

PRAVAHINI

Newsletter of WERC



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Is Tsunami the disaster or the aftermath of it?

Many are in deep sorrow after the Tsunami. The catastrophe lasted only for a few minutes, but has left an impact that would last for years. Some people feel that even though Tsunami has destroyed the lives and livelihood of thousands, it has also proved that nature does not mark-out humans and affect them accordingly. Nature just came with force and washed away people regardless of their age, class, ethnicity, or religion, within minutes. Before the power of Nature human intelligence, human problems, human inventions and human power were all proved futile.

However, Sri Lanka had to be proud of its citizens who put a united effort to relieve those affected. Everybody got together to contribute and help the affected; this proved that Tsunami did not only wash away human lives and livelihood, but also man-made demarcations that humans had been living with for so long in Sri Lanka. No one was bothered where their contributions went, all that mattered for them was whether their contributions reached the affected and helped them in some manner.

While most of us are praising the united effort of all the people and the heroism of those who had tried to rescue people when the tidal waves rushed in, the recent reports about the affected people seems to send a shock wave through us. One of the most common reports from these areas is that the relief goods do not reach the affected; they are either robbed on the way to the refugee camps or are never sent to the refugee camps. These are all underhand activities, which a normal human being cannot perceive as possible. These are activities that have been exposed to society in some way, however the more painful incidents that have been kept well under cover are the sexual abuse and trafficking of women and children. It is indeed very painful trying to understand how humans can act in such unsympathetic and inhuman manner towards another human being and at a traumatic situation like this.

One gets to hear a lot of painful stories about such inhuman behaviour from the women in the refugee camps. It is high time we took some serious action to

prevent this from continuing, and make the women in these camps aware of their rights and ability to go out there and face the world without the help of men. Women from these seaside villages have so far been sticking to the stereotypical image of men being the breadwinners and themselves being secluded to the houses. They have rarely had the opportunity to go out into the world and face challenges since girlhood. These women having been secluded to their houses now wait in dismay, vulnerable to exploitation by certain males. These women, having been continuous dependents on one or the other male family member, feel that they have no other option but to give-in to the requests or rather demands of these strange men. The government and Women's organisations should make immediate intervention and take steps to rehabilitate these women and change their mentality. They should be given counselling to overcome their fear about their future and disgust towards life that has been caused among most people by Tsunami. Plus they should also be given some sort of skills training to face challenges in life and take-up the responsibility of being the breadwinners for themselves and their families. They should be made aware of their talents and abilities within themselves to fight life alone.

In this Issue...

Is Tsunami the Disaster or the Aftermath of it?

The Birth of Women's History Month

Matters that would be worth knowing

Violence and Discrimination against

Tribute to Regie Sirwardhana

Women Around the World

Krishnammal and her Revolution...

"Ain't I a Woman"

New Arrivals to Library

Women are no more to be Preyed Upon

Activities of WERC....

The Birth of Women's History Month

How March came to be women's history month...

The evolution of March as Women's History Month is a story with many points of origin, non-linear narratives, competing calendars and claims and a denouement of some irony.

It begins, most likely in 1908 with the Socialist Party of the United States organizing a Women's Committee to campaign for women's suffrage. A year later, in March 1909, women devoted to both the cause of labor and the cause of women led an uprising of thousands of garment industry workers in New York City.

The alliance of militant working women and women's rights advocates inspired a German Socialist named Clara Zetkin and a Russian textile worker named Alexandra Kollontai to declare an International Women's Day in 1911. By 1913, the date was fixed as March 8th. On that date in 1917, another uprising led by women, this one in the Russian city of St. Petersburg forced the Czar to abdicate. March 8th became a holiday to honor not only women's labor, but women's role in the Revolution.

Over the years and around the world, March 8th took on different meanings. In some years, it was an occasion for organizing against militarism and war. In the late 1950s, it was often the date of female-led anti-nuclear protests. At the same time, March 8th was a rallying point for the demands of workers. By the late 1960s, as women's liberation was spreading in the United States, many radical feminist discovered, re-discovered or decided to honor the revolutionary women and called for an American revival of International Women's Day. An activist calling herself Laura X, who had started a Women's History Library, organized a march in Berkeley, Calif., on March 8, 1969. The marchers dressed as historical characters; she was a cross between Alexandra Kollontai and the dancer Isadora Duncan.

By the 1970s, pressured by women's groups, International Women's Day became broader in scope and official in nature. The United Nations began sponsoring it in 1975. In 1981, the new National Women's History Project in Northern California, among other groups, successfully lobbied Congress to declare a national Women's History Week in the days around March 8th. By 1987, the week became a month.

Along the way, the working class, socialist, grass-roots underpinnings of the holiday fell away and the

focus in the United States largely became the achievements of individual women. Somehow, the 2004 presidential statement for International Women's Day heralded "the advent of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan" and even the Department of Defense joins in, honoring women in the military on its Web site in March.

This article was taken from Asian Network for Culture and Development And Louise Bernikow who is a WeNews Historian wrote this article. she is also the author of seven books and numerous magazine articles.

WERC Women's Day Programme for Year 2005

WERC celebrated the World Women's Day 2005 together with eleven school children from various private schools - St. Peter's College, Harrow International School and Holy Family Convent. This was a programme introducing CEDAW to schoolchildren. During the last few weeks there was a kind of Anti-CEDAW (Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women) campaign in the newspapers, which attempted to connect CEDAW with means of bringing in liberalisation of Anti Abortion laws. We wanted to show the young people that CEDAW contains much more than just this issue, and that the rest of CEDAW is unquestionably important for the development of both men and women, and also for the dawn of a peaceful society.

By the end of the day WERC staff patted themselves on the back for a successful sensitisation programme, which will take Sri Lanka towards a change of attitude in relation to Women's issues and also eliminating the ugly practice of patriarchal domination.

We would like to pay special credit to Father Rector of St. Peter's College for sending the prefects for such a programme. While many of the other Boy's Schools were apathetic and indifferent and reluctant to accept our invitation, he was broad-minded to send the prefects of his school.

Tamil Conference

WERC is planning to have its annual Tamil Conference in July 2005. This time the theme of the conference would be Women's contribution to cultural production and the portrayal of women in the cultural productions by men. Research papers concentrating on this topic would be most welcome. Your contributions would make our conference a great success.

Matters that would be worth knowing

Swedish Parliament debates wife beating tax

A group of Swedish politicians has decided to hit men with a domestic violence tax, in order to pay for the costs to society of abuse against women. This decision was made after recent reports revealed that violence against women increased almost 40 per cent during the nineties and that 20 to 40 women are battered to death in Sweden each year.

One of the several female MPs who had signed the motion says that it must be made clear to all that we have a gigantic social problem and cost in men's violence towards women and it must be discussed how it is going to be paid. She also says that men should understand that they have a collective financial responsibility.

New laws against Domestic Violence

Various forms of domestic violence including emotional abuse are to be curbed under proposed new laws against domestic violence.

The person towards whom the act of domestic violence has been, or is likely to be committed, has to make an application to the Magistrate's Court for a protection order, for the prevention of such act of domestic violence.

Upon consideration of the application, if the Court decides to issue a Protection Order, after considering the evidence before it, the person who is accused of committing the acts of violence will be prohibited from entering a residence or another place shared by a person and the aggrieved party, as well as entering the aggrieved party's residence, place of employment or school.

It will also prohibit any attempt being made at contacting the aggrieved person in any manner whatsoever or committing acts of violence against any other person whether it be relative, friend, social worker or medical officer who may be assisting the aggrieved party.

Legal reforms in Morocco

Morocco has effected broad legal reform that includes the following amendments to the cited provision:

Section 418 - A mitigating circumstance obtains in cases of murder, injury or beating committed by one spouse against the other spouse, when either party is caught in *flagrante delicto* committing an act of infidelity.

While Equality Now welcomes the revision of law to eliminate explicit discrimination against women, Morocco, together with other governments, committed in Beijing Platform to "ensure equality and non-discrimination under the law and in practice" (emphasis added). The new law, while neutral on its face, may continue to be applied in a way that discriminates against women by mitigating punishment for offenders who are all, or almost all, men who have killed women in so called "honour" killings.

Women 'most at risk of poverty in old age'

According to the Association of British Insurers women are not saving enough for their pension and are at greater risk than men of suffering poverty in their old age. According to the ABI 36% of working women were not saving at all for retirement. The researches found that 10 million people were not saving enough for old age and 8 million among them were not saving at all. Among those not saving at all an estimated 56% are women. One of the main reasons why they do not save for old age is due to their low pay. And women also give more priority to providing for their children rather than to save for their retirement. It is indeed very painful to see how the natural motherly instinct of women paves way for their own vulnerability.

Violence and Discrimination against Women and Children in Sri Lanka and in our neighbouring country

Granddaughter raped by the two Grandfathers

Have the cultural and social values of our society decayed so badly? National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) officers are on the hunt for two grandfathers who are alleged to have sexually abused their 13 year-old granddaughter. This was revealed before Colombo Chief Magistrate and Additional District Judge. The victim's mother, employed in the Middle East, had left the child in the care of the two *Seeyas* (one her own father and the other that of her husband's) at their home in Pannipitiya. According to the victim's statement, the two had abused the child sexually for several days.

Sex Workers, Men & AIDS in India

After having had acid thrown on her face by a spurned lover, chilli powder shoved inside her during a gang rape and money stolen by police, Asara says she knows one thing: "I am very put off by men." And she is not alone in India's premier high tech city, Bangalore, where an estimated 25,000 sex workers who are among the highest at risk for HIV infection also face beating, rape and extortion from police, lovers, husbands and rowdies. Asara at least found a little safety with a group of sex workers in Bangalore called Swati Mahila Sangha (women's forum) who promote condom use as well as challenge police arrests for soliciting. Of the dozen women who met in January to discuss their lives, their stories were of a kind – one woman narrated how rowdies who took her to a deserted spot and raped her without condoms, another told of a boyfriend who lured her to the city and sold her as a sex worker. Getting women like this to organise is critical in India to prevent the spread of HIV. India has five million people infected with HIV. The women say getting police to help instead of hinder them would be a big first step. Sex workers in Bangalore allege police extort money under section of the Immoral Traffic Prevention law for acts like dropping their 'pallu' (garment covering the upper body) – which can lead to a fine of 500 rupees or three months in jail. The women say they often instead pay a bribe or worse get raped by police officers who also steal their money. However, top officers deny these allegations.

Child trafficking, sexual abuse on the increase

The shocking incidents of Sri Lankan women and children being trafficked for sexual slavery within the country and abroad were revealed. A hundred out of every thousand children are affected by trafficking.

Migrant women are sometimes trafficked into Arab countries. The reports say that a number of children are also trafficked to West Asian countries as camel jockeys and for other purposes. Women and child bureau of the police department reports 1082 cases of child abuse up to June 2004. Of this, 437 cases were of rape, 179 of sexual abuse and 108 cases related to child trafficking. Ratnapura District had reported the highest number of child abuse incidents. Of the 78 cases reported 36 were of sexual abuse and 7 of trafficking. Anuradhapura District with 62 reported cases of child abuse comes next. A total of 28 cases of child abuse had been reported from the Colombo District. Elimination of trafficking depends on identifying and eliminating the root cause which is poverty, according to certain scholars.

No Girls Please!

In 1991, not a single district in India had been recorded with a child sex ratio of less than 800. In 2001, there were 14. In 1991, only one district recorded a child sex ratio of between 800-849. In 2001, this number had risen to 31. At the other end of the spectrum in 1991, 21 districts had a child sex ratio of over 1,000. In 2001, only five districts were in this range. In other words, while the number of districts with abysmally low child sex ratio is declining. The madness is catching on. There is now substantial data that reveals that private as well as government facilities are used for sex-selective abortions despite the laws that prohibit it. Reports also shown that apart from abortions, if a female child is born despite all efforts to ensure that this does not happen, the baby is abandoned at the doorstep of hospitals. This has been documented in Punjab. Surveys in Haryana and Punjab have revealed that some women genuinely believed that if their numbers decline, their value would increase because men will not find brides. Instead men are buying brides from other states for as little as Rs.5,000 (in Haryana a buffalo costs Rs.40,000). These women are available for all men in the family. Instead of being valued, women are becoming targets of violence in districts with the lowest sex ratios. The most damning aspect of all this is that surveys reveal that even highly educated women in Delhi have resorted to as many as eight abortions to ensure that they only give birth to a son. If not education what could make females understand their own worth? Although women/girls are educated the cultural stereotypes that are embedded in or rather forced into them by society makes their education meaningless and worthless for their future.

A TRIBUTE TO REGI

It is a few months since Regi passed away, and an appreciation about him may be too late now. But it is never too late to leave behind a few words of ones feelings and thoughts to posterity about a great man. Regi was a unique person, he was simple, unassuming, gentle and always soft-spoken. Although frail and weak in his appearance, he had a weight within himself. He knew many languages and was adept at them with a flair for precision and clarity of expression. He was an art critic, film critic and literary critic; he was also a scriptwriter. Being an expert in many fields did not diminish his qualities of talent and expertise. He was equally at ease with all of them. He wrote on National politics but international politics was also his forte. His scholarship was impeccable. He could effortlessly combine creativity with politics.



But do I write about him because of his scholarship? No. There are many who could make claims of scholarship, but Regi was different. His greatness was testified by the fact that a few of the Tamil writers who write exclusively in Tamil journals and newspapers, could not but pay tribute to him in Tamil. One UK based writer, (Jamuna Rajendran) in an Indian journal called *Uyirmai* - another one in a Tamil Marxist Column - entered into a debate with a Non-Marxist writer who had referred to Regi as a humanist who has gone beyond Marxism. I do not want to enter into this debate. It is merely to mention the impact Regi had on such writers, both Marxist and Non-Marxists. *Terital* a small unconventional newsletter like quarterly paper published in Jaffna had referred to Regi as a great man and an honest Marxist and marks his contribution to art and politics and how the Tamil community benefited by reading the translations of his work into Tamil.

Beside the literary genius and his intellectual and creative powers, the Political man in Regi has appealed to these writers. His uncompromising stand on the ethnic questions and his uncritical condemnation of the betrayal of the Left on the language issue has been remembered by these Tamil writers as worthy of comment in a world of political opportunism and bargains in the power game.

A highly principled and a great humanist as he was, I had to make a little detour into the personal - he edited my manuscripts. There is a fixed rate for editing - per page - the editors would first tell me their rate and stand by it, but Regi never discussed monetary rates with me. And to my amazement, once he told me that I need not pay for so many papers, as many of them need not be edited, and he added, you write well without mistakes. Though it satisfied my ego a bit I felt redeemed. Many years ago my father told me that I didn't write well, and that I didn't write good English as one of my brothers. This was a deeply felt hurt, and Regi exonerated me. But above all this, what enamoured me was his statement that I do not have to pay for some of the pages because he did not have to correct them. His payment he insisted was for the actual labour of correcting and not for the time he spent reading them anyway. Does it mean he has understood the labour theory of value? Or is it because he is an untarnished (by the capitalist values) humanist? Yes Regi appealed to me in many ways.

In conclusion I can say that I cannot wish that his soul attains Nirvana or that he attains peace in the next birth. He believed neither in a soul nor rebirth. Let us wish for ourselves that we have many more Regis in the future, so that the world will be a better place to live, for the future generations.

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Women Around the World

Nobel Peace laureate declares war

Among the 34 women who have won the Nobel Prize Wangari Maathai is the first African woman to have been awarded the prize for her great contribution to preservation of the environment in her country. Basically, the Green Belt Movement of which she is the moving spirit has changed the lives of people in Africa in many ways, apart from being a highly successful plantation project. Women environmentalists have long been doing a great job in many countries and Maathai's winning the prize is recognition of not only her own service, but also that of all the women, across the globe, who have been nurturing the environment with motherly affection. Maathai says her war against those polluting the environment has not yet ceased.

Afghanistan's only woman presidential candidate

Masooda Jalal, the only woman to contest Afghanistan's landmark presidential election, has surprised watchers with her fifth place in the vote count, placing her ahead of 13 men. However, the trailblazing paediatrician believes that if it were a fair, free and democratic election without money or military influence, she would have been the victor. The 41-year-old mother-of-three's performance as a paediatrician and the first female presidential candidate is already a victory for a female in an ultra-conservative Afghanistan, where their families forbid many women from voting and most are expected to maintain a low profile. The first lady candidate rightly claims that she has broken a tradition, and created honour and values to women of Afghanistan. They are not 'nothing' anymore in the patriarchal society.

Sri Lankan born young author listed in America's 'Who's Who'

India's bestselling Sri Lankan Computer Science author, Anushka Wirasinha, has received honorary inclusion into America's prestigious 'Who's Who' for her contribution to Science and Engineering. The over hundred year 'Who's Who list' is an internationally famous historical record of the names of today's most influential and extraordinary men and women from around the globe, whose achievements have significantly shaped the people of today and whose efforts are advancing human knowledge. The

stringently selected names considered worthy of inclusion for permanent international record comprises the world's foremost innovators, discoverers, scientists; the men and women leading today's scientific and technological revolution.

Sri Lankan teenager chosen for women's delegation to Africa

The 17-year-old Sri Lankan/American Insiyah Nomanbhoy studying in a leading school in California was selected by Save The Children, an International Charitable Organisation, to be a teen representative on their Women's delegation to Ethiopia and Uganda. Insiyah had to compete with many girls to be selected for this delegation. In March 2004, Insiyah and her fellow students raised \$17,000, for Save The Children by doing a Multicultural Dance Benefit. That money was used to build a school with a well in Ethiopia in the Woliso District. Water the most basic of human needs, is a very scarce resource in Ethiopia, one of the poorest nations of the world. The responsibility of getting water for the family's daily needs falls on the young girls, and this can take up to 8 hours each day. Building a well in the school encouraged young girls to attend, and take their precious water home at the end of the school day. Girls attendance at a school with a well now equals boys. The purpose of the delegation is to have an open dialogue and learn ways to empower the poorest women of Africa. And Insiyah believes that "women have a primary responsibility for children and family all over the world. By giving the poorest women just a little help, whether in the form of money or information or goods or food or even water, the women will 'save the children'".

An actress who presents violence against women in the international arena

Navomy Aakkarman, of Israel, has achieved great recognition through her one-man (one-woman) shows about problems faced by women in the international society. Her acting and her themes are such that each woman who sees the drama recognises herself with the woman depicted in the drama. "Flowers are not" is a drama written and acted by Navomy, and she has staged this drama 800 times, including in India. This drama is basically about domestic violence women face in their everyday life. After every performance she has a discussion with her audience about the drama, and this discussion always gathers her more information

for the drama, and the next performance would surely include the experience and information gathered from the previous post-performance-discussion. She started her career as a stage drama performer in 1998, when the Israel government requested her to perform a one-man/woman show about domestic violence. And ever since that her life, her thinking, her ideas about life and her aims in life have changed. She became aware of the most pitiful and painful experience women had at their homes only after she started performing. Thus, now her aim in performing is not profit oriented but mainly welfare oriented. It is also pleasing that her husband is so supportive for her demanding career.

Exiled Bangladesh writer Taslima Nasreen

The doctor-turned-writer fled her country and settled in Sweden after her novel "Lajja" in 1994 earned her the wrath of Islamic fundamentalists in Bangladesh. In 2002, she was even given a one-year prison term in absentia on charges of making derogatory comments about Islam in several of her books. She currently travels across Europe and Asia to espouse the cause of women illiteracy and poverty in impoverished Bangladesh. The writer is now urging India to grant her citizenship, saying the country of her birth had "slammed the doors" on her possible return.

Krishnammal and her Revolution: Land Belongs to those who Work on it

Krishnammal's story and its implications are worthy to be shared and disseminated as information to Pravahini readers. "Tillers should own the lands" is the policy of Krishnammal Jehannathan. Her dream in life is to give land and houses for the poor tillers. So far she has freed 10,000 acres of land from the rich landowners and handed them over to the poor tillers, she has also built nearly 5,000 houses for these poor tillers. She is a doughty fighter fighting for a Cause.

She is in her eighties, but her spirit and her aim to serve the poor have not aged. She has been working with and for these poor people for the past 35 years. It is the 1968 incident of Venmani Disaster that started her career as a social worker. In 1968, 44 Dalit people were burnt alive, by the rich landlords, for having asked for quarter measure of rice as their pay.

She withstood hundreds of struggles against the landlords following the Non-Violence policy. Her husband is a Freedom Fighter, who also followed Mahatma Gandhi's 'Ahimsa' (Non-Violence) philosophy. At first the landlords were not bothered about her, their attitude was that after-all she is a woman and could be ignored. But, she proved that even a woman could spearhead a revolution.

Her obstinacy to stand for the rights of the poor and her obstinacy to struggle to fulfil her dreams, eventually led to her success. At first the landlords threatened her, then they tried to burn her, but she never ran for security, she stood her ground and faced them boldly. Her obstinacy and willpower surprised many and ultimately made them respect her. Some landlords even handed-over their lands willingly, to her, to be distributed among the poor tillers. This is a victory for the non-violent struggle based on the principle of Ahimsa

Krishnammal has formed a community organisation called "Land for Tillers Freedom", this provides the security for the loans taken from the banks by the poor tillers to purchase lands. This organisation

has also formed computer centres, mat-weaving centres, spice powder packing unit and electrical and plumbing unit, to provide training and employment facilities for the villagers.



Krishnammal belongs to an era when women would have been tied up by traditions forcing them to follow ideals, who would have played passive roles in society and maintained low profiles in their families. Women would have felt it most untraditional even to raise their voice against men folk in their own households. But, Krishnammal seems to have had the courage to raise a revolution against a whole lot of landlords, and be successful too in her struggle. She had her own style of protesting, and her own group - the poor - to fight for. She proved to her society that men are not the only ones who could make history, women too make history/ 'herstory.' There are many women like Krishnammal in Indian History who have had a major role to play in India's struggle for Freedom. However, the uniqueness of Krishnammal's case is that she started her Separate struggle all alone and withstood it throughout the years dependent on her abilities and willpower alone.

When she enters a village in the Nellai district everyone looks upon her as a respectful mother goddess. Her age has not hindered her from running her race in life. She still has so many plans to be implemented for the betterment of the poor. She promises to struggle for the betterment of the poor until her last breath.

If a woman of traditional and patriarchal society could be so assertive, how come some women in the present days, when most women have the opportunity for education and to maintain a better profile than men in their households, are not so assertive or revolutionary? This makes one wonder whether education and awareness about the legal rights alone could provoke the spirit for freedom within a woman, or is it something else that could make a woman become aware of her ability to revolutionise society and question the accepted norms of society.

Accki is No More



Accki who was with us at WERC for nearly ten years passed away in December 2004 - the Vet told us that her growth was malignant but the end came too suddenly. Chandrasena, our office assistant who fathers her, feeds her and takes her to the vet, on a Sunday morning came to announce

Accki's death with sobs and tears. She had passed away in her sleep. I went to bid farewell to her, and then she was buried.

She together with her mother Wercie was the watcher at WERC. Accki was very intelligent and humane and was mischievous too. If there was a delay in giving her the share of the cakes and pastries that are often served in office, Accki takes the liberty and walks into my room and stays near my table. That is the way she complains and I can easily find out her grievances. When we feed her and if her mother Wercie was missing we had to only tell her "go and bring Wercie", and Wercie comes up the stairway in a minute. Accki is a good communicator. Ramaiah who doesn't like dogs used to be harsh on them. Accki walks into my room and I could immediately know the reason, because Ramaiah walks behind Accki to apologise. We all miss Accki's presence, her walking and her barking. Accki is very class conscious, and that is how she differs from Wercie. She would always want to sleep on a carpet, and protests if it is removed, but Wercie sleeps anywhere. When men and women walk into WERC with dishevelled hair, in dirty clothes or folded-up sarongs, Accki barks louder and chases them away, but not the strangers who are well dressed and well groomed!

We wish Accki to be reborn - if there is rebirth - into a family of dog-lovers.

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Calling for Volunteers for Tsunami Projects

Anyone interested in contributing voluntary service for the Tsunami victims are asked to forward their applications to Ms. Marini de Livera, WERC, 58, Dharmarama Road, Colombo 06. For further information call Marini at 011-2595296. It is essential for the applicants to be fluent in either Sinhala or Tamil. Fluency in both the local languages would be an added advantage. The service provided by you would be entirely on voluntary basis.

An African American Revolutionary Poetess of the 19th Century

Here is a poem by a Black American poetess expressing or rather demanding the society why she and women like her are not treated the way the White women are treated, or at least as human beings. It is indeed fascinating to see how advanced she is, for her time, in her views about women's rights. A twentieth century Tamil poet says that women would never win equal status with men until they see women's rights as separate from human rights. Here is a lady who had a similar view, at a time of slavery!

Ain't I a Woman

That man over there say
a woman needs to be helped into carriages
and lifted over ditches
and to have the best place everywhere.
Nobody ever helped me into carriages
or over mud puddles
or give me the best place...

And ain't I a woman?

Look at me

Look at my arm!

I have plowed & planted
and gathered into barns
and no man could head me....

And ain't I a woman?

I could work as much
and eat as much as a man -
when I could get to it -
and bare the lash as well.

And ain't I a woman?

I have borne 13 children
and seen most all sold into slavery
and when I cried out a mother's grief
none but Jesus heard me...

And ain't I a woman?

That little man in black there say
a woman can't have as much rights
as a man

cause Christ wasn't a woman!

Where did your Christ come from?

From God & a woman!

Man had nothing to do with him!

If the first woman God ever made
was strong enough to turn the world
upside down, all alone

together women ought to be able to turn it
rightside up again.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883)



LIBRARY NEW ARRIVALS

1. Storylines: conversations with women writers, ed. by Ammu Joseph & others. (Hyderabad: Asmita Resource Centre for Women, 2003)

The interviews in this volume are the outcome of a series of workshops held with women-writers during 1999 to 2001, on the question of gender-based censorship and related issues. The writers in the anthology are among the best known and best loved writers in India.

2. Between Tradition counter Tradition and Heresy, ed. by Lotika Sarkai & others. (Delhi: Rainbow Publishers, 2002)

The seriously diverse collection of papers address issues such as legacies and features of women's studies, a theory of grassroots feminism, politics and practices within the family, kinship networks, marriage and motherhood and ideologies that shape women's worlds.

3. Exploring Confrontation: Sri Lanka Politics, Culture and History, by Michael Roberts. (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994)

This book is replete with rich ethnographic detail and serves as an exercise in historical anthropology, which illuminates Sri Lanka's political culture.

4. Gender and Caste: Issues in Contemporary Indian Feminism, Vol. 1, ed. by Anupama Rao. (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2003)

This volume constructs an archive of writing relating to gender issues in India, and makes an important contribution to contemporary feminist theory.

5. Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing theory Practicing Solidarity, by Chandra T. Mohanty. (New Delhi: Zubaan an associate of Kali for Women, 2003)

The author here offers a sustained critique of globalisation and images a reorientation of transnational feminist practice towards anticapitalist struggles

6. Recovering Subversion: Feminist Politics Beyond the Law, by Nivedika Menon. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004)

This book makes an argument about law and feminist politics. It is interdisciplinary in scope, straddling feminist and critical legal studies, political science and vanguardist theory.

7. Queer: Despised Sexuality, Law and Social Change, by Arvind Narrain. (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2004)

This is an inaugural monograph based on the belief that the struggle for a better world for queer people has to be based not just on questioning the larger frameworks of legal injustice, state intolerance and social indifference, but also questioning and challenging ignorance, misconceptions and hatred in our families, our schools and college and our places of work.

8. Inside an Elusive Mind Prabhakaran, by M.R. Narayana Swamy. (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Publications, 2004)

Written in a laced style the book is an illustration of resource and meticulous researches. It is a valuable reference book for the understanding of Sri Lankan politics and secessionist politics in South Asia. The author brings out all the real-life drama through this meticulously researched and lucidly written book.

9. Women in Panchayati Raj, ed. by Embrase Pinto & Helarnk Reiffeld. (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2001)

This book deals with women's role and empowerment, especially in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The book is the outcome of a two-day seminar (27th & 28th of April 2000) held at the Indian Social Institute in New Delhi. The articulations of issues by affected women representatives in Panchayati Institutions have had impacts on their role in both private and public sphere.

Women are no more to be preyed upon

[Naabarkovil, India]

On Thursday the 24th of February 2005, a female soldier from the Palali Army Camp had taken a night bus from Anuradhapura to come to Colombo. The bus had reached Colombo the next day by 4:30a.m, since there were no buses to Bambalapitiya at that time she had been advised by the driver and conductor to stay in the bus until it was time. She had taken the advice and stayed in the bus. She had dozed off while waiting in the bus. The driver and the conductor had locked all the doors and tried to rape her, trying to use the opportunity for their advantage. The woman immediately proved to them that she was not the usual type to be preyed upon. She had violently attacked them (she had even bitten their ears and face). The commotion and their screams had gathered a crowd around the bus. Then with the help of the people she had taken the two culprits to the Police. Now the two culprits have been admitted to hospital with police security.

In the Tsunami affected Kumari District of India, thousands of rope makers, seashell-sellers and limestone labourers of 14 fishing villages were also affected. Thus the Central Government had decided to provide them relief. However the relief Funds had not reached the really affected victims of Tsunami, T.M.K. is accused of having distributed the relief funds among those known to them. On the 26th of February 2005, the Area Minister and Collector had attended an Opening Ceremony in a close by town. 200 women, from various fishing villages involved in rope-making, seashell industry and limestone industry, with their babies had surrounded the Minister and Collector demanding for their rightful share of the relief support. When the Minister and the Collector asked them whether they hadn't got the relief support they were allocated with, the women had raised a loud uproar. The two officials had slipped into the government office nearby to escape the angry mob. Then the women had blocked the entrance of the office saying that they would not let the officials leave until they gave a proper solution for their demands. Then the officials were compelled to face these people and own-up their mistake.

While men had not had the courage to protest for the injustice done to them, it is indeed glorious to see women to have taken the courage and lead, to demand for their rightful share in such a powerful manner. These women have actually set an example for Men, and have led the way for men: This is a new trend indeed. What is the moral of these two events, which have made news? Both these incidents touch upon the issue of violence in varied levels and significance. This begs the question whether women are taking to violence and could the answer to this be given through another question – are women compelled to, under the circumstances, regress to violence to protect their dignity and rights from being violated, ignored and despised. This brings to what Mahatma Gandhi, apostle of non-violence, had to say about how women can use their teeth and nails to bite and scratch to attack the offenders who attempt to rape them. Yet, somehow we feel uncomfortable with the violence whether perpetrated by men or women.

Activities at WERC

Sinhala Conference

10th and 11th of March were special days for the WERC staff; they were all very busy with the Annual Sinhala conference. The theme of the conference was "Women's Contribution to Sinhala Cultural Productions." Ten specialists presented papers at this occasion these presentations covered a variety of areas to which women had contributed to, areas such as cinema, drama, lyrics etc. the discussions that followed the presentations were very interesting. To put it short, the resource persons made this occasion a very special one, for all present.

Our Volunteer Zarah Speaks about her experience



I might be the first volunteer working here on a one-year contract. Half my contract period is nearly over. The last six months was one of the most exciting experiences in my life and so far I

learned so much about another culture, about social issues concerning especially women and last but not least I learned much about myself.

Although I'm very young, I was given responsibilities this made me feel that I was not here just doing something to keep me occupied. However this was the feeling expressed by most of the volunteers in other organizations.

In Sri Lanka Women Movements are very visible and active. Women Activists don't have to hide. They are proud to be Women.

My experience through attending the workshops WERC conducted was that men here are really interested in what the women have to say about gender equality, and that they are willing to change their thinking and their attitude if you tell them about the gender concept.

The WERC Staff is really like a second family for me and I feel very comfortable at work.

A Talk on Ethnicity, Race and Nationalism by Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran

This talk attempted to decipher and deconstruct terms such as Race, Ethnicity and Nationalism which have often been misinterpreted and misused throughout the past decades for narrow political gain. Making these concepts clear also involved drawing attention towards the myths behind most of these concepts.

International Conferences Attended by WERC Staff Members

49th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women - At Beijing +10 - Review Conference in New York 2005

Our Executive Director Dr. Selvy Thiruchandran took part in this conference. And she submitted a paper on "Genesis of Violence the case of Trafficking of Women in Sri Lanka"

Ecclesia of Women in Asia (EWA) 2004 Annual Conference held in Indonesia

Our Senior Project Coordinator Marini de Livera represented Sri Lanka, and Women's Education and Research Centre (WERC) at this conference.

Staff Trip to Trivandram, India

Members of the staff made a three-day trip to Trivandrum on the 16th of January 2005. They visited bazaars and shopping arcades, and made interesting purchases - garments, handicrafts and books for the library.

WERC representatives also visited Sakhi - a Women's organisation in Trivandrum. Sakhi means 'friend.' The Executive Director and the members of staff realised that WERC had a lot in common with Sakhi, one of the common features being the well-equipped Resource centre. This Resource Centre also disseminates important policies and documents of international and national importance to women's groups in local language. Although WERC was born long before Sakhi, which is a relatively young organisation born in 1996, this opportunity of meeting and interacting with staff members of Sakhi opened new avenues in the form of ideas and concepts for the future projects of WERC. It appeared that Sakhi was an Indian version of WERC

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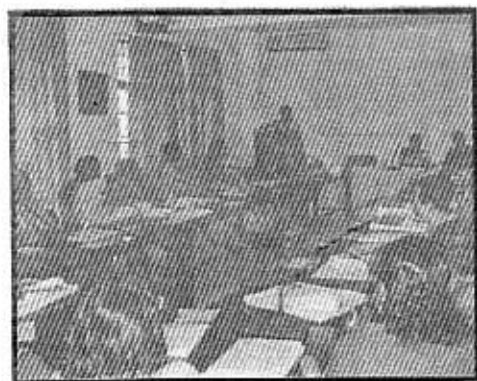


South Asian Feminist Research Association: Conference

SAFRA Conference for Year 2004 was held at the WERC Auditorium. The theme of the conference was "Shrinking Space and Growing Threats - Problems with Post-Feminism"

Delegates from different South Asian Countries were present at this occasion. Representatives from the different countries presented their papers on this theme. This conference went on for three days - 4th, 5th, & 6th of November 2004.

The last day's session ended with a play depicting gender-based violence in Sri Lanka, performed by some young talented School children.



CAA Gender Sensitisation Workshops

These workshops have been conducted for people from different sectors. So far WERC has conducted Gender Sensitisation Workshops for Lawyers, Teachers, Male NGO Personnel, Police Officers and School Prefects.

The topics covered in these workshops were as follows,

Concepts of Gender, Gender Based Violence, Women and Media, Domestic Violence Bill

WERC is looking forward to conducting more awareness programmes like this.

Sinhala/Tamil Women's Studies Course

WERC has designed a 4 months certificate course in Women's Studies combining both theory and activism training a comprehensive strategy for social transformation. The course will be conducted in both Sinhala and Tamil medium. The Sinhala medium course has been planned for mid 2005. And the Tamil medium course has been planned for the end of 2005. The course comprises of three months course work followed by one month of research paper writing.

For further details contact
Chandani at 2595296

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