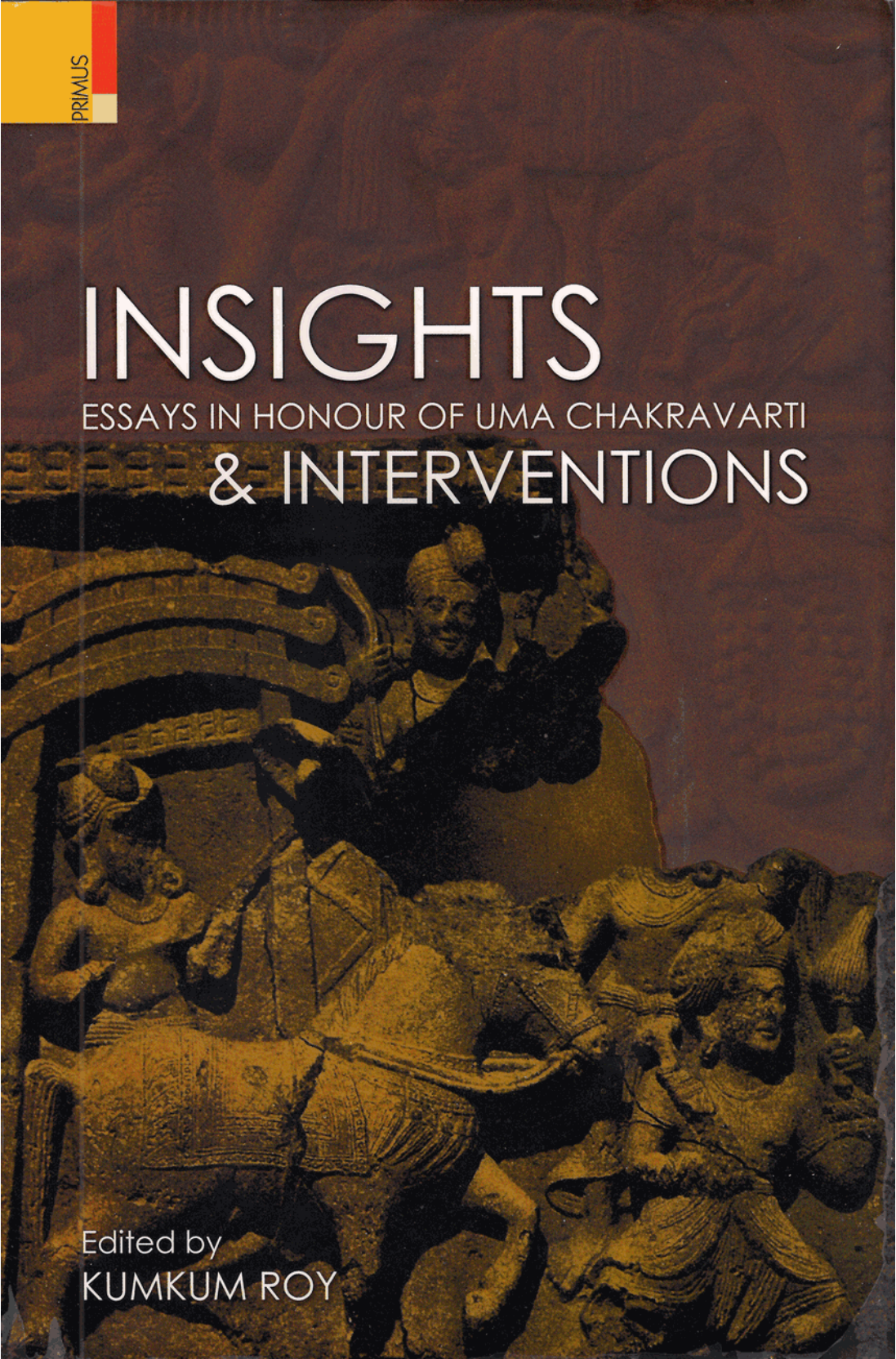


# INSIGHTS

ESSAYS IN HONOUR OF UMA CHAKRAVARTI  
& INTERVENTIONS

Edited by  
KUMKUM ROY



INSIGHTS  
—— and ——  
INTERVENTIONS  
*Essays in Honour of Uma Chakravarti*

*edited by*  
KUMKUM ROY



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SHARMILA REGE



*Women's Studies Since the 1990s:  
Mapping New Conjunctures,  
Challenges and Strategies*

WRITING IN HONOUR of Uma Chakravarti whose academic and political work spans several themes and decades is a daunting task. With her uncompromising political stands and integrity, Uma has influenced over three generations of students and researchers to think critically and make ideas relevant for democratic politics. Her critical and sustained engagement with Buddhism, the burdens of nationalism, the post-colonial Indian state, the relational nature of gender to caste and community, among many other themes, has pushed feminist activism and scholarship in India to debate its compulsions and challenges. My association with Uma began over a decade ago, when she accepted an invitation to be a 'resource person' for a refresher course organized by the Women's Studies Centre at the University of Pune. In more ways than we had then imagined, Uma has come to be an important personal and institutional 'resource'; most significantly for sustained dialogues and debates on gendering caste, casting gender and the pains and pleasures of the institutionalization of women's studies. In this essay, I have chosen to focus on the practice of women's studies in University Grants Commission (UGC)-sponsored Women's Studies Centres; a topic that may seem too narrow in the context of Uma's much broader and significant body of work. However, this essay is written in appreciation of the political energy she brings to the Indian Association of Women's Studies, as also a self reflexive response to Uma's provocative remark<sup>1</sup> about some of the most interesting work produced

by feminist scholars being independent of formal women's studies centres.

In mapping the formation of women's studies in India, Desai, Mazumdar and Bhansali<sup>2</sup> underline the demands for education as a necessity for women in the nineteenth century and the recognition of women's studies as a critical instrument to transform the educational process in the late twentieth century as two significant historical moments. They mark the emergence of women's studies as a shift from women's education as a social reform of women's status and Indian tradition to women's lives and experiences as legitimate areas of academic concerns, especially in relation to poor and uneducated women.<sup>3</sup> Feminist scholars documenting the long and protracted struggle for legitimacy for women's studies have detailed the legacies, perspectives, challenges as also a complex relation of women's studies with the state, disciplinary regimes and academia.<sup>4</sup>

Feminist scholarship since the 1980s which emphasized the contradictions of colonial law, social reform and nationalism thankfully rendered as problematic any possible attempts to equate the public debates on the status of women in colonial India with proto-women's studies.<sup>5</sup> Since the 1990s, Dalit Bahujan scholarship which foregrounded caste to dismantle assumptions of the nation opened up the history of colonial and post-colonial periods to new scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> Dalit feminism further problematized the historically placed opposition between the rights of women and those of the Backward Castes and Minorities and thereafter inaugurated new lines of inquiry. This has wedged open diverse and divergent histories of the language of rights and equality for women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the legacy of anti-caste feminisms in India.<sup>7</sup> Hence, it is important to understand that though the formation of a new field of knowledge with the name women's studies is clearly traced back to the mid-1970s, new routes and roots of knowledge about and by women are still being 'discovered'.

### *Doing Women's Studies: Impossibility of Neat Descriptions and Definitions*

Despite women's studies as a field having a clearly traceable history of over three decades,<sup>8</sup> the term 'women's studies' continues to garner

varied responses from different constituencies. Women's studies practitioners often find themselves explaining to local administrative and academic bodies in their universities as well as committees of the National Accreditation Council that women's studies is not an 'outreach' programme but an academic programme of the university. On the other hand, prospective students are introduced to women's studies as being more than 'just another academic discipline'; by way of dealing with expectations of the women's studies classroom being a 'speak out' space or a programme for 'finding solutions to women's problems' and ensuring academic rigour. While on the one hand, women's studies practitioners need to prove that they are 'academic enough' to the academic community, on the other, they may face criticisms for becoming 'too academic' and forgetting their roots in the women's movement. This ambiguity of identity within the academia is probably most felt by students registered in full-time degree programmes in women's studies. Many of them report that in the absence of any immediate recognition of their field of study from peers they tend to become apologetic, defensive or aggressive in introducing themselves on campus as students of women's studies. This brings us back to the basic question of what is women's studies? For whom is it? Can there be degree programmes in women's studies? Following Mary John<sup>9</sup> it may be argued that the impossibility of any straightforward answers to these questions lies in the very making of women's studies in India.

The last decade, with its peculiar patterns of expansion of women's studies, sites and modes of practice has further complicated matters thereby making difficult a simple map of what in disciplinary regimes is called the 'nature and scope of the subject and its relation to other disciplines'. This has propelled varied inquiries into the formation of the field and almost three decades after women's studies was so named, we have a collection of essays from women's studies centres inside and outside the university and individual scholars on the formation of women's studies.<sup>10</sup> More recently, the first reader on women's studies in India mapping the diversity and transformations in the field came to be published.<sup>11</sup> These accounts locate the beginnings of the field of women's studies in India within the growing economic and political crisis of the nation state and the mass struggles and agitations of the late 1960s and 1970s in which women participated in great numbers and with militancy.<sup>12</sup> Narratives of the formation of



the field emphasize the importance of the report of the Committee on Status of Women set up by the Government of India in 1971 to give a comprehensive review of the rights and status of women in the formation of the field. Thus, the emergence of women's studies in times of suspension of democratic rights and the declaration of political emergency in 1975, practices of the newly-emergent women's movement and the State-sponsored report that was to recommend the actions to be taken for full participation of women in nation-building poses a complex picture. It may be argued that in subsequent years, while the complicated relation of the field with the State became a matter of sustained interrogations and reflections, the relation with the movement often came to be assumed as an inheritance.

The naming of women's studies as Mary John reminds us had taken place in 1974 in SNDT, a women's university in Mumbai (then Bombay), before the new women's movement had gained public recognition.<sup>13</sup> In 1975, as democratic rights came to be suspended with the declaration of political emergency, ironically the repressive State sent the 'Towards Equality' report to the United Nations meet and in the same year sponsored through the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), the apex body for research in social sciences, a women's studies programme. This State sponsorship of women's studies may be located in the nationalist legacy that tied the question of status of women firmly to nation-building, thus rendering it as a 'safer' question as against the 'more threatening' questions of caste and minorities that interrogated the nation. The vehement opposition of the State to the participation of Dalits in the UN Conference against Racism at Durban and thus to the internationalization of the caste question as against its promotion of the internationalization of women's issues on the UN platform is a case in point.<sup>14</sup> Women's studies though viewed by the State as a safer option, too came to be shaped through the subversive practices of the first generation of women's studies that recognized that the political implications of the field would not be immediately understood.<sup>15</sup>

Women's studies, by opening up the personal as political, changed the object of study in a theoretical and practical way and radically expanded the notion of power, bringing questions of gender and sexuality as central to the understanding of power itself. Most existing accounts of the definitive history of women's studies rarely ever discuss the exclusions in the formation of the field. The nation state

was a significant addressee for the emergent field of women's studies and while the critique of the nation was central to its formation, this critique was in many ways still part of the political and cultural logic of the national-modern.<sup>16</sup> In fact the disavowal of caste, community, ethnic, regional and linguistic difference was crucial in the expansion of women's studies as a 'universal-modern' field of inquiry. The political events of the 1990s such as the anti-Mandal agitation, the rise of right-wing Hindu politics, the 'silent revolution' of Dalit Bahujan politics in north India and the emergence of a new wave of Dalit feminist politics combined with the drive to privatize and liberalize the Indian economy, disrupted the narratives of the national-modern, posing challenges for a singular subject of women's movement and studies.<sup>17</sup> Feminist interrogations of nationalism and social reform, State policies for development and empowerment of women and more recently of the assumptions of the national-modern have meant that the complex relation between women's studies and the State came under greater scrutiny than the relation between the women's movement and women's studies.

On the relation between women's studies and the women's movement there are polarized views either about women's studies being an intellectual arm of the women's movement or criticism about the growing distance of women's studies from the women's movement. Many of the first generation women's studies practitioners had traversed the two worlds with greater ease—organized several seminars and workshops in collaboration with women's groups and students and teachers were involved more directly in campaigns of the movement. We have now come to recognize that the women's movement itself was/is constituted by varied groups of women in Left party-based organizations, mass movements, anti-caste struggles, autonomous women's organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in dialogue and discord with each other. Many of these groups also came to be involved in research, documentation and training. This calls for more specific inquiry across different regions on the areas/lines of influence direct and indirect, the overlap of themes and concerns, points of divergence and convergence between women's movement and studies. Women's studies no doubt emerged through an interrogation of the canonical opposition between 'scholarship' and 'commitment'; however like all inheritances, much about this inherited relationship has come to be assumed and

discussions on the matter are by far few. To begin with, it might be useful to ask what multiple locations of doing women's studies are produced by the complex relation between the State, women's studies and movements. What is recognized as women's studies today is constituted by multiple sites which include at least the following:

- Individual scholars outside the academy and those located within disciplines in the academy;
- Women's studies centres attached to the University, funded by the UGC;
- Women's Studies Research Institutes being supported by grants from the ICSSR;
- Women's organizations such as non-governmental registered societies, or a department of Central Government, or State Government for specialist sectors;
- Grass roots organizations as well as feminist resource centres which develop their funding base through projects which are commissioned by a broad spectrum of agencies, government, corporate, financial institutions as well as international donors.

The first anthology mapping the field of women's studies in India in bringing together a gamut of research essays, commentaries, and manifestos bears witness to the pulls and pressures of that constitute the field.<sup>18</sup> Thus, women's studies as a field defies any neat categorization into disciplines or themes and is practised in varied modes and on multiple sites. In this essay, I shall focus only on one such site—the women's studies centres sponsored by the UGC; not least because of familiarity and one's experience of doing women's studies in one such centre for over a decade and a half but more because these centres bring to the fore a peculiar pattern of expansion of women's studies in higher education.

### *Women's Studies in UGC-Sponsored Centres: A Peculiar Expansion*

The first women's studies conference organized at SNDT in 1981 remains a crucial landmark in the history of women's studies in higher

education. Madhuriben Shah, then Chairperson of UGC played an active role in this conference, following it up with letters to universities across India to incorporate women's studies in their programmes. Taking note of the dismal response to the proposal, she commented that a broad-based movement within the higher education system was required. This came with the 1986 National Education Policy, which, along with education for women's equality and empowerment, referred specifically to women's studies.<sup>19</sup> Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) came to be established in the university system by the UGC in the eighth, ninth, tenth and eleventh five-year plans. Starting with four centres in the eighth plan, currently in the eleventh plan period there are more than 130 WSCs established in various universities and colleges, thus presenting a peculiar case of institutional expansion of women's studies in higher education.

What makes the expansion a 'women's studies in the educational system' a 'peculiar' one? A review of the documented history of the institutionalization of women's studies reveals that out of the total 17 'narratives from the women's studies family' documented in the Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput co-edited volume, 11 narratives are from the UGC sponsored WSCs,<sup>20</sup> while in the first women's studies reader which comprehensively maps the field,<sup>21</sup> out of the 84 selections only 4 are from contributors located in UGC-sponsored WSCs and three of these are essays belonging to the founding moments of the 1980s. What does this huge gap in the representation of UGC-sponsored WSCs in 'institutional histories' and 'intellectual-political histories' of women's studies in India suggest? It may be argued that though UGC-sponsored WSCs have emerged as an important site of bringing visibility to women's studies in higher education, there may be a serious disjunct between women's studies as an intellectual-political project and the institutional expansion of women's studies in higher education. As mentioned earlier, Uma Chakravarti's remark that some of the most interesting work produced by feminist scholars has been independent of formal women's studies centres needs to be considered in a reflexive mode, at least by those located in UGC-sponsored WSCs.

In 1985 the UGC, Indian Association of Women's Studies (IAWS) and University of Delhi organized a seminar on the organization of women's studies units in Indian universities. The

deliberations of this seminar went into the making of the first guidelines for women's studies in universities. The first UGC guidelines for women's studies framed in 1986 envisioned women's studies as providing a perspective at all levels and all disciplines, engaging in the combination of research, extension and teaching and playing an 'interventionist role' within and beyond the university. The guidelines in the subsequent five year plans continued to make it imperative for WSCs to organize their activities under teaching/training, research, extension activities, dissemination through library acquisition, documentation and publication and advocacy on public and policy related issues. The infrastructural support for this multidimensional programme has been small and project-based, often dependent on evaluations of WSCs undertaken at the end of each five year plan. While this kind of institutional support by a State body is unique, the rationale for expansion and review has not always been explicitly stated. For instance, the review committee set up in 1991 did not spell out what constituted good performance and proceeded to suggest the strengthening of 'performing centres' and closure of those that had 'failed'. Following protest, the report was revised and new committees visited the 'failed' centres and made new recommendations.

The last decade for the UGCs centres is marked by two significant events; a democratization of the process of drawing up and implementing the guidelines in the ninth plan and a contradictory move in the tenth plan to rename women's studies as family studies. The ninth plan guidelines were significant in that there was an entire section on the role that the university was expected to play in social transformation. Moreover, the guidelines were formulated in dialogue with directors of the centres thereby factoring in greater flexibility of financial matters and measures to ensure accountability and quality through a phasing approach. Most importantly, it suggested a networking and clustering between centres, colleges, NGOs and grass roots women's organizations. The tenth plan guidelines that came in 2003 built in centralization and control by State agencies and called for a more practical approach as against academic endeavour. In a major restructuring, women's studies came to be assigned to the non-formal education sector. Thereafter, a large part of the grant given to WSCs was assigned to community action. The same plan period also witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of cells in colleges.

In 2003 the UGC attempted to rename women's studies as Women and Family Studies—a move which was silenced by letters of protest from IAWS, individual scholars and some WSCs. This among other issues had generated enough controversy during the tenth plan period, such that the Human Resource Development Ministry under the newly-elected UPA government appointed an Empowered Standing Committee under the chairpersonship of Vina Mazumdar to review the state of WSCs. The Committee organized five regional workshops during 2006–7, inviting all UGC-sponsored WSCs and submitted a status report and new guidelines for women's studies in the eleventh plan. The eleventh plan guidelines largely drew upon the ninth plan guidelines but initiated a new focus on teaching programmes. It stated that women's studies was now a recognizable body of knowledge built upon interdisciplinary research, carrying the implicit responsibility of transforming disciplines not only in the humanities and social sciences but in science and technology as well.

The UGC centres by their sheer number and persistence over the last several five year plan periods have become an important site, such that the future of women's studies in India has become in many ways tied to the practice of women's studies in these centres. Understandably, most of the available narratives of doing women's studies from the UGC centres produce a critique of the irregularity of funding, temporariness of teaching and staff positions, and neglect by their own university and state governments in matters of concurrence. Many of such *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*<sup>22</sup> give a rich description of the ridicule, reluctance and refusal by local university bodies and the ways in which these barriers were overcome and provide insight into the ways in which the problem of the absence of women in higher education came to be named in specific contexts. Most narratives highlight the moment of founding, exemplary leadership, problems faced and overcome by individuals or teams. The editors of the *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family* in presenting a rationale for calling the network of centres a family, despite the culture of inequality associated with the family, argue that they see the WSCs as building a new kind of kinship. As is true of most kinship narratives, those from the WSC kinship network too tend to underscore sacrifice while maintaining silence on the messiness of kinship ties, the generational tensions and more. While these narratives

are no doubt inspiring, they reveal little about the macro and micro politics of women's studies in higher education. For instance, what within the given structures of higher education became enabling and constraining to women's studies? How did the women's studies perspective mould influence, networks, and coalitions, political and personal strategies for effecting or resisting change? Moreover, how did the divergences and convergences between UGC guidelines for women's studies and local university policies enable and restrict women's studies in specific contexts?

While acknowledging debt to the founding moment is significant for the WSCs, the constant comparisons with the 'golden age of founding' have often been at the cost of engagement with the 'contemporary', be it the changing meanings of feminism, the diverse maps of the women's movements or the changing policies of higher education. We need to recognize that the hyper visibility of 'women' in the media and the multiple worlds of studying women have meant that WSCs may not seem any longer as doing something new. Further, the expectations of multiple programmes, minimal and temporary institutional support and evaluations by the UGC have led to poor networking among the centres and the imagined family of WSCs has rarely collectively engaged with understanding and disrupting the codes of its 'dwelling'—the policy and practices of higher education in India. What happens when WSCs participate in institutions of higher learning and expand under conditions of real marginality? Does this institutional expansion become in some ways disjunct from women's studies as a political-intellectual project which has a certain weight and stability in academic life?

*Teaching to Stabilize Gender:  
Disjunction between Intellectual-Political  
and Institutional Expansion*

Most WSCs in keeping with the guidelines of the UGC broadly organized their activities into teaching, research, documentation and extension and field action programmes. A review of the reports of programmes and vision documents drawn up by the WSCs suggests that, WSCs have charted out, not always consciously, varied patterns

of development of women's studies within the universities and the colleges. In the 1980s and 1990s most of the WSCs pursuing the founding mandate of Women's Studies as a 'perspective' pursued varied combinations of research, documentation, extension and field-based activities. If one reviews the extension programmes undertaken by the Centres—extension often stands for extra-mural training programmes meant for various community target groups such as women in panchayats, women in slums, and field action for diverse programmes undertaken often in collaboration with local NGOs.

We have only recently begun to map how despite uniform guidelines by the UGC, the WSCs have followed very diverse and uneven paths. The WSCs that were initiated in the 1980s and early 1990s generally have a history of founding directors with some level of involvement in women's issues and democratic movements. The specific histories of these centres came to be shaped by this involvement, the disciplinary engagements of the director and research staff and the level of university support. Until the last decade, most of these WSCs following the dictum that 'women's studies is a perspective' largely focused on research, documentation and extension work. Some WSCs, most often those located within or having directors from mainstream departments started early with optional courses on women/gender in the disciplines. The earliest teaching programmes in women's studies were certificates/diplomas/refresher courses and can be traced back to the mid 1990s. Many of the new WSCs that emerged after the mid 1990s had no or little history of engagement with the women's movement. In many such cases, individual WSCs framed the UGC guidelines on extension and community action clearly within the State Policy for Empowerment of Women, self help groups, private donors and international agencies.

In the 1990s the demolition of the Babri Masjid, implementation of the Mandal Commission Report followed by violent elite caste revolts, liberalization and privatization of the Indian economy posed serious challenges to a theory of gender in India.<sup>23</sup> The aftermath of Mandal and Dalit feminist assertions of the 1990s saw some attempts at revisioning histories of feminism. Feminist scholars felt the imperative to engender histories of caste, in the process conceptualizing the specific structures and practices of brahmanical patriarchy and surveillance in India.<sup>24</sup> Thus gender analysis sought to unravel ways



in which women are constituted as both victims and agents of communal and caste violence and map the gendered strategies of violence. There were a series of studies on the 'effects of globalization' and diverse feminist responses to 'globalization' emerging from conflicting political positions and deeper differences on the conceptualization of globalization.<sup>25</sup> Feminists engaged thus, albeit in diverse ways, with caste and religion, with the global economic integration, the repressive State whether in Kashmir or the North-East or in its conflict with the dispossessed and new political assertions on alternative sexuality and disabilities. Thus a review of the feminist intellectual project in the last decade and a half suggests intensified and enriching connections between the feminist intellectual and political project.

If we review the engagement of the WSCs with this conjuncture, largely through the prism of themes of research projects undertaken and seminars organized by the UGC-sponsored WSCs, it is apparent that caste and communalism were rarely researched and debated, while gender and globalization and empowerment of women became catchwords in research and seminar proposals. As feminist scholarship debated fracturing of gender along the lines of caste for the Women's Reservation Bill, most centres in one way or the other were involved with conducting training programmes that unproblematically operationalized the category 'woman' in the training of elected women representatives. Several workshops and projects on HIV-AIDS were undertaken with no reference to questions of sexuality.<sup>26</sup> The National Policy for Empowerment of Women argues for 'mainstreaming gender in the development process' and views globalization as a 'new challenge for realization of women's equality' stating the problem as one of 'uneven benefits of the global economy been unevenly distributed'.<sup>27</sup> As empowerment became a catchword, contrary to the feminist critique, increasing number of WSCs organized micro-credit groups and women entrepreneurship development programmes neatly fitting them into the UGC guidelines for extension and advocacy. On the one hand, the 1990s politics of caste destabilized 'woman' as the subject of feminist politics and the assumed commonality of the female experience and the politics of sexuality threw into disarray assumptions of gender-coded bodies and normative heterosociality, thus expanding the possibilities of gender as an analytical category.

On the other hand, within the WSCs gender came to be largely attached to development through international bodies and the governmentalizing drive of the State, thereby stabilizing it as a synonym for women.<sup>28</sup> The agendas of the feminist-intellectual project and the seminar, research and extension programmes of the expanding WSCs often seem to be running along parallel paths. In the last couple of years, this disjunction is becoming most apparent in the ever-expanding teaching programmes in women's studies which threaten to multiply the sites of reproduction of gender as a frozen or at best a descriptive category.

A two-day national workshop organized by the Women's Studies Programme of Jawaharlal Nehru University in March 2004 foregrounded certain crucial questions emerging from the growing number of teaching programmes on women/gender and highlighted the significance of developing critical pedagogies. Bringing together teachers, researchers, students, activists and policy-makers, the workshop enabled sharing of a wide range of experiences from schools, colleges, autonomous centres and universities. Among other issues the workshop highlighted how most women's studies courses remained optional, the gap that students experienced between the claims of women's studies and the actual course content and the difficulties in demarcating the distinctiveness of women's studies from other studies on women. It was argued that the subject of 'gender and women' was relegated to select women faculty and that these faculty members too often had to struggle to engender a critical and rigorous attitude amongst students when they opt for gender as a subject of research. Faculty members from metropolitan colleges complained of resistance among students to theories like Marxism or issues like caste, and the inability to touch students' lives beyond the classroom. There was an agreement on there being a backlash of sorts due to the media generated perception among urban classes that women have been given their due.<sup>29</sup>

Research on women's studies in numerous universities and colleges in Tamilnadu, both state-funded and private undertaken during the same period reported that several WSCs and women's studies cells in colleges sought practical relevance by offering degrees such as 'women's studies and computer applications', or teach women's studies within the ambit of 'value education'.<sup>30</sup> Certain WSCs reported the threats

of de-radicalization in the context of Hindutva politics and the new sources of gender legitimacy deriving from the development sector.

A review of curricula, more specifically of teaching programmes floated by more than 30 UGC-sponsored WSCs undertaken in 2010,<sup>31</sup> revealed that more than 70 per cent of the curricula did not draw even a single reading from feminist research, 10 per cent of the courses drew upon feminist texts, referring to Western feminist texts for theory courses, and completely excluding feminist scholarship in India. Women and technology, entrepreneurship development and computer applications, women and governance, self help groups and legal literacy constituted an important part of the curricula. In the absence of any networking among centres and any sustained combined efforts in curriculum development there is clearly an arbitrary borrowing of courses and reading lists across centres. It was apparent that after almost two decades of recognition of women's studies as a significant interdisciplinary field of research, teaching programmes in women's studies were mushrooming as were courses on women/gender within the traditional social science disciplines and humanities courses. Newer interdisciplinary fields like Cultural Studies and Dalit Studies were also drawing from the perspectives of women's studies, while not always recognizing them as such. Thus, on the one hand, the gains both substantive and methodological of the political-intellectual project of women's studies are being diffused in their circulation within the academia, on the other hand, the expansion of women's studies through curricular initiatives in the field proceed as if in disjunction from women's studies as an intellectual-political project. This among other developments led the UGC in 2010, to intervene through the formation of a Curriculum Development Committee to review curricula and pedagogical practices and recommend a broad structure and content of courses in women's studies.

### *Teaching Programmes in Women's Studies: New Conjunctures and Challenges*

The developments of the last two decades have led to curriculum development in women's studies becoming a critical area that merits focused attention. The UGC in its guidelines to WSCs in the eleventh plan spells out in detail the mandate for teaching and training.<sup>32</sup>

Significantly these guidelines made room for WSCs with diverse histories to chart different paths and make development of reading material an integral part of the curriculum development initiative. The approach paper to the eleventh plan guidelines clearly notes that the current configuration of the centres is such that there are differences amongst the WSCs in their age, skills, location within the university in terms of the university's own priorities as well as in leadership. It suggests that attempts be made to even out the differences in capacity to perform and to have the centres identify their roles and choose their priority area. While proposing that support be given to strengthen and sustain the university-based WSCs by establishing them as statutory departments in the university system, it is suggested that there be more networking with other constituents of women's studies to facilitate their own capacity such that they are mutually reinforcing. The guidelines spell out the possibilities for undergraduate, postgraduate research degrees, core courses in science, agriculture, and technology programmes, certificate and diploma programmes in women's studies. As a follow-up action on the guidelines, the UGC Standing Committee on Women's Studies in 2009 suggested that a Curriculum Development Committee drawn from feminist scholars and members of the IAWS be appointed to periodically undertake reviews of curricula and pedagogical practices and recommend a broad structure and content of courses. As is the UGC practice, the course structures recommended by the Committees would be published by the UGC and would serve as broad guidelines for Boards of Studies and other academic bodies within the university system. This is a significant institutional intervention and subcommittees are at present working out curricula in women's studies at the undergraduate and postgraduate level and would later undertake an exercise in reviewing the women/gender courses within the disciplines.

The UGC Standing Committee in the note circulated at the first meeting of the Curriculum Development Committee outlined the following issues as needing deliberation:

- (a) In the early 1990s, only a few WSCs had floated certificate and diploma courses and conducted various short-term training programmes. There were even fewer institutional initiatives to introduce women's studies perspectives in various disciplines through joint courses or programmes. Some WSCs

were able to host students working towards M.Phil. and Ph.D. degrees, usually in another department.

- (b) The new trend is one of an increasing number of WSCs offering Masters courses in Women's Studies and aspiring to offer a full-fledged Ph.D. Some of the earliest WSCs and those evaluated by the UGC as Phase III and Advanced Centres are not necessarily those offering postgraduate degrees and research programmes. Many of these WSCs have only recently floated Masters and M.Phil. programmes and some continue with Certificate and Diploma programmes.
- (c) This pattern reflects both the strongly held belief of many women's studies scholars who would rather intervene in different disciplines from a women's studies perspective than develop women's studies as an interdisciplinary teaching programme and, as also, the lack of adequate faculty strength and tenure in UGC-sponsored WSCs.
- (d) The increasing number of women's studies cells at the college level in the tenth and eleventh plan has meant a rising number of undergraduate level courses in women's studies. Many of the newly autonomous colleges are offering B.A. (Honors), electives in addition to the Certificate and Diploma courses.
- (e) At present, most UGC-sponsored WSCs offer at least a Certificate or/and Diploma programme and many are in the process of designing Master's programmes.

While the exercise of putting forth broad guidelines and structure for full-time courses in women's studies addresses some of the immediate issues by developing 'model curricula' several questions regarding practice remain. At least some of the following complexities at the level of practice will have to be debated and factored in at the very stage of developing guidelines for 'model curricula'.

- (a) Diverse paths of development of the WSCs: As discussed earlier, UGC-sponsored centres have had different trajectories, and often the influence of feminism as an intellectual-political project on the women's studies curricula in these centres has been limited to individual influences and have not acquired an institutional base.

- (b) Ghettoization within the university system: Despite efforts by women's studies scholars to impact knowledge production as a whole, the women's studies perspective remains by and large sidelined within the university as a specialized topic/paper. In the everyday disciplinary gate-keeping of our universities and colleges, interdisciplinary credit courses in women's studies designed for students across different disciplines are often run down as 'similar to' or repetitions of 'women in the disciplines' courses. This poses a challenge to WSCs to map curricula that establish the validity of distinct interventions made by women's studies at the methodological and conceptual levels.
- (c) Disciplinarity: Women's studies was conceived primarily as research, and different disciplines in the humanities and social sciences have responded variously and at different levels to the challenges posed by women's studies. Diverse disciplines have been impacted by women's studies, and women's studies on its part have received from these disciplines to a greater or lesser extent. This has happened in ways that do not always make obvious the development of an interdisciplinary field of women's studies and gender as a specialization area within disciplines. In practice, therefore women's studies is an interdisciplinary field as also a field anchored in existing disciplines. This poses complex questions in outlining curricula and pedagogical practices at the varied levels of the educational system. Though these tensions are richly productive, the challenge is to make this stand within usually understood components of independent teaching programmes—namely as a separate body of knowledge that is relatively autonomous and encompassing.
- (d) Overlap with training programmes in the development sector: Most organizations within the development sector also engage with issues of women's studies, especially through gender training programmes. These programmes have influenced the curricula of short-term courses in women's studies such that there is often an overlap between some of the 'teaching' programmes of the WSCs and 'training' programmes of the organizations within the development sector.

- (e) Engaging the young: The activism of the women's movement, visibility of women's studies in the university system, hyper visibility of gender issues in the media and the expansion of the Rights discourse propelled both by national and international agencies have led to paradoxical developments. There is, on the one hand, a slew of information now on gender issues, making the issues sometimes seem self-evident and commonsensical to young scholars. Often anxieties of making courses engaging for a generation that is disconnected from the history upon which women's studies curricula build, result into syllabi that quantify the 'victimhood' of women (often reiterating all the binaries of East/West, rural/urban that the feminist intellectual-political project has long critiqued) or present an uncomplicated narrative of 'women's empowerment'.

Further, to strengthen women's studies in general and the exercise of curriculum development in particular, the present expansion of women's studies in the university system, marked by a growing number of new centres and cells, alongside the temporariness of older centres will have to be placed within a larger context. In the next section, I shall try to delineate the complex set of factors ranging from international governance, state policies on higher education, political assertions and local university contexts that frame the present of WSCs. Such an exercise is called for if we are not to brush off the uneven curricular practices across different centres as faulty protocols of learning, thus bypassing the micro and macro issues that frame the expansion of 'women and everything/anything' kind of courses in WSCs.

### *International Governance and Higher Education: Beyond Framing 'Useable' Degrees in Women's Studies*

The September 2000 United Nations Millennium summit agreed upon a set of 8 MDGs for the world's poor nations. These were not the result of an initiative from the South itself but were co-sponsored by the IMF, WB and OECD. As Samir Amin argues, the definition of these goals is extremely vague; for instance the goal for achievement

of universal primary education comes without any discussion on reduction in public expenditures and privatization of education.<sup>33</sup> Of the 8 MDGs only the third goal promotes gender equality and women's empowerment and explicitly refers to gender, while the fifth goal refers to 'improving maternal health'. Equality is reduced to access to education and empowerment which is measured by the proportion of wage earning women. It displays the consensus of the neo-conservative forces across different religions on keeping sexual and reproductive rights and the question of violence firmly outside.<sup>34</sup> However, the United Nations MDGs of September 2007 set into motion a steady publication of gender reports and frames for gender training and gender mainstreaming programmes.

Over the last two decades, there has also been a battery of reports on higher education commissioned by State and non-State agencies delineating the crisis in higher education and spelling out policy initiatives directed towards producing knowledge workers and specialized knowledges. The brief review of reports like the Birla-Ambani Report (2000),<sup>35</sup> the report of the National Knowledge Commission<sup>36</sup> and the Yashpal Committee Report<sup>37</sup> on rejuvenation and renovation in higher education opens tensions between and within committees on advocating privatization and more public funding and state control. There are also differences over the university as a principal site of contesting perspectives on social justice and affirmative action by oppressed groups.<sup>38</sup> As Supriya Chaudhari observes, the field of national policy on higher education resembles a game of Kabbadi—with ground being alternately lost and won by the public education initiatives on one side and the pro-privatization groups on the other.<sup>39</sup> The responses at the local levels, especially in state universities (as against the more privileged central universities) have centred around questioning the 'usability' of the university degree for newly emerging markets, more particularly in case of the social sciences and humanities.

The academic community (and lesser still as a women's studies community) has rarely responded to the unfolding plans and proposals for refashioning higher education. In the last decade there have been several reports on the state of research and training in social sciences in India by individual scholars and institutions like the ICSSR and SSRC.<sup>40</sup> Most of these reports saw social sciences in state universities



characterized by poor infrastructure, poor quality of research and teaching, absence of teaching materials in Indian languages, lack of innovative pedagogies, predominance of 'Western frameworks' and dearth of 'relevant and situated' theories and curricula. Though these reports are mostly silent on women's studies as a field, reviews of women's studies by individual scholars and regional reports of the UGC in the same period highlighted much the same issues. Interestingly both reports did not review knowledges produced and circulated in Indian languages and while noting some centres of excellence, rarely commented on possible models underlying the development of excellence thereby implicitly equating institutional excellence with individuals. The reports also share an intriguing silence on two of the most defining characteristics of our times—the changing social composition of students and researchers across colleges and universities and the growing anxiety about 'employability' of students.

In the last decade, the most vocal responses to new developments in higher education have come from liberal academics declaring a state of 'crisis' and expressing nostalgia for an imagined/once pure (devoid of 'primordial' identities) university. It may help to recall here, that universities in India until the last decade and more remained the preserve of the privileged elite. In the last three decades, the Indian university system has responded to the emergence of new subjects of study—women, tribals, ethnic violence and caste inequalities—by setting up new centres focusing on research 'on' these excluded categories often overlooking the tensions and intersections within and across categories. But the changing social composition of students, researchers and teachers in the last decade has called for far more radical revisions in ways of knowing and studying. Much of this is being pushed under the carpet by liberal voices, thus reducing all political engagements in the academy to identity politics and a lack of academic engagement with 'broader issues.'<sup>41</sup> The anxieties related to producing 'employable students' and designing 'usable' degree programmes have a deeper influence on curriculum development in women's studies not only because it is a relatively new teaching field but also given the omnipresence of women's issues on the international and national scene through the different schools of official international feminisms (most prominently the United Nations and the Bretton

Woods system and their agencies) and state policies of empowerment. Women's studies comes to be viewed as having an edge over the mainstream disciplines in that it is an 'applied'/'useable' degree or a professional programme. At the local level, academic bodies of the university call for revision of curricula, the buzzwords being vocationalization/globalization/applied knowledges and in the process often calling for reconstitution of academic bodies so that inclusion of experts from 'industry' is mandatory.

More than others, WSCs have a stake in examining with greater care the relationship between this 'perceived crisis' in the university and the cultural capital at the disposal of those calling the crisis. No doubt the last decade has seen a shrinking of opportunities traditionally available to students in the social sciences and humanities, but it has also witnessed a welcome change in the social composition of students—so that we are placed in a classroom that is more diverse and are interacting with/learning—teaching students whose pasts and futures we can no longer imagine to be identical to 'ours'. In risking what may be best described as reflective utopianism,<sup>42</sup> I argue that this moment of perceived crisis of/in the disciplines may be a critical moment for women studies centres to think beyond the immediate. Can women's studies centres through curricular and pedagogical initiatives innovate and reinvent not only teaching programmes in women's studies but while bringing 'difference' to centres and interrogating the assumed binary of quality and equality in higher education thereby argue for more sustained public investment in higher education in general and women's studies in particular?

It is important that we locate the institutional, curricular and pedagogical concerns of our WSCs within these international and national contexts as also within the everyday of our universities characterized by a new depth and scale of public disinvestment of higher education, increasing student debts that are quickly making full-time students in social sciences a rarity, new models of evaluating teaching services (API), casualization of academic labour (clock hour/contract) and pressures to forge international collaborations. It may serve WSCs well to debate and discuss salient suggestions made by the Yashpal Committee, particularly those that reflect on the quality of access in higher education and the role of the university in reassessing the epistemic status of what we call knowledge.<sup>43</sup> The

WSCs could innovate the UGC mandate for networking and clustering to build sustainable models for institutionalized dialogues with research institutes, undergraduate colleges, movements and NGOs and as a relatively young teaching programme experiment with new courses, syllabi and methods of evaluation. In the light of this argument, in the next section I would like to discuss some aspects of the experiments on the site of women's studies designed to re-imagine practices of higher education, in particular drawing upon the experience of the UGC-sponsored Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre (KSPWSC) at the University of Pune.

### *Risking Reflective Utopianism: Re-imagining Practices of Higher Education in Women's Studies*

The journey of KSPWSC to full-time degree programmes in women's studies and re-imagining practices in higher education is messy and like all involved storytellers, I am probably imposing a linearity and coherence to the narrative that is never entirely there in reality. The UGC-sponsored KSPWSC (henceforth Centre) at the University of Pune has its beginnings in the Department of Sociology in 1987, with a founding director with a long history of engagement with the women's and other democratic movements in Maharashtra.<sup>44</sup> This promoted an institutional legacy of collaborative research, seminars, campaigns with autonomous women's organizations, Left party-based women's groups and anti-caste organizations. In the last decade, the changing composition of the women's movement, its strategies and programmes however had come to be viewed by the Centre within a rather uncomplicated frame of 'effects of globalization' and the co-option of the once autonomous women's movement through internationally funded NGOs.

In the early years, the Centre was involved in teaching optional 'gender' papers in the mainstream department that housed it and started a part-time postgraduate certificate programme in 1995 more as a response to challenges posed to the academic credibility of the programme. A certificate course in women's studies was floated both in English and Marathi and designed around four core components of feminist theory, social history of the region, culture and politics

and development studies. Looking back, this vision promoted at the Centre a sustained debate on language, region and the practice of women's studies at the Centre. As the Centre was made autonomous in 1998, the experiences of sudden dislocation from a disciplinary dwelling confirmed that there are indeed few real institutional frameworks and procedures to make interdisciplinarity work within the university structures. Autonomy from or integration within disciplines is at best an academic debate. In practice, most WSCs are required to make the 'choice' of either 'dissolving' within disciplinary regimes of the university system or 'stand alone' without any possibilities of collaboration with teaching/research programmes in the disciplines. Recognizing that even the most engaged students of the certificate programme were 'lost to their disciplines' after the programme, a new Advanced Diploma programme that built upon the Certificate programme came to be designed.

In 2002, as the university adopted a credit-semester system, credit courses in women's studies came to be offered to students across the disciplines. The Centre had been working with undergraduate college teachers through refresher courses and following the UGC mandate for extension work had been organizing thematic workshops for students in urban and rural campuses. By early 2000, pressures of accreditation were pushing undergraduate colleges to float 'vocational'/practical courses, and viewing this as an opportunity to introduce teaching programmes in women's studies at the undergraduate level, a three-month off-campus certificate course in women and development came to be floated alternately on rural and urban college campuses. Thus, each of the teaching programmes of the Centre had emerged in response to prove either the academic credibility or relevance of women's studies within the university system. In the absence of any real procedures to sustain interdisciplinary work, once again the idea of initiating full-time postgraduate degree programmes in women's studies came into serious consideration at the Centre, largely to promote institutional reproduction of women's studies within the university system.

In 2008, in the context of the perceived 'crisis in higher education', which as already discussed earlier was being diversely characterized, but most often debated within binaries of quality versus equality, the Centre planned a project—an experiment in re-imagining higher

education in the humanities and social sciences on the site of women's studies.<sup>45</sup> The project began with a base line survey of 11 state universities in Maharashtra—noting among other things curricula, readings, assignments, *kunjis* (guide books), aspirations of students and teachers and the ways in which caste and gender mediate tensions in staff rooms and classrooms, aspirations and career goals. The initial findings suggested the need to bring about a concerted focus on quality of access in order to problematize debates on higher education in the region which had often defined equality in terms of access and quality as necessarily opposed to equality. The survey suggested that any project seeking to intervene in the architecture of learning would have to explore and comprehend explicitly 'difference' in the practices of higher education in developing both short-term and long-term strategies. The project thus brought to debate at least the following issues as requiring strategic interventions:

- Entry-level questions related to the gap between the worlds of undergraduate and postgraduate education, rationale for 'doing women's studies' as against mainstream disciplines or professional courses like social work.
- The purist divide that operates between 'knowledge' for developing critical faculties and 'skills' for employability and which of the two frames the choice between critical faculties and skills as an either/or.
- Changing social composition of students and faculty as an important resource for improved curricular and pedagogical practices opening up the site of higher education to the larger changes in the functioning of our democracy.
- 'Exit'-level questions relating to employment of students. Thus this would explore which students remain unemployed after a Master's degree in social sciences and why and the skill gaps received by potential employers.
- Questions of region, language and discipline and modes of dialoguing and translating across fields, disciplines, sites and languages of knowledge production.

Interventions were planned through institutional collaborations with undergraduate teachers and students, researchers and scholars in the university, social activists and NGO personnel, and a range of

imagined potential employers. In what follows, I shall only outline<sup>46</sup> some of the interventions and ways in which they seek to address some of the questions in higher education in general and women's studies in particular:

- Reframing 'vocationalization': women's studies in undergraduate programmes
- Developing postgraduate curricula and pedagogies: bringing a difference to the centre
- Enhancing employability: beyond fusion or instrumental relations between women's studies and women's movement
- Building resources: beyond the easy equation between language and region

### Reframing Vocationalization: Women's Studies in Undergraduate Programmes

The relative absence of women's studies in undergraduate education had long been a matter of concern. In the last decade undergraduate colleges invited vocational courses as add-on courses. Sensing an opportunity, the Centre initiated an off-campus three-month undergraduate certificate course in women and development which runs simultaneously in rural and urban colleges. The call for vocationalization was historically located within the long-standing (at least since the Radhakrishnan Report 1948) distinction between facts, events and values as subject matter of the sciences, social sciences and humanities respectively. Even when there were revisions in education policies, as for example in the New Education Policy (1986), vocationalization had been proposed as an antidote to the colonial emphasis on the liberal arts which were supposed to equip graduates only for the civil services. Interrogating this division, vocationalization came to be reframed in the project to address issues historically constituted by the policy of 'general' education. Basic skills of reading, analysing, comparing and writing critical texts are integrated into the curriculum. This has involved detailing lesson plans and micro planning of assignments, developing textbooks and dialogues with undergraduate teachers and developing summer internship projects for undergraduate students at the Centre. The field work component

of the course is conducted in collaboration with local democratic movements, NGOs and research organizations. This undergraduate-postgraduate linkage is built institutionally by expanding the usual Research Associate/Teaching Assistant model. Young researchers in women's studies, who work as teaching assistants in the postgraduate programme are trained to teach the off-campus courses in women's studies at the college level. Plans are underway to develop this three-month course into an online course and build a consortium of colleges floating 60 credits in women's studies over three years of college education in the mode of UGC add-on courses.

### Developing Postgraduate Curricula and Pedagogies: Bringing a Difference to the Centre

The central question guiding the exercise of developing two new full-time teaching programmes (a Master's in Gender, Culture and Development Studies with the possibility of securing a Diploma after completing the first year of the Master's programme) was—how do we produce students who think critically and are considered to be employable in the academic, development and media sector? How do we address 'difference' in the curricular and pedagogical practices to make it an integral part of the learning-teaching process? The project explicitly seeks to address difference in at least the following ways:

#### QUESTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN DISCIPLINARY REGIMES

Much of the research and writing in women's studies has emerged in working within and against frameworks of existing disciplines—the question therefore is: how do we make use of the multidisciplinary knowledges for an interdisciplinary teaching programme? Also, how do we spell out ways in which feminist scholarship disrupts and integrates knowledges from different disciplines to develop new concepts and epistemologies? At a pragmatic level, how do teachers anchored in disciplines or at best equipped with multidisciplinary skills develop minimum proficiency of methodologies and languages across the broad range of feminist scholarship? How do we train

women's studies students to engage with feminist scholarship in ways that help them disrupt and reconfigure their disciplinary baggage?

#### QUESTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE CURRICULUM

How do we ensure that difference of caste, community and region are not relegated to elective courses or to a module in a course in an additive mode? In other words, confronting questions that women's studies perspective asks of other disciplines which relegate gender to the optional. How do we address 'region' and internationalism in our courses? Do courses on development and globalization build more on South–South comparative frameworks than courses in feminist theory? Is there enough comparative engagement on themes across different regions in India? The project is in the process of designing annual workshops for building South–South relational frameworks in women's studies curricula.

#### QUESTIONS OF DIFFERENCE IN THE CLASSROOM

How do we engage with a generation of students who have a lot more information but are disconnected from the history on which women's studies curricula build? What are the new strategies to be brought to the classroom to negotiate the diverse expectations that students bring to the classroom, while ensuring that the political edge of women's studies is not lost? The typical women's studies classroom is richly textured through inequalities of caste, age access, unequal cultural capital, uneven undergraduate training and multiple and diverse aspirations attached to the degree/diploma. In the last three decades, the Indian university system has responded to the emergence of new subjects of study—women, tribals, ethnic violence and caste inequalities with setting up new centres; but the changing social composition of students and teachers in the last decade has called for far more radical revisions in ways of knowing and studying. In this context, the Centre reviewed the most commonly practised response to the changing social composition in higher education—



namely the remedial English programmes. These programmes most often reiterate the model of the middle class, urban, upper caste student as normative and target the already burdened 'others'. Instead, a Bridge Course (so named after Donna Kate Rushin's 'Bridge poem') conceived of as a pass course, is floated every semester. The course design is based on an effort to wedge open the inequalities that are articulated through the 'language question' in higher education. The bridge programme opens up the gaps caused by a fractured understanding of the middle class English educated students as also a matter of urgent concern. The course builds on texts exploring inequalities and exclusions and serves to build linkages between the students' undergraduate training in the disciplines and women's studies as an interdisciplinary field, as also a training in skills of reading, making notes, building arguments and most importantly in reflecting on one's own location and its relation to knowledge and power.

#### DIFFERENCE IN PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES

A troubling question is: how do we address difference such that pedagogies do not assume students as predefined subjects to be convinced—to adopt the teacher's truth? The Centre is in the process of building different tools, methods and strategies to combine social critique with skills of doing critical work. This includes designing assignments to translate knowledges across imaginaries, for policy community and media, and to develop games for critical training programmes. Strategies for critical engagement with technologies, everyday lives in ways that reconstitute students as producers of knowledges both individually and collectively are being developed. Developing reflexive notes on group work has emerged as an important resource for engaging with diversity and difference in practice.<sup>47</sup> There are efforts to delineate the principles and practices of critical pedagogical practices, such as Phule-Ambedkarite feminist perspectives which seek a rational engagement with the pedagogy of culture to examine how power works through the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge within particular contexts and re-imagine a culture of pedagogy based on truth-seeking. Thus the focus is on a double articulation that conceives of education then not only in terms

of cultures of learning and teaching but also dissenting against that which is learnt and taught by dominant cultural practices.<sup>48</sup>

Enhancing Employability: Beyond Fusion  
or Instrumental Relations between  
Women's Studies and Women's Movement

Most students applying for postgraduate courses in women's studies admit that they come to the course to escape unemployment (since for many this is a second Master's degree) and to be in hostels which are the only democratic space available while preparing for a career. The decision to apply for a second degree/full-time diploma in an 'Interdisciplinary Programme' like women's studies is for most a conscious one—since these programmes are considered to open up opportunities in the NGO/media sector. As mentioned earlier, the Centre had a legacy of conducting research, seminars, campaigns in collaboration with autonomous women's organizations, Left party-based women's groups and anti-caste Left organizations and political parties. However as mentioned earlier, in the last decade, the changing relations between women's studies and women's movement had come to be perceived at the Centre, often uncritically in rather gross terms of co-option of the once-autonomous women's movement through internationally-funded NGOs and State-sponsored empowerment programmes.

At the Centre there was a growing concern with the fusion between women's studies programmes and gender training programmes as well as unease about developing instrumental partnerships with NGOs for enhancing employability of students. How was employability of students to be enhanced without as if giving up the critical edge of women's studies? Efforts are underway to design different tools, methods, strategies to integrate, at the curricular level, the questions of theory and practice of gender in different sectors. This is being done in collaboration with social activists, state and non-governmental organizations, thus making questions of employability a site on which the Centre explores the diverse ways of 'doing gender' on multiple sites of the state, NGOs and democratic movements.

Beginning as a dialogue on employability, the Centre has developed four open courses, one in every semester designed in collaboration

with social activists and organizations in the development and media sector. Each course is a combination of weekly modular workshops, wherein using exercises, students are introduced to specific sectors, to issues, practices and dilemmas that are encountered in practice in those sectors. These workshops allow students and 'potential employers' to interact in a non-recruiting scenario and make choices for most summer internships. For the Centre, the modular workshops have become an important platform to learn about the development sector as one of the domains where in the name of 'gender training' considerable discussion on, and dissemination of, issues and themes related to women takes place. These workshops open up an understanding of the varied gender training programmes in terms of their history, modalities (including content and pedagogy), influence and impact, giving important suggestions for a more nuanced understanding of the relation between women's studies and gender training.

The collaborative teaching programme seeks a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the concepts of gender, practical and strategic gender needs are used across different sectors, region and time. Students and faculty opened up new dialogues across the sites of women's studies and gender training as they raised questions about the inadequacy of interrelationality of gender, caste and class in the framework of training. The course draws together the initiatives of the State, NGOs, and democratic organizations and seeks to go beyond an evaluation of success or failure, empowerment and depoliticization to see the layered histories of conceptualization and implementation of gender empowerment and gender mainstreaming. Efforts to map the overlap and conflicts between the diverse meanings of doing gender on varied sites suggests possibilities for WSCs to broaden and reinvent the UGC mandate of extension and advocacy in ways that neither fuse nor make instrumental the relations between women's studies and the multi-sited women's movement.

### Building Resources: Beyond the Easy Equation between Language and Region

The complex question of building resources for teaching women's studies focuses on the need for translation of materials into Indian languages, readers and textbooks. While there is no doubt that these

are required, we need to ask if this makes for an easy equation between region and language in doing women's studies and thus may foreclose possibilities of new conversations and comparative frameworks across different locations—social, geographical, institutional and epistemic. Building resources for teaching women's studies at the Centre has involved back translations from English to Marathi, developing digital archives of music, films, pamphlets, booklets and critical memories of democratic anti-caste struggles as 'legitimate' readings for courses. An important component is building bilingual readers, teacher manuals and most importantly, putting together writings by students as learning-teaching materials. A booklet on 'dissonant democracy', produced by students document and analysed the diverse media articulations of the holo-caste at Khairlanji. Another produced a film on 'Cell Phone Cultures'; researching the biography of the product, its travels to different constituencies, SMS as cultural consumption, the perceived dangers and anxieties related to the product, celebrity scandals with camera phones and so on. The film focused on how cell phones were organizing and conducting students' own lives. Students have published three collections of researched articles in English and Marathi on—'exploring the popular: texts, identities and politics', 'plundering popular culture' and 'Youth Cultures: defamiliarising the familiar'. The participants of a course on 'Caste and Gender: History and Memory' published a collection of oral histories and recipes entitled *Isn't This Plate Indian: Dalit Histories and Memories of Food*. The process of translations and developing bilingual resource books push those engaged in the programme to reimagine the methods of knowledge, to destabilize the assumption of English as always and already the language to translate from and to understand the translations necessitated across internal hierarchies of Indian languages.

This long narrative on re-imagining practices of higher education at KSPWSC is more by way of sharing of anxieties, limitations and possibilities of the 'reflective utopia' so as to promote wider criticism and debate than an evaluation. This experiment is only in its third year and it would be premature to talk of success and failures and presumptuous to draw generalizing conclusions. The powerful poetry of the engaged Adivasi poet Bhujang Meshram on the workings of power in academic spaces come therefore in lieu of a conclusion.

*In Lieu of a Conclusion: 'Do Closed  
Doors Open Without a Push?'*

*The Teacher asked,  
'Name any three tribal villages',  
So I told.  
Slap me if I was wrong  
But do tell me do closed doors open without a push?  
I only told—'Shelti, Varud, and Kondpakhandi'.  
The teacher asked,  
'For what are these villages famous?'  
I only told,  
Shelti for Holi,  
Varud for the woman—Gowarin Bai,  
And Kondpakhandi for the theft of cotton.  
The teacher roared and slapped with his hands  
He broke a couple of staffs of the Mehendi bushes.  
Go get a reference from three people  
Or else no entry for you in this school—he said.  
That's when I decided to get introduced  
to Birsa kaka, Tantya nana and Ambar Singh Maharaj!!*

—BHUJANG MESHAM

Mala Bhetlelya Kavita, *The Poems I Met*, 2007

The UGC intervention in developing broad maps of 'model curricula' in women's studies is a significant first step. However, building teaching capacities in women's studies may call for developing alternate models for institutionalized dialogues and collaborations between the university-based WSCs, undergraduate colleges, research centres, and diverse actors that constitute the women's movement and other democratic movements. The words of Bhujang Meshram, historically grounded in the struggles over resources, identities and meanings are a reminder that power is never really external, even to reflective utopian experiments in higher education. New conversations, 'dialogues' and comparative frameworks across different locations and imaginaries—social, geographical, institutional, and epistemic can disrupt an established understanding of power and knowledge in women's studies. However, following Meshram, one may underscore that only when the limits set on 'dialogue' by powerful languages are

interrogated that re-imagination of the content and methods of knowledge becomes possible.

## Notes

1. See Uma Chakravarti, 'Oppositional Imaginations', in *Narratives From the Women's Studies Family*, ed. Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, New Delhi: Sage, 2003, pp. 355–71.
2. See Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar and Kumudini Bhansali, 'From women's education to women's studies: The long struggle for legitimacy', in *Narratives From the Women's Studies Family*, ed. Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, New Delhi: Sage, 2003, pp. 44–77.
3. Ibid., p. 18.
4. Mary E. John, 'Women's Studies: Legacies and Futures', in *Between Tradition, Counter Tradition and Heresy*, ed. Lotika Sarkar, Kumud Sharma and Leela Kasturi, New Delhi: Rainbow, 2002, pp. 47–63; Mary E. John, 'Country Paper on India', in *Women's/Gender Studies in Asia Pacific*, Bangkok: UNESCO, 2004, pp. 17–49; Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*, New Delhi: Penguin, 2008; Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 'Blazing a Quarter Century Trail: Research Centre For Women's Studies, SNDT University', in *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*, ed. Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, New Delhi: Sage, 2003, pp. 81–114; Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*, New Delhi: Sage, 2003; and Vidyut Bhagwat, *Stree Prashnachi Vatachal: Parivartanachya Dishene*, Pune: Pratima Prakashan, 2008.
5. See Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1989.
6. See K. Satyanarayana, 'Dalit Studies as a New Perspective in the Indian Academia', in *Dalit Studies in Higher Education: Vision and Challenges*, ed. Arun Kumar and Sanjay Kumar, Delhi: Deshkal, 2005, pp. 81–95.
7. See V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-brahmin Millennium: From Iothee Thass to Periyar*, Calcutta: Samya, 1998 and Sharmila Rege, *Writing caste/writing gender: narrating dalit women's testimonios*, New Delhi: Zubaan, 2006.
8. See Mary E. John, 'Women's Studies: Legacies and Futures', op. cit., and Desai, Mazumdar and Bhansali, 'From women's education to women's studies: The long struggle for legitimacy', op. cit.
9. See Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*.

10. Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*.
11. See Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*.
12. Ibid.
13. Mary E. John, 'Country Paper on India', in *Women's/Gender Studies in Asia Pacific*.
14. Sukhdeo Thorat and Uma Kant, eds., *Caste, Race and Discrimination: Discourses in International Context*, Jaipur: Rawat and IIDS, 2003.
15. Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*.
16. See Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
17. See Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender', in *Gender and Politics in India*, ed. Nivedita Menon, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 494–526.
18. See Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*.
19. See Desai, Mazumdar and Bhansali, 'From women's education to women's studies: The long struggle for legitimacy'.
20. See Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*.
21. See Mary E. John, *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*.
22. See Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput, *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*.
23. See Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana, 'Problems for a Contemporary Theory of Gender'.
24. See Uma Chakravarti, *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*, Calcutta: Stree, 2003. See also, Abhinaya Ramesh, 'Brahmanical Surveillance and Possibilities of Border Crossing', paper presented at 'National Seminar on Interrogating Discourses: Ambedkar and Discursivity', Dr Ambedkar Adhyasan and Thought Centre, University of Pune, 14 March 2011.
25. See Mary E. John, 'Reframing Globalisation: Perspectives from the Women's Movement', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLIV, no. 10, 7–13 March 2009, pp. 46–51.
26. See S. Anandhi and Swaminathan Padmini, *Making it Relevant: Mapping the Meaning of Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu*, Working Paper No. 198, Chennai: MIDS, 2007.
27. See Government of India, *National Policy for Empowerment of Women*, 2001.
28. See Nivedita Menon, 'Sexuality, governmentality: contests over "gender" in India', *Feminist Review*, vol. 91, 2009, pp. 81–94.
29. Mary E. John, 'Country Paper on India'.

30. See S. Anandhi and Swaminathan Padmini, *Making it Relevant: Mapping the Meaning of Women's Studies in Tamil Nadu*.
31. Through a letter in March 2010, the Women's Studies Bureau of the UGC requested all WSCs to send a list of courses floated by them and details of the course outlines and recommended readings. Only 31 WSCs sent course details in response, as a result of which the available pool of curricula is not comprehensive. However, it can serve as a baseline survey of the curricula in women's studies.
32. Guidelines for the Development of Women's Studies in Indian Universities and Colleges during the Eleventh Plan 2007–2010, UGC, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi, [www.ugc.ac.in](http://www.ugc.ac.in)
33. Samir Amin, 'The Millenium Development Goals: A Critique From the South', *Monthly Review*, vol. 57, no. 10, 2006, accessed at: <http://monthlyreview.org/2006/03/01/the-millennium-development-goals-a-critique-from-the-south>.
34. Jamilah Ariffin, 'Gender Critiques of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): An Overview and an Assessment', paper presented at the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) 2004, 31st International Conference on Social Progress and Social Justice, 16–20 August 2004.
35. Mukesh Ambani and Kumaramangalam Birla, 'A Policy Framework for Reforms in Education', report presented to Prime Minister's Council on Trade and Industry, 2000.
36. Government of India, *National Knowledge Commission, Government of India Report to the Nation, 2006–2009*, accessed at: <http://www.knowledgecommission.gov.in/downloads/report2009/eng/report09.pdf>.
37. Government of India, 'Report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education', Yashpal Committee, Government of India, June 2009, accessed at: <http://www.academics-india.com/Yashpal-committee-report.pdf>.
38. Kaushik Basu, a renowned economist in the Yashpal Committee submitted a note of dissent on universities as public good. In May 2006, two distinguished members of the Knowledge Commission, both social scientists, had resigned from the National Knowledge Commission on the grounds that the policy for 27 per cent reservation for OBCs in central universities was a politics of illusion.
39. Supriya Chaudhari, 'What is to be done? Economies of knowledge', *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 105, February 2011, pp. 7–22.
40. See A. Vaidyanathan, 'Social Science Research in India: Some Emerging Issues', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13–19 January 2001, pp. 112–14



- and Partha Chatterjee, ed., *Social Science Research Capacity in South Asia*, New York: Social Science Research Council, 2002.
41. See Sharmila Rege, 'Education as Trutiya Ratna', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XLV, nos. 44 and 45, 30 October–12 November 2010.
  42. Following Ernst Bloch in *The Principle of Hope* (1986), Bourdieu defines rational utopianism as simultaneously against the pure wishful thinking that has always discredited utopia and the philistine platitude essentially occupied by the 'Given'.
  43. Government of India, 'Report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education', Yashpal Committee, Government of India, June 2009. *Report of the Committee to Advise on Renovation and Rejuvenation of Higher Education*, accessed at: <http://www.academics-india.com/Yashpal-committee-report.pdf>.
  44. I refer here to Vidyut Bhagwat who was the director of the Centre from 1998–2008.
  45. The project 'Building Teaching and Research Capacity in Women's Studies' (2008–11) received a grant from the Navajbai Ratan Tata Trust. The project works in close association with the Higher Education Initiative of CSCS, Bangalore.
  46. Detailed Process Reports of each of these initiatives are available at the KSPWSC.
  47. The micro planning of assignments is a joint project—and the presentation of the outline of this project includes work done by Sharmila Rege, Anagha Tambe and Swati Dyahadroy.
  48. Sharmila Rege, 'Education as Trutiya Ratna'.