

Message to AIDWA's Seventh National Conference

18-21, November 2004
Bhubaneswar

I have been associated with AIDWA from the time of its conception - by a small group of your leaders, whom I admired greatly. Some of them are not with us today, but their memories continue to inspire me. I am sure you will continue to uphold their ideals and strengthen your organization to struggle for Gender Justice in the decades to come - even if the young people among you do not have personal memories of Susheela Gopalan or Vimal Ranadive who built this organization in its founding years.

I have, however, an appeal to make to your current leaders, who were young in 1981, when AIDWA held its first national conference, to which I was invited to speak at the inaugural session. From that inauguration - at Chennai, I went straight to Mumbai to participate in the first National Conference on Women's Studies - which gave birth to the Indian Association for Women's Studies. Many of us have referred to the **post - seventies Women's Movement in India, and Women's Studies as the Siamese twins - because history linked them together, at a significant juncture of India's history.**

I believe it is critically important to record, and share this common origin and shared understanding, of the **experiences of women** (across India's regional, religious, linguistic, class and cultural diversity) - **of the pattern of economic social and political change in the 20th Century to equip all those involved in the struggle for gender justice in the 21st Century.**

I say this because our predecessors, despite their commitment to the cause, failed to record the memory of their struggle adequately. Recovering lost memory is not only very painful, but often a futile exercise, as I can assure you from my personal experience.

There are many among you, who have been trained in the discipline of History. My appeal is particularly addressed to them - collect the records that are now scattered all over the country at one place, take steps to preserve them for the future. But the immediate task that some of you must undertake is to produce a history of the first 25 years of this organisation's existence. This is a responsibility that you owe to your younger members, and to all future generations.

My faculties are failing fast, but if I can help the group that undertakes this responsibility in any way, I would be happy to do so.

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