships. There are still too many men who pay lip service to women's empowerment and notions of gender justice, who have yet to make any fundamental shifts in their own behaviour within their families and within their workplace. Women working in development agencies that promote gender frameworks within the work of their partners of the ground can attest to the ways in which gender hierarchies are reproduced and reaffirmed in internal structures of these very agencies. This is why the work needs to happen at all levels.

With this rich harvest of passionate women's and men's writings, we hope that we will stir up sufficient debate on this issue, and start the conversation from another entry point. The task of gender mainstreaming is not over, surely, but clearly there are visible gains in this area, and worthy of a reflection on how far we have gotten, where we are heading, and what we might be gaining and/or losing as a result of this project.

courtesy: **Women In Action** No. 1, 2001- Editorial

(Women In Action covers a broad range of issues affecting women globally, but focusing on the particular needs and concerns of women in the Global South, and forwarding a progressive perspective tempered by the experiences of the third world women's movements.)

Gender Interacts and Intersects

India and Asia, it is said have great cultures and a great civilisation. When did we have it as totally and wholly cultured and civilized? Was there any time in history that this was truism or has it always been something we speak of theoretically. What happened in Gujarat, in India in the recent past makes me raise the above questions. I raised the same question before, once in 1983 and again in 1989 when the LTTE ethnically cleansed Jaffna of the Muslims. For me culture and civilisation should essentially relate to human beings.

There is mass killing all over among us. When we become ethnically or religiously tensed-we destroy people in the most gruesome way, men and women and children. Here we are particularly concerned about the gender aspect of it. Though killing of any human being amounts to the same horrific feeling ethnic cleansing gender belonging plays a major gruesome role.

Ethnic or religious belonging is written politically on the site of female bodies. This happened throughout histories all over the world. Human beings commonly share this vice. In Gujarat recently we hear of murder and gang rapes of girls and women in the presence of their family members. This is violence of a particular nature which has gender dimensions relating to women's bodies and sexuality. This comes under the rubric of women's rights within human rights.

Occasionally religious identity is also written on man's bodies. A Muslim was stripped to confirm his identity and then stabbed in the chest and abdomen – His wife a Hindu was also stripped (for different reasons here) and stabbed on her "private parts" and she died instantly. Another Muslim boy, a teacher was also stabbed to death – being punishment for marrying a Hindu girl. Those two encounters are not chance encounters but premeditated and sought after for a good reason – marrying a Hindu girl.

Vishwa Hindu Prashad, we learn is very touchy about Hindu girls marrying Muslim men – viewing the phone menon as conversions to the Muslim faith. But it welcomed Hindu men marrying Muslim girls. Apart from the question of conversion there is also another deeply sensitive reason, which is limited to the sexuality of women – the lineage markers and identity markers are carried on the male line. The womb carrying women receives the Muslim man's child and gives it an identity based on his male line. The Hindu men of the community resents this and feels it as loss, as a blemish on their cultural identity. But on the contrary, if a Hindu man marries a Muslim girl she gives birth to Hindu progeny by the reason of one male line determining the identity of the newly born. Gender impinges heavily as matters of ethnic and religious identity and during riots and communal clashes being a woman has its own vulnerably dangerous implications.

(The incidents reported here are taken from the Hindu of 1st April 2002)

We extend our solidarity to the victims who are alive, both men and women who are victimised brutally by fellow human beings. We also condemn the killings and rape of women. We also extend our cooperation and concern to all those who are working against this type of barbarism.

When are we going to become cultured?

When are we going to be civilised?

The struggle has to go on!

Civilising others - the Mission continues

We have passed through a stage of our history where decolonisation took place for many nations and many peoples. World super persons with their military might and presumed superiority of civilisation came down to many countries with a "cross and sword" conquering us, plundering our economic resources. But they felt subjectively that there is a civilizing mission in the process. We thought this phase was over, though glimpses of the ideology persisted through other means such as economic domination, unfair trade deals. But what is shocking now is the statement made by Tony Blair's aide, Mr. Robert Cooper. A deciphering or a deconstructionist view of what he said amounts to a repetition of history. What exactly did he say?

"Defensive imperialism to deal with threats from undemocratic states"

"Well governed Western Nations can impose order and stability in the world"

"The need for colonisation is as great as it ever was in 19th Century"

This was stated in a pamphlet on "Reordering the world" - He emphasised the "need for colonisation and is in fact unhappy that there are "no colonial powers", willing to rise to the occasion.

Are we going back to an age of imperialism and empire building?

And what is the relevance of this to our agenda Gender. The discourse on gender relations emphasises many things amongst which equality, non-hierarchy and non-oppressive social relations are the most important factors. As feminist, our agenda, extends to all types of oppression, whether it is national or those based on racism, class and caste.

We are certain that the feminists in the UK and those within the Labour Party will set right the agenda of the Labour Party which is headed by Tony Blair.

S. T.

Personality Development

The differences in the sexes go beyond biology. Two of the most important differences that shape the future child are societal norms and maturity.

At birth the sex of the infant is a factor deciding how people react to the baby. The social order associates certain colours with boys and other colours with girls. In time, the dress code will be differentiated. Later specific expectation – short hair for boys, long hair for the girls will increase. Parents pride themselves on favourable comments from society. They see how well boys and girls behave according to social expectations. The elated children repeat the applauded behaviour in order to please people around them. Children do respond to praise by repeating the deed. Getting praise for behaviour in accord with what people expect encourages children to play the role appropriate to their sex. Parents ever sensitive to the social order, categorise the children's activities as masculine and feminine.

Research findings indicate that girls are more mature than boys of equal age. Three year old girls unbutton their clothes easier than three year old boys. Even girls of five years have the capacity to control their posture to sit still for stories, whereas boys of similar age do not have that kind of control.

It is important to clarify the individual differences. The most important fact about a child is not the age nor the stage she is in nor any other grouping that she falls into (or that describes her) but the fact that she is herself, a unique personality.

Child psychologists confirm that differences from individual to individual are much more important and larger in comparison to the differences between the sexes. The child will solve many a developmental problem, each in its own way and at its own speed. Thus the child develops as an individual at her own rate of progress.

Along the child's path, a major factor that contributes to her success will be the confidence that adults give. Appreciating a child for herself, makes her appreciate herself, thus making her appreciate others as individuals. As adults, we should help them to understand the differences and to accept them. Differences are recognised but evaluative comparisons are not made.

Most cultures curb and restrict the progressive thinking of a girl child so that, she cannot develop as an individual, but is taught to be dependent. Changes in thinking must start from childhood. A confident personality is what is important in making an assertive person. It will make her a wholesome person able to stand on her own.

By V. De S.



Awarding certificates to a participant after the Law students Workshop held at WERC.



Group Discussion at a workshop

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At the Strategic planning workshop held for the WERC staff and Board.



Workshop on Gender sensitisation at Trincomalee

From UNIFEM Currents

The Executive Director (UNIFEM) outlined four key priorities for Afghan women, which include:

- **Security:** Special protection should be provided to women in camps for refugees and displaced people and during the repatriation process. A professional police force should be trained and equipped to address women's special security needs.
- **Gender justice:** An independent judiciary based on the rule of law must protect women's rights. Violations of women's rights must be monitored, reported and remedied.
- **Governance:** Afghan women need ownership and representation in the reconstruction process. The two women in the Interim Administration and their Ministries need political and financial support.
- **Women's economic security:** UN programmes and NGOs providing credit, economic opportunities, skills and employment must respond to the needs of particularly vulnerable women and link them to private sector opportunities.

The long-term goal of UNIFEM's work is to realize all human rights for Afghan women as enshrined in the 1979 Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN ALBANIAN WEAPONS COLLECTION PROGRAMME

UNIFEM's campaign to build awareness of women and youth about voluntary weapons collection in Elbasan and Diber resulted in increased roles for women in weapons collection and a significant increase in the number of weapons surrendered in project areas. The campaign was part of UNDP's "Weapons in Exchange for Development" (WED) programme in Albania.

UNIFEM surveys showed that women are essential in convincing their family-members to hand in weapons as a condition for a better life, both economically and socially. Through the WED programme, around 7,000 weapons and 300 tons of ammunition have been collected in project areas. Police claim large quantities of weapons still remain in civilian hands, representing a clear and present danger to women, children and communities as a whole. Partnerships between women's organizations and police were increased through the campaign.

GROUP ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS LAUNCHED IN CHINA

In China, government representatives formed the "National Coordinating Group on the Protection of the Rights of Women and Children," with fourteen government ministries and leading political parties as members. The establishment of the National Coordinating Group is a result of two years of public campaigns from women's and civil society groups. The Group was launched last November at an inaugural workshop for UNIFEM's Trust Fund supported project "Women and

Men Working together for the Elimination of Domestic Violence against Women in selected Provinces of China."

The establishment of the National Coordinating Group has enabled the Trust Fund project to garner political and institutional support in the four pilot provinces of Jiangxi, Shannxi, Liaoning and Hubei. The National Coordinating Group provincial representatives include women leaders with the regional Women's Federations, local heads of police forces, people's courts and concerned local government officials.

TRAVELING SEMINAR FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN INDIA

In India, UNIFEM and the NGO AAKAR organized a 'traveling seminar' on gender, masculinity and violence against women. The seminar targets young men and women in six universities throughout the country and seeks to explore issues of sexuality and masculinity in relation to the increase in violence against women, as well as HIV/AIDS and population control policies. The traveling seminar has already visited universities in Baroda and Trivandrum and is currently at universities in Delhi.

SIXTEEN WOMEN ELECTED TO BURUNDI NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

Sixteen women were elected to Burundi's Transitional Assembly last month. The elected women were candidates from 14 political parties and members of civil society. The elections come after intense years of lobbying by the women of Burundi, supported by UNIFEM and other partners, for the inclusion of women in decision-making and their participation in the Burundi peace process. In July 2000, UNIFEM's briefing to Burundi's 19 negotiating parties made possible the first All Party Burundi Women's Peace Conference. As a result of the Peace Conference, twenty-three of the women's recommendations to protect and promote women's rights were included in the final peace accord.

PROTECTING RIGHTS OF MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS IN JORDAN

UNIFEM is supporting efforts in Jordan to modify the Labour Law to be used as a crucial tool for protecting the rights of migrant women workers. In an effort to ensure that the rights of migrant women are recognized and valued, UNIFEM met with a delegation from Sri Lanka last month to discuss ways to protect the legal, economic, and social rights of women throughout the migration cycle. UNIFEM's programme to empower migrant workers in Jordan began in August 2001 and its objectives are to improve women migrant workers' situation through changes in legislation and policies, promotion of migrant's rights, improvement of services and dialogue between sending and receiving countries.



London

Located in London's East End, Britain's new women's library houses a core collection of more than 60,000 books and records recounting the rich history of women's achievements. The Director, Antonia Byatt says – "This is an extraordinary collection.

Not only does it track the story of women's campaign for equality with men, but it is a unique source of social history about daily life." Previously known as Fawcett Library which grew out of the London Society for Women's Suffrage founded in 1867, it was at one time located in a pub.

Byatt goes on to say, "We might not have the same sort of battle on our hands like the suffragettes, but there are things for men and women to talk about... their roles in society. We want to relate the library to what's going on today. You can't isolate it from what is going on in the world."

Rosie Boycott, the Editor of the feminist magazine "Spare Rib" launched in 1972, the first copy of which is on display, remembers that at that time a woman could not apply for a mortgage without the permission of her father or husband.

The new library hopes to become a cultural and feminist landmark in London.

Paris

Socialist Prime Minister, Lionel Gospin was elected in 1997 and gave top priority to giving women their rightful place. His cabinets included several women ministers.

The "parity" bill passed in parliament in 2000 sought to increase the number of women taking to politics and parties obliging were to have equal number of males and females on their electoral list. Following on this, the Municipal Elections of 2001 saw an increase of women councillors from 23% to 48%.

However, France has only 10.9% women in parliament, which places her in the embarrassing world position as 52nd. The election due in June, 2002 was originally expected to yield a large increase in women representatives in The National Assembly as a direct result of the "parity" law. It is interesting to note that under the "parity" law, which claims a global first,

a party that presented an electoral list with no women would lose their claim for government financial subsidy while the ideal position would be a list with equal numbers of male and female names. A discrepancy would mean a proportionate loss of subsidy. However, the final number of "winners" does not come into consideration.

Hard on the heels of these encouraging assumptions comes news that the male bastion of French politics is still going to be difficult to breakdown. It is reported that mainstream political parties have not changed their attitude to women and have not included the 50% women in their electoral listing in spite of the threat of government sanctions. It is more realistic, accordingly to expect not more than 20% of the 577 seats in the National Assembly to be taken by women.

Mainstream parties have ignored the parity law under which the parliamentary elections are being held for the first time. Nevertheless, an optimistic note is sounded by those who believe that the large numbers of women involved in local politics since 2001 have produced experienced women who would find their way into the National Assembly. It would indeed be interesting to see if, in the final count, men will accept the rightful place of women.

Marseilles

The "Averroes Conference" was collated in 1994 and is organised by Marseilles' Culture Office. It hosts historians, philosophers, sociologists, film makers, artists and writers brought together from one shore to the other of the Mediterranean for two days, and aims to "contribute to building bridges between the two shores". Named after Averroes alias Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), the conference is open to everybody and has now become an important time of exchange to gain a better understanding between the Eastern and Western shores. A "specific theme of reflection" is chosen each year. The purpose being to make knowledge accessible beyond the intellectual circles, which it is reported leads to "fascinating discussions and personal testimonies".

The last Conference held on November, 23rd & 24th, 2001 had as its theme – "Women in the City". They were tackling the subject from three angles.

"The first will deal with women's relations to liberty, the second with their position in the face of violence and the third with their role in artistic creation".

Although Mediterranean women had been left out of affairs concerning the city, the women are now faced with access to public areas which needed to be "questioned, compared and revealed". Films too will be given a special place with discussions following film shows.

The Story of Suu Kyi



Where it began:

In Myanmar (Burma), Ne Win, now over 90 years old, fought side by side with Aung San (Suu Kyi's father) to gain independence (from the British) for their country and allied themselves with Japan to fight the British in World War II. Aung San was

assassinated in 1947 while Ne Win subsequently occupied a key position in the politics and military of the country. Ne Win seized power in 1962 and set himself up as a dictator and head of the military. Protests against this military dictatorship broke out, but were suppressed with much bloodshed. In March 2002, he was placed under house arrest.

Suu Kyi was just a child when her father was assassinated. She spent most of her life abroad and returned home only in 1988 to look after her ailing mother.

But as the protests against Ne Win's military junta escalated and the country was seeing bloodshed, Suu Kyi immediately joined the pro-democratic party, the NLD, soon becoming its figure-head as leader of the Opposition. In 1989, she was placed under house arrest by the military junta for six years. In 1990, her National League for Democracy won a landslide victory in the elections. However, the military junta refused to hand over power to the NLD, and continued to harass her. In 1991, she was awarded the Nobel Peace prize as the world recognised her efforts to win democracy for Myanmar. She was freed in 1995, but subjected to several restrictions and finally placed under house arrest in September 2000.

However, she could not be silenced as she carried on her campaign and the military had no alternative but to talk to her as international sanctions laid on Myanmar brought the country's economy to shambles. Secretive talks through many months finally led to her freedom in May 2002. The international community which had laid sanctions as well as the NLD demanded an unconditional release for Suu Kyi. She is reported to have said that there are no restrictions on her movements and the international community views the release as a very positive first step. The world now awaits the military junta's moves toward genuine political reforms.

Suu Kyi at 56, has the world behind her in her effort to bring democracy to her country – **Myanmar**.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

The International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo) recently organised an International Conference on Women, Peace building and Constitution making.

Participants numbering one hundred and thirty five from twenty five countries converged to share their experiences and exchange their ideas on topics of current interest to women and on behalf of women.

Conclusions centred on justice for women who invariably become victims of war and the undisputed role that women could play in peace making. It was a show of consensus among the participants from different parts of the world.

WERC was represented by the Executive Director, Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran at this conference.

Maria Vasquez of Columbia

One of the participants at this International Conference on Women, Peace building and Constitution making, organised by ICES was Maria Vasquez of Columbia.

A 40 year long conflict has made Columbia a war torn country, and Maria had been a member of an urban guerilla group having got involved in it as a university student along with the youth of that time who hoped to achieve radical political and social changes in the country. She had been a member for 17 years and had been jailed for nine years.

However, she left the movement of her own accord and went back to university.

She wrote a book on her experiences as a militant and won a Colombian government award in 1998.

Maria is now a human rights activist, along with other ex combatants, making a complete change in their attitude. They had decided to let the public know that they were convinced that only dialogue and peace negotiations would solve the long drawn out conflict in Columbia.

International Women's Day Programme Migrant Women Workers

The problems of migrant women workers, most of whom are employed in the West Asian countries, have been a perennially sore subject of discussion. Since the open economy of 1977, Sri Lankan women started leaving their homeland in search of jobs mainly for economic reasons. Though they went with great expectations lured by attractive foreign earnings and dreams of providing a better living for the family at home, a large majority was disappointed. Their stories of harassment, non payment of salaries, inhuman treatment and the culture shock they suffered from, have flooded our newspapers.

A workshop on this subject organized by WERC invited three migrant women to talk of their experiences. Their testimonies were a series of experiences, which bore confirmation of the oft repeated common complaints which migrant female returnees have expressed.

Having heard their personal experiences which led to much discussion, the consensus was that there was after all these years a great deal more that the State and other organizations could yet do for these women who bring in the highest foreign exchange into the country.

At the conclusion, of the workshop the participants urged the government of Sri Lanka as well as NGOs to intervene with effective urgent action in the following areas of concern to them.

- ✱ To institute new research to cover not just the Middle Eastern migrants but also women workers who migrate to Western Europe and the Asia Pacific region. They are a particularly neglected and invisible category in the existing body of literature on migrant women in general. Migrant women workers in Western European countries face racism and racial discrimination, which often manifest in violent forms. The need is not just filling the gap in research but highlighting the specific forms of violence against them, their condition of vulnerability and disadvantage due mainly to cultural difference. Their voice also needs to be heard and accounted for.

- ✱ To put an end to the gross gender profiling and differential treatment meted out to especially to migrant women at the airport. Such profiling bureaucratized and institutionalised by state practice and rationalised by society constitutes inverse discrimination against women by marking them as a separate category of people requiring special attention. It further reinforces patriarchal domination and conversely female subordination.

- ✱ To call for attitudinal and ideological change on the part of Sri Lanka community in general and the women's movement in particular on perceptions of migrant women. Stereotypical and sexist norms of migrant womanhood and negative representations need to be challenged and resisted. Women need to be educated on the pioneering role migrant women play in the country's economy and the need for greater sensitivity and respect for their dignity and integrity.

- ✱ For the state to take effective remedial measures to combat sexual enslavement and exploitation of migrant women in the Middle East at the hands of Sri Lankan authorities in diplomatic missions who under the guise of "safe houses" subject women to multiple forms of victimisation. These "safe houses" have emerged as centers for a thriving sex trade. They have become potential sites of extreme violence against women. Women have been at the receiving end of abusive officials who enjoy the power to manipulate degrading situations of women and turn them into profit and advantage. This triangle between the police in the receiving country, foreign employers and the Sri Lankan mission is a highly organised global network of modern trafficking and slavery. Failure on the part of the Sri Lankan state to fulfil ILO commitments in protecting its citizens employed overseas who bring in the highest foreign exchange will mean complicity and collaboration with organised international networks of trafficking.

- ✱ To incorporate AIDS awareness and sex education component in the training program for migrant women in view of the increasing number of HIV infected women among migrant population. However, we feel that society at large needs to be responsive, responsible and sensitive to the pressing concerns of AIDS affected migrant women and not react with stigma and ostracisation.



Some participants at the International Women's Day workshop listening to migrant workers experience.

Women's Writing

Women's writing in Sri Lanka was undertaken as a major research study by WERC.

It was designed on a three phase base – writings of women in Sri Lanka in pre colonial, colonial and post colonial periods. It was further diversified into English, Sinhala and Tamil writings. The research encompassing extensive areas and indepth probes spread through four years and has yielded five publications in English, Sinhala and Tamil.

Two more books are due for publication shortly.

English-Colonial Period:

Writing an Inheritance: Women's Writing in Sri Lanka – 1860-1948 Vol. I.

Edited by Neloufer de Mel and Minoli Samarakkody.

An Anthology - a collection made for the first time of some of the earliest writings in English by women in Sri Lanka. From travelers folklore to ghost stories, historical fiction and social satire the varying themes reflect the colonial society.

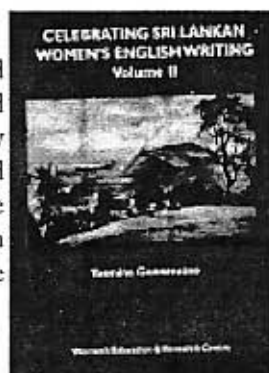
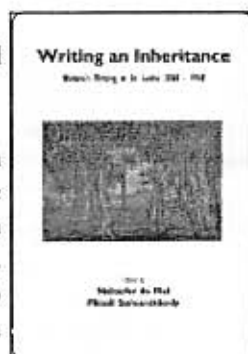
Writers include British and American travelers, Bella Woolf, Constance Cummings, Carolyn Corner giving their impressions of colonial Ceylon, along with creative writings of Jessie Alice Goonetilleke, Jane Goonetilleke, Rosalind Mendis, Mabel Fernando and Ira Trimmer.

Post Colonial Period:

Celebrating Women's English Writing in Sri Lanka – 1948-2000. Vol. II.

By Yasmine Gooneratne

The author has researched and documented fiction and poetry published in English by women living in the Island and outside from 1948-2000. The author has succeeded in including about seventy five writers.



Tamil - Pre Colonial Period: (published in English)

Feminine Speech Transmissions: An Exploration into Lullabies and Dirges of Women.

By Selvy Thiruchandran.

This book is a study of the rich verbal arts of lullabies and dirges found in Sri Lanka's folklore of the North. The material for the research was collected from what is available from publications, but it remains an oral tradition handed down the generations as unwritten literature.

Colonial Period: (published in English)
Subjectivities and Historicism

By Selvy Thiruchandran.

This publication comprises Tamil writings of the colonial period, where collecting source material was a painstaking search through many libraries both in Sri Lanka and Chennai, India, and includes much information from personal discussions.

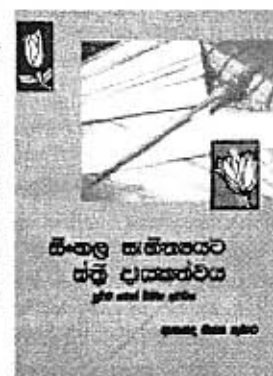
Sinhala - Pre-colonial period

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By Ananda Tissakumara.

This book is a collection of writings and also unwritten literature of this period. The author has given his analysis and interpretation of the materials contained in the various chapters such as Sigiri Gee, Gajaman Nona and Lullabies.

(Publication due in September 2002.)



Volunteer - Daniela

The third volunteer to join WERC in recent years was Daniela Kasche from Germany. She was sponsored by the Centre for Education and Networking in Non-Violent Action in Kurve, Winstrow, Germany. Daniela spent a period of six months with WERC. Young and rather apprehensive, she came two years after high school and found herself in a rather bewildering environment.

However, very soon she was one with us, adapting herself beautifully at WERC. Daniela was much interested in the objectives and programmes of the organisation. She was keen to understand various gender issues as seen in a third world country. She initiated contacts with women's organisations with similar interests in Germany.

Having developed a very sensitive understanding of women's issues, Daniela went back to her university studies pronouncing that what she learnt at WERC would influence her future. We wish her well.

Here are Daniela's impressions:

"I came to Sri Lanka in October 2001 to get to know its culture, compare it with my own culture which is totally different and to have the experience of how life is in Sri Lanka. This happened during a six month voluntary service at the Women's Education and Research Centre, Colombo, to which I was sent.

After I got over my first cultural shock, I began to explore the Country and its people. Now I know the meaning of words like Power-Cut, Trisbau, Saree, Kiribath and Poya Day. A very important experience for me was, that I was a foreigner. To be conspicuous all the time because I am different and to live with strange people and a language that was new to me. I had to handle prejudices against myself. This was a hard experience but after some time it was better and I am happy that I could make new friends and gain new experiences. Now, I understand the situation of foreigners in my own country.

When I settled into the organization, I started to help in the library. That was the perfect opportunity to improve my knowledge about Sri Lanka, Gender, Ethnicity, because all these books have been at my disposal. At the same time, I gained knowledge of the library work and made myself useful for the library staff.

I was one of the family of WERC. With immense goodwill and patience everybody answered my questions. At WERC there is a lot of cooperation and transparency in their work.

Later, I offered to get in touch with German organizations to find funders. I realised that it is hard work to find people who are willing to fund the work that is done by women's organizations. Now, I admire the women in these organizations despite all the circumstances that repress them, they show such motivation



and involvement in their work. I joined some workshops and meetings at WERC, and gained knowledge about the situation of women in Sri Lanka. I have learned to see the world through a feminist view.

Being at WERC, I could see, how many women in different areas in the country, have already succeeded with their Programmes, publications and that really encouraged me for my future.

Volunteer Intern

Young, cheerful Indumathie Senadeera joined WERC as a Volunteer Intern, sponsored by the Centre for Study of Human Rights under their Internship Programme.

Indumathi spent four months at WERC and during this period was assigned duties as a temporary member of the Library staff. She involved herself in various aspects of library work and proved to be very helpful. She made use of the opportunities available to gain experience by helping in workshops and other activities organised by WERC.

A graduate in Law, Indumathi is just venturing out into her chosen field, and we wish her well for the future.

Triennial Congress of the International Alliance of Women in Colombo

The International Alliance of Women (IAW) is meeting in Sri Lanka for the first time. The 32nd Triennial Congress of the International Alliance of Women is being hosted by the Sri Lanka Women's Congress (its affiliate) in Colombo in September 2002.

Theme of the conference is "New Frontiers for a New Age."

The Congress will be attended by more than 80 delegates from USA, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Australia and Affiliates of the Sri Lanka Women's Congress. Most of the delegates are women leaders in their countries.

Staff Relax

Sunday, February 24th, saw WERC staff assembled outside our office premises to take off on a trip to Kandy. We piled into the waiting van choosing comfortable seats. Amidst the exchange of chatter, laughter and general good spirits, interspersed with a good supply of delicacies, we sped on leaving the hustle and bustle of Colombo.

By early afternoon, we reached Hotel Vistas situated outside Kandy town on a hill top commanding a panoramic view of hills and valleys and the black ribbon of a road winding in and out. In the evening, we enjoyed a walk through the Peradeniya Royal Botanical Gardens and later drove through the University Campus. Reaching Upper Hantane, we spent some time on the hill sides taking photographs, admiring the scenic beauty and even visiting the kovil. Returning to the hotel, the van came down effortlessly as from habit, while in the suspended gloom the city trembled with light. Back in the hotel, after a sumptuous dinner, we sat out on the rocky hillside enjoying the surrounding scene by night while cool breezes fanned us lightly.

Next day, we drove into Kandy town, and wandered about in groups visiting the Dalada Maligawa, St. Paul's Church, the Museum, Raja, the Maligawa tusker preserved in its glass case and rounded up the day with a shopping spree.

Two days of relaxation and enjoyment, far removed from our routine of projects, workshops and seminars, really gave us a much needed break. Thanks to WERC.



Staff at the Orchid House of the Royal Botanical Garden, Peradeniya.

From the Bookshelf.....

NEW ADDITIONS,

THE SINGER AND THE SONG, by C.S. Lakshmi, Vol 1, New Delhi, Kali for Women 2000 383pp.

The Singer and the Song is the first of C.S. Lakshmi's three volumes of detailed interviews with 50 notable women in the arts in India. She recounts the experiences of legendary greats in the field of music, both vocal and instrumental. She provides us with a fascinating account in a constantly changing musical environment, from the days of the devadasis and tawaifs, to contemporary times.

WOMEN AND THE NATION'S NARRATIVE; Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka, by Neloufer de Mel, New Delhi, Kali for Women 2001 293pp.

This book explores the development of nationalism in Sri Lanka during the past century, particularly within the dominant Sinhala Buddhist and militant Tamil movements. Tracing the ways women from diverse backgrounds have engaged with nationalism, the author argues that gender is crucial to an understanding of nationalism and vice versa.

SHADOW LIVES; Writings on Widowhood, by Uma Charkravarti and Preeti Gill, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 2001 489pp.

This volume, documents the focus on the widows, regarded as the dark half of womanhood in tradition, the structural counterpart of the sumangali or the auspicious married woman, and to provide an archive on widowhood, dating back to the 5th century B.C. from Sanskrit texts and other documents in many languages published in the 19th and 20th centuries.

VICTIMS, PERPETRATORS OR ACTORS?, Gender, armed conflict and Political Violence, edited by Caroline O.N. Moses and Fiona C. Clark, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 2001 243pp.

This book provides a holistic analysis of the gendered nature of the armed conflict and political violence and a broader understanding of the complex, changing roles and power relations between women and men during such circumstances.

WOMEN IN POST INDEPENDENCE SRI LANKA, edited by Swarna Jayaweera, Colombo, CENWOR, 2002 371pp.

This volume discusses the impact on women of the social, political and economic developments which have occurred during the time Sri Lanka achieved political independence in 1948. The book covers a broad range of spheres where women have been affected, including education, health, the economy, employment, governance, law, human rights, as well as family and community life. The book focuses on the post independence era in Sri Lanka between the year 1948 - 1998.

UNRAVELLING HERSTORIES; A Three Generational Study by Kamalini Wijayatilleke, Colombo, CENWOR, 2001; 176 pp.

The author reviews women's roles, responsibilities, and status from childhood, during adolescence and adulthood, while on other, she investigates women's position vis a vis culture and traditional practices. The book narrates the private lives of women within the frame work of the family and constitutes an important record for the feminist history.

Farewell!

Pushpa Wickramaarachchi resigned at the end of 2001 after 10 years spent at WERC. Pushpa made a valuable contribution to WERC in the area of publications and accounts. Friendly and helpful, she was appreciated for her outspoken manner. She has joined the World University Service, Gender and Development project which has taken her out to Hambantota. We wish her well in her new sphere of work.

Young, energetic Vigitha Renganathan was at WERC only for a very short period. Her service was marked by her methodical work style, her enthusiasm and her charming smile. She has joined the Centre for Poverty Analysis as a Research Officer. Our goodwishes go out to her.

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It is vacant from October 2002 for visiting expatriate scholars, researchers, NGO personnel and the like.

Inquire from ...

WERC Administrative Officer - 595296 , 596826

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