

**Gender Basic Course – A Report,  
February 15-20, 2010 - New Delhi.**

India has always been a picture of many contradictions. It has been one of the world's fastest growing economies with an average growth rate of 8.8% in the last decade, but its human development index (HDI) tells a different story. India has consistently slipped in the HDI ranking over the years, meantime that its economy was steadily on the upswing. Its gender-related development index (GDI) is even lower than its HDI. And, while it can claim to have given women more legal rights at this point in time, it has not really facilitated crucial enabling mechanisms and processes for women to fully actualize their potential in the social, political and economic domains.

Against the backdrop of neo-liberal economic policies, the poor have been most negatively affected but the gendered impacts of these policies rendered women most vulnerable. The following trend had been inevitable:

1. The displacement of the poor and their alienation from their homes, land, other resources and sources of livelihood owing to big investment projects like dams and highways, conversion of farmlands into industrial areas, etc. The sustainability of the environment has always been a major issue.
2. Inter-State & cross-border migration for livelihood and employment has been steadily growing with the disintegration of the rural economy.
3. The problem of the “triple dynamics of growth, rapid urbanization and growing poverty”. Urbanization is seen as the engine for economic growth and cities attempt to align its infrastructure to cater to the demands of keeping a pace with the rest of the world, supported by policies for the purpose of globalization. Hence, abandon is thrown into the air for constructions of business townships- malls, flyovers and increase in number of roads is seen to be trend in every metropolitan cities and major township. This has resulted in number of homeless people, which is rapidly growing in the cities by impacting environmental degradation - water shortage, floods during monsoon, global warming and brings about many more challenging issues.

The gendered impacts of economic reforms and increasing feminisation of poverty are well-established. Economic dislocation has affected poor households badly and the pressure of family survival devolves mostly on the woman. Across India, where male members of the households undertake seasonal migration for work and natural resources for sustenance and livelihood are fast disappearing, women take on the load to ensure family survival. This phenomenon has resulted in increase in “Women-headed households” particularly in agrarian society of most economically vulnerable by posing a heavy toll on women - women are affected differently and more acutely than men, it has in turn effected the serious concerns of human rights violations and women's rights.

Globalisation though, promises growth and diversification of the economy for both women and men, towards better quality of life and fewer struggles, but it has only perpetuated the more struggles and reversed increase in human rights violations in general and it also has increased forms of violence against women (VAW) from privet to public spheres. Evidently, the differences have widened and

deepen the inequalities. This is seen to be a deliberate attempt of impunity professed by the ruling elite to exclude women, Dalits, tribals and other minorities from inclusive growth.

While VAW, at home and outside the home, is on the rise. Declining sex-ratio continue to be embedded in a few rich pockets of Indian States, the situation is worsening with the use of technology and the collusion of certain quarters in the medical field. Nevertheless, the incidence of domestic violence is a major cause of deaths among young women. The issue of dowry has been buoyed by the increasing consumerism in the country for more and more demands and greed. There have been increases in cases of “honour killing” which are reported in the media on almost daily basis in the recent years. These forms of VAW underlined by the fact that the women are asserting their rights viz-a-viz within the family - entering into a relationship whether outside the caste or “community”, or same-sex relationship; choosing to work outside the home, choosing to study etc.

There has been rampant increase in cases of sexual harassment— such as incidents of rape, molestation in every spear of public place, work place so on and so forth (most commonly in public transports, moving vehicle etc.) VAW has also been linked to risks to HIV and AIDS and other forms of health hazards. It is therefore, leading to remorse and devaluation, anemic due to losses in apatite, injuries etc. On the other hand the rise in VAW may seem to be indicating regressive trend in relation to women’s position. Women exercising personal freedom as a right is benign opposed in the expectations of “community interests”. Looking closely, one would realize that the resistances to women’s assertion are coming especially from those benefited by patriarchal structures and the manifestations of this resistance have become more pronounced today.

Policies, processes and practices all come together to constantly marginalize large sections of the population, “Women” rendering them vulnerable in variety of ways. Traditions and practices in the name of “culture” are perpetuated most particularly against women to control their sexuality and deny them opportunities towards education and or training, basic health conditions, livelihood, employment, decision-making, political participation, and access to services, justice as well. Gender discrimination, inequality remains to be a major impediment to women’s empowerment as to the nation’s progress. Indeed, gender inequality has been shown to hinder the achievement of many developmental goals and aspiration of women’s empowerment.

### **Early Indian Women’s Movement:**

Indians’ women’s movement traces back to late 60s and early 70s, this era saw a spate of movements in which women took part: campaigns against rising prices, movements for land rights, peasant movements so on and so forth. Women across the country came together to form groups both inside and outside political arena, thus vibrant women’s movements were emerged that swept the country, resulted in transforming the women’s movements within the given spectrum. It is therefore, violence against women received wider attention throughout the country. Two specific forms of violence was addressed-rape, and dowry deaths. Women’s movement demanded for change in the legislation to compact VAW. Change in law did not yield positive result towards women’s rights though, feminist and woman’s group started re-energize their knowledge and began to campaign and build political pressure to implement these progressive laws. Indeed, in the early campaigns, women’s movement learnt from day to day and felt that merely targeting the State alone was insufficient, and that victims also needed support. Evidently, women from the movement got off on the streets to raise awareness or conscientisation of

general public on violence against women, by organizing protest, rally, street meetings etc in the country.

The on going struggle for women and the women's movement in India has been getting women's voice together to be heard in the corridors of power to demand, aspiration of women towards human rights and dignity. It is therefore, gender equality is basic human rights which are constituted within good governance, women's way forward towards empowerment, peace and development with gender justice equity with equality.

### **Six Day Training:**

With this perspective a six days institutionalized Gender Basic Course was held between February 15-20, 2010, at Vishwa Yuvak Kendra, New Delhi, 25 participants from central and northern States participated in the training programme which included five men. The young enthusiastic group was very receptive and vibrant with divers in its nature; the work experience varied from less than one year to ten years. The course was participatory in its nature the methodology adopted was conducting series of excesses, group work/discussion, role play, presentations question and answers etc.

Keeping in mind the main objective of the course, in order to build perspective and competence of participants, on both sectoral and thematic rights from diverse development sectors, the six days course continuously drawn towards stimulation processes to understand the challenges of gender discrimination and need for feminist theory. The courses indeed addressed several development issues— poverty and livelihoods, women and health, violence against women, women's sexuality and identity, and frame work of national and international human rights instruments to recognise the challenge that violates women's human rights and need for support towards women's struggles for equality and equity.

The course also focused on understanding the dynamics of power and power relations change of locations/positions/identities/social set up according to situation, gender box— understanding gender, and experiences that participants underwent with divers messages that they received during their childhood, understanding the differences between gender stereo type roles that re enforces by family and the community and system as a whole, patriarchal structure— its impact within the family and system and imposition on women with customary practices and tradition roles that negatively binds women's empowerment and development, leading to subjugate women's position in submission to male authority.

### **Thematic Rights:**

#### **Poverty:**

The session on poverty and livelihood was conducted by Prof Aasha Kapur Mehta, Economist from Indian Institute of Public Administration, the session and discussion aimed at looking poverty by gender lenses and the gaps that exists in development processes. The session had series of power point presentation including excises on understanding and of cause's that leads to poverty, three key factors— people continue to live in poverty, people come out of poverty and people who are reduced to poverty.

The session further emphasized on how poverty line is measured by the Planning Commission that adapted to measure poverty line at district, Sate and National level. The session also focused on the

indicators used to measure poverty line and which is changed at each five year plan assessment period (1955 to mid term appraisal 2009).

### **Health:**

The session on women's health was conducted by Ms. Jaya Velenkar, the session identified the violence that perpetuates women's health both - physically and mental, the food habits, the cultural practices, patriarchal norms that all have impacted poor women's health. Therefore, the health movements have been constantly posed by challenges to State to bring changes in health policies with a women-centric approach rather than a State-centric approach.

### **Sexuality:**

The session on sexuality, challenges and gender-stereotypical roles was conducted by Ms. Jaya Shrivastava, this session focused on— body and self, sexual choices and identities and patriarchal challenges, violence faced by individuals and women's movement perspective. The day-long session included several exercises, role plays on day-to-day incidences that take place in public and private spheres— eve-teasing, molestation, approaches etc.

### **Violence against women:**

The session on violence against women focused on the factors that influence forms of violence on women, in day-to-day life; within the family and in the community. The issues discussed were masculinity, globalization, and market-driven patriarchal approaches. All have re-enforced the violence against women and it has further marginalized women in narrow spaces.

Last but not the least, the course also traced the historical background of women's movement at different periods, national policies/papers, legislations/laws and acts that are available towards women's equality and equity.

### **List of Participants:**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Organisation/State</b>
Janki Khelya Vijaylakshmi Heera Dharbwal	Mahila Samakhya, Uttarakhand
Shilpi Manoj	Aasha Mahila Adhikar Kendra, Madhya Pradesh
Pravesh Verma	Sahyog, Uttar Pradesh
Reetu Devi Azad Babli	JAGORI GRAMIN, Himachal Pradesh
Parul Prajapati Popatbhai	SWATI, Gujarat
Priti Samata,	AKSHARA, Maharashtra

Lavanya Mehara Tulsi Manimutu	C.H.S.J, Delhi
Kalawati Keshrani	VANAGANA, Uttar Pradesh
Prem Lata Jain	Seva Mandir, Rajasthan
Yachna	Individual, Uttar Pradesh
Nidhi Mehjabeen	SAHRWARU, Gujarat
Malti	Nari Suraksha Samiti, Orissa
Namita	Odisha Mahila Adikar Manch, Orissa
Meenakshi	Astitva, Uttarakhand
Bhairwa	CDR, Rajasthan