

Women in India: The Other Half



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A study of women's organisations: from colonial to contemporary, the struggle continues.

Aims: I want to explore:

- Continuity and change in the campaigns and ideology of Indian women's organisations.
- What upholds oppression? An examination of the obstacles to gender equality.
- Where do women's organisations fit in the wider women's movement in India?



A women's collective that combats violence against women in India since 1981.



Interview at Saheli Office in Delhi



Image above and in border below designed by Saheli Women's Collective: <https://sites.google.com/site/saheliorgsite/communalism>

The Project:

I began with wider reading from the Robinson library in Newcastle and used inter-library loans from the British Library.

Then twenty days in Delhi:

- Archival research at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library examining the private papers of Madhu Kishwar and private and institutional documents surrounding the All India Women's Conference.
- Interviews with contemporary women's organisations 'The Rahi Foundation and 'Saheli'.
- Meeting with the research fellow and Nehru University professor Biswamoy Pati.

The All India Women's Conference Est 1927



The uplift of women for 'The regeneration of a country' (Aparna Basu) through educational and social reform. Campaigns included women's education, combating child marriage, purdah (veiling of women) and trafficking, developing women's employment and inheritance rights.

"the inner sphere of the women's domain has stuck in its medieval

NMML, File No.2, page 25 All India Women's Conference fifth session January 1931.



A women's organisation supporting survivors from childhood sexual abuse through professional services. Pictured left is a scene from a play I was invited to following the interview, "30 Days in September" which powerfully exposed the raw truth of a survivors story.

Conclusions & Observations

- Gender equality is often overshadowed by broader campaigns of social reform that aim to enhance the progress of India as a nation.
- Members of women's organisations tend to be urban middle class women as for the rural and lower classes, basic survival needs take precedence.
- Patriarchal oppression not only propagates ancient forms but takes on new ones in a constantly changing society.
- As a result women's organisations continue to have a fundamental role in the women's movement India and many inspiring women continue this legacy.



Madhu Kishwar (right) established Manushi, a 'Journal about women and society' and played an active role in the Women's Rights campaigns of the 1980s.

However Kishwar stirs considerable controversy among other feminists with her changing opinions on dowry as an 'empowering' tool for women, and her political associations with India's right wing government.



"Let us not only redefine ourselves, our role, our image – but also the kind of society we want to live in."



Image (Right) from Manushi, Issue 59, Page 12.

YOU'D BETTER DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT POOR ABUSED WOMEN IN THAT HOUSE AND THAT ONE ALSO AND THAT... AND THAT... AND THAT... AND THAT....

