The Status of Women
- Reflections on Two Decades of Change

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Scope of the Presentation

- The GAD Trajectory

    - Gender Justice and Economic Justice

    - The Rise of Neo-Conservatism

    - The Post-Washington Consensus

    - Democratic Deficits in Global Rule Making

    - Transnational Mobilisation of Women

- India – Challenges for Feminism

    - Inequity

    - The War on Women's Bodies

    - The Co-option of Grassroots Feminism

    - The Depoliticization of Empowerment

- Feminist Intervention – The Crossroads

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Scope of the Presentation

- Vantages of Change

  - The Economic Agenda – Ending the Ambiguity

  - Institutional Accountability through assertion and infiltration

  - A New Culture of Collaboration

  - Sanghas as the Local Forum

- New Strategies through New Technologies

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The Gender and Development Trajectory

- Gender justice linked to global economic justice
  - Critiques of Neo-liberalism – the marketisation of development
  - Security of livelihoods and an enabling economic environment - an important basis for moving forward to meet reproductive and sexual health needs of women
  - Role of democracy and human rights for development policy - with implications for women's rights agenda
  - Policy instruments – lifeline for women

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The Gender and Development Trajectory

- ## The Rise of Neoconservatism

  - Increasing mediation of state power by religious fundamentalists

  - The rise of neoconservative political economy eg. Aid conditionalities

  - Rights langauge eclipsed by protectionism - recent debates on pornography on the Internet

- ## Post-Washington Consensus

  - Good Governance and Participation – "new moment in the neo-lib agenda"

  - Social policy as social risk management framework – corrective to markets, safety nets for 'coping'

  - Women's empowerment instrumentalised for growth

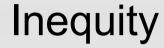 - Contradictions in unilinear approaches to defining progress

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The Gender and Development Trajectory

- Deficits in global rule-making

  - A new *global* economy needs a global polity

  - Democratic deficits in global governance

  - The capture by corporates of public policy spaces

- Transnational Mobilisation of Women

  - A coming together of social movements on the agenda of global justice - trade, sexual rights, peace

- *Global trends mirrored in national spaces*

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Inequity

The gap of Gross Dropout Rate (GDR) between general and SC candidates have deteriorated from 6.7 percent to 10.4 percent between 2001 and 2004. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) of SC boys declined by 37 percent in Assam, 31 percent in Gujarat, 25 percent in Orissa, 18 percent in West Bengal and 10 percent in Bihar during 2001 and 2004. The GER of SC girls declined by 23 percent in Assam, 21 percent in Gujarat and 13 percent in Chandigarh during the same period.

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The War on Women's Bodies

State sponsored violence in a scenario of increasing religious intolerance and fundamentalism, ethnic conflict and terrorism. These trends are distinctly gendered – *communal battles (and more recently, class wars) are being fought over women's bodies*; *state hegemony is sought to be resisted by tribal communities through notions of honour as they are practiced in the non-tribal parts of the country, tribal women's experiences of violence are obscured to protect the collective honour of tribes*; *dowry based violence increasingly brutalizes poorer women as capitalism and consumerist modernity create a nexus between marriage and money in the widening social polarization*.

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The Co-option of Grassroots Feminism

-Sangha baiting and "poaching" by political parties, insurance companies, MFIs and the state!!!

- Agenda setting by middle class feminists

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The Depoliticization of 'Empowerment'

The ubiquitous SHG 'movement' and deradicalisation of feminism

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Feminist Intervention
- The Crossroads

- The old question of time and space

- How does one work with the education for empowerment model? (Almost every MS sangha woman is also a member of another SHG)

- How does one negotiate the inherent tensions in institutional frameworks? Expansion versus dilution, new sanghas and their disconnect with old, state pressures

- How does one address the undermining of collective identities and sangha solidarities?

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Vantages of Change

1. The Economic Agenda – Ending the Ambiguity

- Wider debate and explicit analysis on women's poverty and notions of economic empowerment
- What is MS' answer to the reigning economic order and the fragmentation of collective identities?

- What are experiences teaching us within and beyond the MS context?

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Vantages of Change

2. Institutional accountability
through strategies of assertion and infiltration

- Participation in local institutional structures – gram sabha, board of local Fair Price shops, anganwadi monitoring committee, SDMC, social audits of NREGA

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Vantages of Change

3. A New Culture of Collaboration
- Linking with social movements

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Vantages of Change

4. Sanghas as the local forum and resource group

- Restoring the place of intimacies, reclaiming history, celebration
- Affirming subjectivities
- Revisiting and reflecting upon the questions of identity and power
- Resisting cooption and targetting of leaders by vested interests
- Conceptualising robust and organic links between sangha women and girls/kishoris
- Appropriating the public sphere to legitimise a sub-altern feminist discourse

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New Strategies??

New Technologies as a Platform for
Feminist Consciousness,
Collective Identities and Radical Action

New Technologies as Catalysers of Sangha
Legitimacy and Leadership

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