

# Making It Relevant: Mapping the Meaning of Women's Studies in Tamilnadu

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## Abstract

*What is women's studies? Is it a discipline? Subject? What should a women's studies' programme connote and what obtains in practice? Through a survey this paper attempts to map the different aspects of the women's studies programme in the institutions of higher education of Tamil Nadu. Among other things, the contention of the paper is that the forms and conditions of institutionalization of women's studies in the institutions of higher education to a large extent constrained the possibilities of carrying out women's studies as an academic discipline. The paper has important implications for bodies such as the UGC that, at one level, has been in the forefront of the institutionalization of the women's studies' movement in India particularly in the 1990s, but, at another level, has failed to achieve the kinds of intellectual and political changes promised by the founders of women's studies in India.*

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Women's Studies is both the location of new disciplinary thinking about women and gender, and the point at which feminist scholarship and theorizing within these older disciplines intersect with those occurring within ethnic studies, area studies, sexuality studies, and cultural studies; with the work taking place in activist projects and organizations; and with the insights drawn from personal narratives and the creative arts.

Bonnie Zimmerman<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

One of the important aspects of Women's Studies in India is its successful institutionalization as a higher education programme within the Universities and Colleges with curriculum for teaching and research focusing on women and women's issues. By now, we have fairly good accounts of the genealogy of the institutionalization of women's studies<sup>2</sup> that tell us how women's studies was instituted as a programme in the institutions of higher education and what perspectives informed the teaching and research in women's studies. However, women's studies practioners continue to be confronted with the problem

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Zimmerman, 'Beyond Dualisms: Some Thoughts about Women's Studies for the Future' in the Question of Women's Studies, <http://info-centre.ccit.arizona.edu/ws/future/plenary/papers/part1.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance, Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar and Kamalini Bhansali, 'From Women's Education to Women's Studies: The Long Struggle for Legitimacy', in Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput (eds), *Narratives From the Women's Studies Family : Recreating Knowledge*, (New Delhi: Sage, 2003); Kumud Sharma, 'Women's Studies and Higher Education: The Troubled Journey', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 9: 2 (2002); Maithreyee Krishnaraj, 'Blazing a Quarter Century Trail: Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT University' in Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput (eds), *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*.

of how to define women's studies and also the issue of what constitutes women's studies? For instance, is it a discipline / subject? Is it interdisciplinary / multidisciplinary? Does it integrate activism with academics? Does it provide critical interrogation of existing disciplines? What does/should a Women's Studies programme connote? Is it about, integration of women into the existing curriculum / changing the disciplines /rethinking theoretical and analytical approaches / adding new knowledge about women to the ongoing research and teaching projects? All these seem to be unresolved issues even after two decades of 'successful' institutionalization. Even as women's studies scholars continue to engage with these questions there is very little attempt made to connect practices of women's studies to specific forms and patterns of institutionalization and how the latter has impacted on the kinds of knowledge produced, nurtured and disseminated. Also, over time, the 'successful' career of women's studies has very little to do with critical analysis of its perspectives and programmes.

Against the above backdrop, this paper set out to explore how women's studies was defined and carried out within the institutions of higher education in Tamilnadu. Employing a survey methodology, the present study attempts to provide an account of important trends, the direction that Women's studies has taken over the years in Tamilnadu, and, its implication for development of women's studies as a discipline.

Our contention is that to a large extent defining women's studies as a subject or discipline or as a critical perspective was contingent upon the nature of initiatives and the forms of its institutionalization in the institutions of higher education. In other words, the conditions and possibilities of introducing and carrying out women's studies as an academic discipline was also constrained by the very nature of this institutionalization. In this context, it is important to briefly engage with the history of how women's studies was conceptualized and instituted nationally before engaging with the Tamil Nadu case.

## **Part - I**

### **1.1 'Disciplining' Women's Studies: The Founding Discourse**

By now we have a fairly good review of the institutional and epistemological history of women's studies.<sup>3</sup> In the 1970s, women's studies was mainly characterized as

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<sup>3</sup> We may note here that various accounts on the genealogy of women's studies present the history of women's studies merely as narrations of its linkages with the women's movement and as a mere process of institutionalization without engaging with the interventions that it made in teaching and research. There is

‘academic activism’. The focus as then envisaged, was to be on research and on imparting a critical perspective to social science through new research on the conditions and status of women. This was, as many women’s studies scholars have acknowledged, a fallout of the critical review of conditions of women contained in the Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India called *Towards Equality* (1974), followed by the ICSSR’s Advisory Committee on Women’s Studies (1977) which demanded further and new research on the social and economic conditions of women.<sup>4</sup> The Committee for instance stated that “the main objective of the programme of women’s studies is the generation and analysis of data with a view to uncovering significant trends in patterns of social and economic organization which affect women’s position in the long run”.<sup>5</sup> In other words, the Committee underlined the fact that the purpose of these research activities was to challenge the marginalisation and misrepresentation of women in social science disciplines and scholarship by adding new knowledge about women through generating data, among others.

Institutionally, it was the SNDT Women’s University in Bombay that established the first women’s studies centre as Research Centre for Women’s Studies in 1974 with a focus on systematic documentation of various aspects of women’s lives that could then be made available as ‘data on the status of women in diverse fields’.<sup>6</sup> Around this time two more institutions, the Institute of Social Studies Trust (founded in 1976) and the Centre for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS, established in 1980) were also established mainly to undertake new researches on women in the context of socio-economic and political transformation.

Until the 1980s the number of institutions committed to carrying out women’s studies programme was very minimal. But the discussions on the scope and objectives of women’s studies were already taking place in various platforms. The ICSSR Committee

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hardly any account of how women’s studies interrogated traditional disciplines or of its interdisciplinary research methods and outputs.

<sup>4</sup> One may note here that even before the Report of the Committee on Status of Women underlined the importance of new research on conditions of women, the SNDT Women’s University resolved to set up a research unit within the University to carry out research and to systematically document issues related to women. For details of how the research unit in SNDT pioneered in carrying out women’s studies see, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, ‘Blazing a Quarter Century Trail’.

<sup>5</sup> Indian Council of Social Science Research, *Programme of Women’s Studies*, 1977, cited in Neera Desai et al., ‘From Women’s Education to Women’s Studies’, p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, ‘Blazing a Quarter Century Trail’, p. 88.

defined the main objectives of women's studies programme as research on socio-economic conditions that affect women's lives and thus generate new data and analysis that add new knowledge and also a critical perspective to the social science disciplines. Similarly, in 1979, a group of women's studies scholars in their first discussions on the nature and scope of women's studies defined its objectives as 'transformation of spheres of knowledge production' with the "new academic search to organize knowledge on various aspects of women's situation resulting in changes in perspectives about women's contribution to society and their needs and problems in the context of modernization, development and social change".<sup>7</sup>

A cursory glance at some of the early discussions on what constitutes women's studies make it clear that in the formative years women's studies was envisaged as 'interventionist' within higher education and not as a 'discipline with a course or curriculum or teaching methods. It was largely perceived to be a 'critical instrument in the educational processes.'<sup>8</sup> The first National Conference on Women's Studies held in 1981 defined women's studies as a 'critical perspective' and an intellectual pursuit in understanding social reality and not as a discipline or as a separate programme.<sup>9</sup> Instead, it recommended an integration of women's question in all disciplines. Similarly, the UNESCO Conference on Women's Studies in South and South-east Asia held in 1983, described women's studies as 'critical instrument for social science development' and also a 'critical understanding of social reality'.<sup>10</sup> Around this time, feminist scholars too defined women's studies as a 'process of becoming aware of the situation of women' and as 'a movement to assert the interests of women as a sex'.<sup>11</sup>

However, in the early 80s both the Indian Association for Women's Studies [IAWS] and the UGC felt that it was not enough to merely acquire new knowledge on the conditions and status of women but women's studies needed to be integrated into existing academic disciplines as courses and as research agenda with a multidisciplinary focus. For

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<sup>7</sup> Kumud Sharma, 'Women's Studies and Higher Education', p. 210.

<sup>8</sup> For details of how women's studies was conceptualized in the early years see, Neera Desai et al., 'From Women's Education to Women's Studies', pp. 44-77.

<sup>9</sup> Report of the First National Conference on Women's Studies, cited in Kumud Sharma, 'Women's Studies and Higher Education', p. 212.

<sup>10</sup> Kumud Sharma, 'Women's Studies and Higher Education', p. 212.

<sup>11</sup> Maithreyi Krishna Raj, 'Why Women's Studies? : Some Feminist Perspectives', in Maithreyi Krishna Raj (ed.), *Women's Studies in India: Some Perspectives*, (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986), pp. 34-35.

the first time, in a joint seminar organized by the IAWS and the UGC in 1985, the importance of founding separate centres within the institutions of higher education to carry out research and teaching in women's studies was emphasized. In conceptualizing the role and status of these women's studies centers, it was emphasized that they should be 'independent and parallel to the department and faculties' in order to avoid 'structural constraints and delays' in coordinating research and teaching. It was believed that by instituting women's studies the educational system would be made accountable "to expand the social concern against injustice, marginalization and oppression of women".<sup>12</sup> Towards this, the centres for women's studies were expected to play 'catalytic role' in motivating the entire University community to address issues that concern women's development.

Though women's studies was conceptualized primarily as research and teaching agenda to be carried out in institutions of higher education, there was considerable anxiety to make it relevant to the outside community. Especially, in 1980s, as the women's movement gained momentum, women's studies researchers, teachers and students were urged to link their scholarship with action programmes of women's groups in order to make it relevant to those outside the academic community. When Centre for Women's Studies (CWDS) was founded as a research institute to undertake research on women, its founders 'tried to balance research and action in their agenda'.<sup>13</sup> In other words, women's studies research itself was conceptualized as outreach programme.<sup>14</sup>

The anxiety to make women's studies accountable both to the academy and activism found its place in the UGC's policy on women's studies which right from the beginning emphasized 'extension activity' as an important component of women's studies. For instance, the first UGC guidelines for development of Women's Studies in Indian Universities and Colleges brought out in 1986, clearly underlined the importance of extension work as crucial for women's studies programme so that the latter could play an interventionist role through implementation of development policies for women. The guidelines stated,

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<sup>12</sup> Neera Desai *et al.*, 'From Women's Education to Women's Studies', p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Kumud Sharma, 'Women's Studies and Higher Education', p. 212.

<sup>14</sup> Mary John, 'Women's Studies: Legacies and Futures', in Lotika Sarkar, Kumud Sharma and Leela Kasthuri (eds.), *Between Tradition, Counter-Tradition and Heresy: Contributions in Honour of Vina Majumdar*, (Noida: Rainbow Publishers, 2002), p. 54.

(g)reatest importance to be attached to extension work, as a learning and developmental instrument, for the benefit of the community, students and teachers. Its role in women's studies is crucial as it would enable the women's studies programme to play an interventionist role for the improvement of women in particular and society in general. At the same time it will lead to an effective implementation of development policies meant for women as well as other weaker sections of the community.<sup>15</sup>

It is interesting to note here that in the above guidelines, but for the call to recognize the relevance of women's studies as policy intervention, no where had the UGC spelt out the linkages between research, teaching and extension work in terms of how they would feed into each other.

Since the UGC was mainly responsible for institutionalization of women's studies in Indian academic institutions, it is important to see how the disproportionate stress on extension activity as an important component in carrying out women's studies substantially diluted the earlier conceptualization of women's studies as a 'critique of knowledge production'. This clearly points to the need for a critical review of the nature and content of the 'successful' institutionalization of women's studies programme by the UGC.

## **1.2 UGC Initiatives in Women's Studies**

### *a) Institutionalization*

The first UGC guidelines for Development of Women's Studies in Indian Universities and Colleges, brought out in 1986, envisaged women's studies as 'support for other policy thrusts of UGC and for the induction of extension as the third dimension of University activities'.<sup>16</sup> Though the UGC recommended that women's studies 'should not be organized as a separate discipline or department' it came up with two models of institutionalization of women's studies within the universities. a) Women's Cells within the existing departments and b) Centre for Women's Studies as an independent unit *with the status of a Department*.

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<sup>15</sup> The UGC Guidelines for Development of Women's Studies in Indian Universities, UGC, unpublished, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid .

Along with research and teaching these centres were expected to carry out their extension activities in collaboration with and by networking with national and international agencies.

Based on these guidelines, between 1986-97 the UGC funded 22 women's Studies centres and 11 Cells in various colleges. During the ninth plan period the UGC - funded centres for women's studies in universities and in colleges increased to 34 and 13 respectively. As per the tenth plan, an additional 22 centres for women's studies were to be created in the universities along with 12 more centres in colleges, thus giving a total of 66 centres for women's studies within the universities and colleges all over India. While the sheer magnitude of these numbers of centres indicates the successful institutionalization of women's studies, it makes one ponder over the nature of this institutionalization and more important, the implications of such institutionalization for the academic content of women's studies.

*b) Women's Studies as Outreach Programme*

Almost a decade after constituting these centers, it appears, that to a large extent, the research and teaching activities seemed to have been marginalized at the cost of carrying out 'extension work'.<sup>17</sup> Often the centres came to be recognized by UGC as advanced centres mainly for their successful outreach programme and not for their academic contributions. For instance, an approach paper brought out by the UGC in 1998, while reviewing the activities of these centres, took special note of their ability to "build the component of action potential in whatever research has been undertaken".<sup>18</sup>

In the ninth plan, not just extension activity but advocacy was also identified as priority area for the centres to concentrate upon. To facilitate this, the guideline emphasized 'partnership and clustering' and networking with various organizations. Accordingly, the centres were also placed under various phases for funding. For instance, it was required of these centres in their *phase I* to concentrate on 'networking' which could also mean focusing on extension activities and outreach programmes. Since the UGC considered that "fulfilling the national goals of women's empowerment is a priority area for all women's

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<sup>17</sup> In the Ninth Plan document the UGC has defined the extension activities of the Centres for Women's Studies as follows:

Extension programmes will include social action and community development activities like consciousness raising, sensitizing on women's rights, capacity building, counseling, legal literacy aid and so on to be carried out as outreach programme. See, UGC Guidelines and Approach Paper for 1998, p.6.

<sup>18</sup> The UGC Approach Paper 1998, p.3.

studies centres”, its budget provision for academic activities was minimal with priority being accorded to extension activities.

*c) The Budget Allocation*

Unraveling the components making up the budget of a centre, we find for instance that, during the 10<sup>th</sup> Plan, a total of Rupees six lakhs was allotted for implementation of ‘action plan and activities and programme’ and Rupees seven lakhs for ‘other activities such as mobilization, skill training and counseling to micro-credit and SHG groups’.<sup>19</sup> A mere one lakh of Rupees was allotted for documentation, development of educational materials, syllabi and course material, publication etc and another one lakh of rupees for the purchase of book and journals.

Despite this complete lack of emphasis on the academic content of women’s studies as revealed through budget heads, and despite exhorting the centres to focus their entire attention on outreach programme, the UGC has no compunctions in mandating these centres to draft curriculum and syllabuses in women’s studies for different disciplines within colleges and universities. At the third phase, the centers are demanded to be “strong academic centers of teaching and learning, generating new thinking and knowledge on feminist theory and offering women’s studies courses”. In other words, by the time a Centre is placed at the third phase, it appears that it is expected to convert its entire extension works or outreach programmes into academic activities such as drafting syllabus etc. However, detailed case studies of different centres reveal that this has not been possible for various reasons. When most activities in the first phase of the women’s studies were not connected to ‘knowledge generation and critical perspective on social sciences’, it can hardly enable a centre to suddenly launch full-fledged academic activities. The implication of this, [i.e., disproportionate emphasis on extension work] for developing women’s studies as a discipline and as academic departments within the University system will be discussed taking Tamil Nadu as a concrete case.

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<sup>19</sup> The other services included under this budget for centers in general (for the total of 7 lakhs) are as follows: 1. Project support for self-reliance to distressed women in families. 2. Educational awareness especially for women students, teachers and community. 3. Promotion of entrepreneurship among women especially for their participation in national activities in organizing village trade fair etc. 4. support to art, culture, dance drama music for preservation and maintenance as well as uplift of the tradition among the village girls or women 5. Setting up of child care centers and counseling /helpline.



## Part - II

### 2.1 The Tamil Nadu Survey

A survey of Women's Studies was undertaken out after a brainstorming session at the Madras Institute of Development Studies where faculty teaching Women's Studies courses in colleges in Chennai deliberated on several aspects of their experience with such courses. This brainstorming enabled us to put together a 'Guideline Questionnaire' that formed the basis of our data collection for this survey.<sup>20</sup> In retrospect, we feel that this approach has been instrumental in throwing up a rich variety of institutional typologies, sometimes within the same College/University. Here, we must qualify our effort as only an introductory-level survey of women's studies in the institutions of higher education in Tamilnadu. It is not an exhaustive review of scholarship and/or of the pedagogy of women's studies; rather, it attempts to map the direction that women's studies has taken in Tamil Nadu, illustrating in the process some specific practices within some academic institutions in order to understand what meaning and content these offer to women's studies.

The survey was conducted in three regions of Tamilnadu covering 30 institutions of higher education. The survey mapped

- the nature and brief history of the institutions/departments that offered women's studies.
- the categorisation of the course, namely, whether it is a core, optional, major or allied paper,
- the duration of the course, eligibility criteria for taking the course, nature of certification, specific requirements of the course, (if any),
- expertise, infrastructure and other facilities available for teaching and carrying out research activities

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<sup>20</sup> As of now there is no directory of Centres for women's Studies or details of colleges that offer women's studies courses in Tamilnadu. The colleges as well as some universities were reluctant to provide us with the details of departments, courses and other historical details on women's studies, since they were extremely suspicious of our intention to collect information related to women's studies. For these reasons, we were able to collect information, only through our personal contact with the teachers in various colleges and with the help of research assistants. Therefore, this survey does not represent the entire set of higher education institutions that carry out women's studies courses and programmes.

- the staff recruitment procedure, profile of the students/participants, teachers, nature of networking and alignment with women's organizations outside the academic institution
- the nature and source of funding for women's studies

Other than this survey, individual interviews with few founder members, teaching staff and students were also carried out. [For a broad mapping of colleges and universities of Tamilnadu covered by the survey, see Appendix- I]

## **2.2 Institutional Patterns**

The foray into how Women's Studies got instituted in Tamilnadu reveals that there were various patterns of institutionalization. The history and the variety of these do contest the common understanding that women's studies is a fall out of the women's movement. Instead, there definitely was a 'women's studies movement' in Tamilnadu with a variety of initiatives to institutionalize women's studies. These included the Tamil Nadu State government's initiative to start a women's University with courses in women's studies, private institutes and self-finance colleges offering diplomas and degrees in Women's Studies and Christian higher education institutions setting up Cells and Centers with international funds. However, by and large, women's studies centers within the universities of Tamilnadu came to be set up at the instance of directives from the UGC. Following is the broad typology of initiatives undertaken to institute women's studies in Tamilnadu.

- Government initiative of starting of women's University to exclusively teach and research in women's studies ( Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal )
- Starting of women's studies in Christian colleges by the United Board of Christians for Higher Education and also by the All India Association of Christians for Higher Education.
- Self-financed private institutes that offer mainly certificate courses and diploma degrees in Women's Studies.

- UGC initiatives in colleges and universities in the form of Centres and Cells other than introducing women's studies in various departments as degree granting programme.

Each of these patterns contain variety of methods and practices of women's studies which reveal not just how women's studies got instituted but also the ambiguities and contradictory nature of teaching and doing research in women's studies in Tamilnadu. I.

### **2.2.1 Government Initiatives in Women's Studies**

Even before the UGC directive on starting women's studies courses in colleges and universities, a Women's University was started in Tamilnadu to teach and research on women's issues. The founding of a University, mainly to carry out women's studies was premised on the understanding that there is a need for an enquiry mainly in the form of research into the subordinate position of women and to suggest ways and means of attaining women's equality.

In 1982, at the instance of Bharathiar Centenary celebrations, the then chief minister, M.G.Ramachandran decided to establish a women's University. Towards this an expert committee was set up under the chairmanship of Malcolm Adiseshiah to advise the government in establishing the University. This Committee outlined the purpose of setting up of a women's University: as to "monitor the progress of and obstacles to women's education in the state and the country, offer consultancy services to women's educational institutions at all levels to speed the progress of women's education, and undertake research on all obstacles to the attainment of equality of status by women and the means of overcoming them".<sup>21</sup> This is how the Mother Teresa Women's University came to be established in 1985.

In setting up the University, the Expert Committee clearly stated, that the primary task of this University was to establish women's studies as a "multi or trans-disciplinary and challenge the arrangement of knowledge into academic uni-disciplines...." Towards this, the University was expected to mainstream women and women's experiences through changing of existing curriculum and methodology of teaching and research in all social science disciplines.<sup>22</sup> Initially, the University had four Departments: Tamil, English,

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<sup>21</sup> Malcolm Adiseshiah's letter to Minister for Education dated 15 September 1982, reproduced in Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal Publication I. (n.d).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. xv, xvi.

History and Education in which only a summer course was offered for college teachers registered for M.Phil degree. Though the committee for setting up this University clearly emphasized the need for women's studies, the faculties in these departments were not clear as to what women's studies really meant.<sup>23</sup> However, individuals within these departments made efforts to include topics related to women. For example, the Tamil Department had papers related to representation of women in Tamil language and literature to be taught in its M.Phil courses. Similarly, within the Department of History, a paper on 'Women through History' raised issues of invisibility of women in History. By about 1987, with the help of UGC funding, the University introduced a regular course for M.Phil degree in these departments and also started new departments like Economics, Sociology and Home Management. It was only after 1993, the University introduced the regular M.A degree courses in various departments.

In the formative years the University was also doing 'sort of a campaign for women's studies'. The faculty of different departments went to various colleges in Madurai to conduct workshops and to lobby with the institutions to start women's studies within various disciplines. As Devadata observes, "though the University was not involved in doing research, it prepared syllabuses and course modules for teaching women's studies and distributed to the college teachers during the awareness programme".<sup>24</sup> In the early years, despite lack of space and infrastructure facilities, with the help of few staff and with suggestions from women's studies experts, the University managed to build a strong library with fairly good collection of books on feminism and women's studies and thus became a resource centre for researchers. The staff were also encouraged to undertake independent research and sent on various exchange programmes to other women's studies centres abroad. The University received funds both from the UGC and from the state government, but no international funding.

The University could not initiate any Post-graduate (M.A) courses in the various departments for several reasons; one, because of nil students due to inaccessibility of the University location coupled with inadequate hostel facilities; two, due to lack of focus of its M.A courses rendering them unsuitable for job purposes, etc. So much so, that in the

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Dr. Devadata, former Registrar, Controller of Examination and the Head of the Department of Tamil, Mother Teresa Women's University, Kodaikanal, 11 January 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Department of Women's Studies started in 1988, not a single student had enrolled since 2001 while the Centre for Women's Studies has no staff at all except the director. Given the UGC mandate to the Centers for Women's Studies to carry out research, teaching and extension activities, the director alone single handedly carries out various research projects, training programmes etc. Our investigator observes that the entire University has only 300 students registered either in the department of distance education or in the research programme of some departments.

What is significant to note about Mother Teresa Women's University today is that it offers women's studies as a course through 125 study centres located at various places in Tamilnadu. Since the University failed to attract students to enroll for regular courses, it resorted to a distance education programme. Students can now register at these centres for various degrees and get their degree awarded by the University. As a staff in one of these centres observed, "these centres attract students mainly because they offer career oriented courses like BBA, MBA, Diploma in Catering, Corporate Finance, and, Masters in Computer Applications". The same staff, however, also feels that the offering of vocational and job oriented courses to women students has completely changed the goals and objectives of starting the University as well as the idea of women's studies. According to her, now women's studies is all about providing job opportunities for women.

The way these centers function has also come under severe criticism. As one former staff of the University comments, "Today any person, even if he/she is not connected with Women's Studies and even if he/she has no required educational qualification can start a Center with self-finance courses and affiliate it with Mother Teresa University by offering huge amounts to the University and then get recognized as a Centre of the University. Since the students are willing to pay huge amounts for professional or vocational courses, the University also gets a share out of the Center's earnings. In other words, the University sells degrees".

The University has also started a women's college in Kodaikanal for career development through vocational courses mainly offering degrees like BBA, MBA, MCA and M.Com etc. Interestingly, though these courses are offered ostensibly to 'empower women' they do not offer a single paper on 'women and development' or on any such theme related to women's studies. On the other hand, the degree courses in social science

subjects offered at the same University offer managerial courses with a view to generate employment opportunities. Within the social sciences departments of the University, the post-graduate first year students of history are taught papers like ‘Women and Management’ and ‘Women and Technology’. Also the M.A degree in women’s studies has been renamed as ‘M.A in Women’s Studies and Computer Applications’ in order to make it relevant for the students to acquire jobs. Now the students of women’s studies are not offered papers on women’s history or on the women’s movement. Instead, the second year M.A students are taught papers like ‘Women and Entrepreneurship and NGO Management’.

Another unique feature of this University is that it has both a Department of Women’s Studies (funded by the University) that offers M.A, M.Phil and Ph.D degrees and also a Centre for Women’s Studies funded by UGC, offering similar degrees but mainly carrying out the UGC mandate of ‘extension work’. Caught up within the agenda of making women’s studies relevant, the Center organizes a variety of programmes like AIDS awareness, environmental awareness programmes along with counselling and gender sensitivity trainings for adolescent girls. Training programmes for women Self Help Groups (SHGs) in entrepreneur development, fashion designing, flower making, jute product making, and bee-keeping nursery are offered from the Center as certificate courses. The Centre is also actively involved in forming the women’s Self Help Groups and also in establishing a marketing center for products of the SHGs. As the Centre’s handbook indicates, nearly seventy five such women’s self help groups have been formed by the Centre. A production centre run by the Centre for Women’s Studies markets goods produced by the SHGs like garments, juices, jams etc. One of the Centre’s future programme is to help open showrooms for these products in other parts of Tamilnadu and also to “participate in local, regional, national and international exhibitions to acquire export orders for some of the products”.<sup>25</sup> The Centre carries out research projects mainly to ‘educate’ women on the State’s welfare programmes like *Mahalir Thittam*, Micro-credit for Self-help groups, Women’s co-operatives, IRDP etc.

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<sup>25</sup> Centre for Women’s Studies, Mother Teresa Women’s University, *Handbook*, n.d.

## 2.2.2 Christian Colleges in Women's Studies

### a) *Lady Doak College, Madurai*

One of the significant ways in which women's studies got introduced in the Christian colleges was mainly through teaching of women's issues as part of what they call as value education. At the Lady Doak College, an introductory course on women's studies was first offered in 1986 as an additional course or interest course within the value education.<sup>26</sup> Since value education was made compulsory for both the students and the teachers, the college management and administration ensured that each and every staff was made to contribute and participate in women's studies related programmes. Within the value education, as the former principal, Ms. Shanthi Manuel recollects, "students were made to discuss lives of women who were made invisible- like the lives and times of their own grandmothers and also issues of sexuality, body and violence were discussed under the course on women's health and family".

In 1978, when the Lady Doak College was granted autonomy, it came up with some innovative curriculum in women's studies for its undergraduate students within the various departments of the college. The credit for this goes to the former principal Ms. Shanthi Manuel for her perceptive and innovative methods of reorienting the academic and administrative structures to include gender within various curriculums of the disciplines. As early as 1979, a network of Christian colleges began to debate about the need to have a separate department for women's studies within these colleges. Ms. Shanthi Manuel, the then principal of the college was opposed to the idea of a separate department for women's studies and instead promoted the idea of incorporating gender perspective in all disciplines and also in the administration of the college.<sup>27</sup> Her view then was that a separate department for women's studies would become exclusive and segregated without an involvement of the entire staff of the college. As Ms. Shanthi Manuel recounts, 'women's studies in the college began with gender sensitization of the college management'. For instance, in the early 80s, when the United Board of Colleges for Christian Higher

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<sup>26</sup> Anna Abraham, 'Introductory Course on Women's Studies Offered at Lady Doak College', in S.Gita Rani (ed.), *Consultation on Women's Studies : Sponsored by the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, held at Lady Doak College, Madurai, 1989*, Lady Doak College Publication, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Ms. Shanthi Manuel, Chennai, 18 October 2004. This fact that she was against a separate department of women's studies and for a critical perspectives on women to be included in teaching and in administration of the college has also been noted by Ms. Anna Abraham who was responsible for drawing up a curriculum for the introductory course in women's studies for the undergraduates.

Education (UBCCHE) organized an international conference on women's studies, the Lady Doak College along with few others used that occasion to raise serious objections to the termination of women staff of Christian colleges immediately after their marriage.

Towards an effective introduction of women's studies as academic programme, an 'administrative restructuring' was undertaken to involve the entire faculty in evolving women's studies curriculum within various disciplines. To come up with a good curriculum and a syllabus, importance was given to course evaluation as well as faculty evaluation. The faculty was also recognized for collective actions and innovations in the planning and execution of new curriculum. A curriculum planning committee was set up for involving the entire staff of social sciences to discuss how gender could be incorporated in various curriculums. It was not only the conventional disciplines like English and Tamil that took to women's studies course but also a discipline like social Psychology where a paper on womanhood and women's work was introduced as papers.

Since, women's studies in general was primarily introduced only within the social science disciplines, the college began to explore ways and means of introducing the students and teachers from science disciplines to women's studies. Towards this, an introductory course on 'Feminism and Gender' was made a compulsory course for all undergraduate students of the college in their third year. This was also known as 'foundation course'. Talking about how this foundation course in women's studies was evolved, the then principal notes, "To evolve this foundation course, a group of teachers came together and brainstormed on what is women's studies and how do we go about teaching the course. The idea was that as an institution for women's education we had to prioritize women's concerns and link ourselves with the women's movement".

To some extent, one could consider the foundation course in women's studies as an academic innovation and a model for introducing it at the undergraduate level. A glance at the module of this Foundation Course offers us the perspective and the conceptual clarity with which this course had been offered at the undergraduate level. This introductory course begins with what is women's studies, what is gender and feminism and then moves on to a discussion of gender roles in various societies. The course also examines the role of religion and legislations in addressing issues of women's rights. As part of the course, a paper on 'women's organizations and women's movement in post independent India' is



offered along with projects like the study of women's groups and organizations in Madurai where the college is located.

The success story of this programme was mainly due to the substantial training and orientation given to the faculty teaching women's studies. As Ms. Anna Abraham, who initiated the foundation course recalls, "We had received All India Association for Christian Higher Education (AIACHE) funding for continuous faculty orientation programme and also small funds for exchange programme to motivate teachers to take up teaching in women's studies. Each department had to orient the staff not just in their respective discipline but also to make the teachers contribute their time and talent for teaching and curriculum evolving in women's studies".<sup>28</sup> The faculty was encouraged to pursue their research in women's studies and they were also sent to other academic institutions of higher learning like the Oberlin College, Asian Women's Institute and to countries like China, Philippines and Bulgaria to pursue higher studies in women's studies.

Despite the introduction of women's studies courses in the various disciplines of the college, the idea of a separate centre for women's studies within the college was deliberated upon after the involvement of the college in the preparatory process for the International Women's Conference in 1985. In 1988, the then principal of the college met with a group of twenty five faculty members from the departments of humanities and languages to consider seriously what women's studies could mean to the college and what the proposed Centre for Women's Studies could do. After the United Board for Christian Higher Education reviewed women's studies programme on campus, the Centre for Women's Studies was started in 1988, with their funding. The main focus of the Centre's activities seemed to have been curriculum building and carrying out some research on women's issues other than organizing seminars and workshops for the faculty and students to get them involved in women's studies related academic activities. This is quite clear from the aims and objectives of the Centre:

- a) to provide resources for study and research in areas related to women
- b) to undertake a sociological analysis of women's position in existing structures
- c) to help young people gain self-insight and to help them to develop into more complete human beings.

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ms. Anna Abraham, Bangalore, 23 September 2004.

The Centre had a full time member of the faculty (at the time of inception, a faculty from the department of history was the coordinator) supported by a core group of faculty and post-graduate students of the humanities departments to plan and run the programmes of the center. [For more details on the Centre's programmes and projects see Appendix-II] The entire Centre's activities were conducted with a very minimal Budget of Rs.52,000 for a three year period. Out of this a substantial amount was spent on teaching-learning materials and for the visiting faculty and resource persons to conduct seminars and workshops. Some amount was also allocated for faculty study involving trips outside the campus.

Later the Centre received funding from UGC for building the library and documentation in women's studies. Looking at the objectives and activities of the Centre one could conclude that, until the 1990s, the Centre had mainly concentrated in carrying out academic activities like research projects and curriculum development in women's studies. However, when the college started the self-finance courses, the Centre was faced with the challenge of how to make women's studies 'marketable'. Later, to avail the UGC funding, it contemplated with the idea of combining activism with academic work. The dilemma of shifting from offering women's studies as an agenda for women's education to doing women's studies as activism is well captured in the remark made by the former principal who commented that, "women's studies has to be a knowledge driven and activism seems to be working against this goal. Only in women's studies we are faced with this challenge".

During our visit to the College in August 2004 to meet with the staff, students, we could decipher that the college continues to be exuberant with the same enthusiasm and learning spirit, though its agenda of incorporating women's studies in all disciplines, orienting the teaching staff etc. had been militated by factors like lack of funding possibilities. Taking serious note of the self-financed courses that were introduced in the college, a teacher observed,

With the self-finance courses, the nature of activities of the college has changed tremendously. You have part-time teaching staff who are not sufficiently oriented to teach women's studies courses. The students show very little interest in non-career oriented courses like the women's studies. Allowing the self-finance courses has killed the spirit of learning and it has changed the dynamics of the college. ...the compulsion of the college to show more attention on courses that could attract

students and fetch money has diluted the democratic structures. Women's studies courses had to bear the brunt of it since it is not career-oriented.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, the activities of the Centre for Women's Studies have received new impetus with UGC grants but the Centre is expected to fulfill the UGC mandate of combining 'extension work' with academic activities.<sup>30</sup> It will be interesting to watch the future unfolding of the Centre as it grapples with competing rationalities and contradictory objectives.

*b) Women's Christian College, Chennai<sup>31</sup>*

As early as 1975, at the end of the International Women's Year, Women's Christian College in Chennai (WCC) had set up a Women's Studies Centre. Founded in 1915, the college, right from the beginning emphasized that education, among other things, was central to the development of women, and, therefore felt the need for a Centre to sensitize the staff and students on women's issues. However, in those early years, women's studies was not introduced as a teaching programme or as courses in various disciplines. The college's early years of close association with the Asian Women's Institute (AWI), an NGO accredited to the Department of Public Information of the United Nations, was the main force behind the founding of the Women's Studies Centre within the college.<sup>32</sup> The proposed aims and activities of this centre corresponded to the objectives and implementation schemes of the AWI, namely, one, to procure books on women so as to understand the problems facing them and their role and status in the family; two, understanding the social, economic and political spheres with the aim of facilitating research on women from the existing literature; and, three, identifying lacunae in knowledge regarding the role and status of women which would form the base for new work. The education of young girls, mainly to create an awareness of the role they were

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<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note here, that in Lady Doak College, right from the beginning women's studies was perceived as critical learning and awareness. The foundation course continues to be part of the compulsory learning for all students across disciplines. The College has not introduced carrier-oriented courses within the teaching of women's studies.

<sup>30</sup> It is too early to evaluate the Centre's current activities.

<sup>31</sup> The details of Women's Christian College's involvement in women's studies have been drawn mainly from the survey notes of Susan Alexander and we are grateful to her.

<sup>32</sup> The Asian Women's Institute (AWI) was born out of a meeting of the heads of nine women's Christian colleges in Seoul, in 1972. WCC along with St. Christopher Training College, also in Madras, and seven other colleges situated in Lucknow, Lahore, Seoul, Tehran, Beirut, and Tokyo were part of the AWI. The name 'Madras Women's Initiative' (Also known as Madras Women's Centre) was used to distinguish the chapter at WCC. Unfortunately, the college does not have information on this initiative. An archives at the Yale university seem to have all the materials related to the 'Madras Women's Centre' as part of the collection on the Asian Women's Initiatives.

required to play in a changing society, and the sensitization of educated women to draw them into the struggle against ignorance and social injustice, were other stated objectives of the Centre.

In the early 80s the programmes of the Centre could not be accommodated within the academic schedule which was felt to be too 'tight' especially after the college was granted autonomy. A retired member of the staff, who was actively involved in the Centre, pointed out that the upside of this was that only those who were genuinely interested would participate in the Centre's activities which were conducted after college hours. Our respondents spoke of a 'good' response from the students. A notice-board with newspaper cuttings was maintained, and, besides conferences (e.g. on peace), activities included staging of puppet shows, a show on dowry even being telecast. There was ongoing interaction with other AWI centres such as the Pakistan Women's Institute, Lahore, and Student exchange programmes between AWI centres, as also participation in the programmes of other organizations like the All India Women's Association, the Joint Action Council for Women, Y.W.C.A. and Women's Voluntary Service of Tamil Nadu. Also, within the college, a library of relevant books, reports and journals was built up over the years.

The decline in the activities of this Centre, after about a decade, has been linked to factors such as change of leadership of the college and problems with funding due to a shift in the thrust of the activities of the AWI. Some faculty at the college continue to nostalgically recall the role of AWI in arousing consciousness and sensitizing students and staff, some of whom took up research on women's issues. Despite these early efforts to introduce women's studies it did not find a place in the teaching or academic curriculum for a long time. One need to note here, that the WCC activities and the international network for promoting women's studies started much before the UGC recommendations for introducing women's studies courses in the colleges. Teachers of this college came into teaching of women's studies courses, only after being part of the Women's Studies Center's activities and programmes which were funded by the AWI. Even if the participation of the faculty was very minimal, in some departments like in the history department, it enabled them in preparing workbooks for teaching the women's studies course and some of them undertook research in women's studies. For instance, in 1982, the department of history

introduced a paper called 'Women's Studies' as a major for the third year students. As books for references were very few, the department prepared a 'workbook' consisting mainly of notes on the topics within the syllabus that served as a textbook for students of the course. In 2001, the same course had to be restructured to 'make it more topical and relevant' with the title of Gender Studies.

The History department also offered another one semester optional paper on women's studies with the syllabus similar to the core paper of history major to all undergraduate students of the college. Though this course was popular among the students for nearly a decade, in the 1990s, students began to opt for 'job oriented courses' and therefore the course on women's studies had to be withdrawn. The history department now offers optional courses on tourism, art and architecture and Human rights. Much later, the department of English too started offering papers like 'feminist perspectives' and 'women writing' as part of English literature courses.

Few years ago, an attempt was made to start a Women's Cell on Campus, but it is now non-functional. General reticence to discuss the Cell, and the lack of official documentation in the college about the body, made it difficult to gather information about its aims and activities. What is clear is that from the outset, the ill fated Cell was the victim of internal wrangling and a power struggle that rendered it ineffective in promoting women's studies on the campus.

*c) The Madras Christian College, Chennai<sup>33</sup>*

Unlike the above two women's colleges which mainly offer undergraduate degree courses, The Madras Christian College, a co-education college, offers post-graduate degrees and research degrees through M.Phil and Ph.D programmes in both sciences and social sciences. With the autonomy granted to the college in 1978, it has constantly evolved new courses along with revising the curriculum in the existing disciplines and also new patterns of evaluations. In 1984, the Department of history was the first to introduce a course in women's studies for the post-graduate students. Though introduced as optional paper, later it was turned into compulsory course.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This part of the report substantially draws from Susan Alexander's survey notes on MCC activities.

<sup>34</sup> For details of the Madras Christian College's experience of introducing women's studies course at various levels of degree programme mainly within the discipline of history, see, Rukmani Sampath Kumar, 'Women's Studies : The Madras Christian College Experience', S. Gita Rani (ed.) , *Consultation on Women's Studies*, pp. 4 - 8.

With the funding from All India Christian Association for Higher Education (AIACHE), the college started a Centre for Women's Studies (CWS) in 1987 'to promote an academic focus on women's studies within the college'. The Centre was mainly entrusted with the task of evolving a syllabus for an introductory course in women's studies to be taught at the undergraduate level. Later, the Centre organized range of programmes on gender issues as part of bringing about awareness among the students and also for involving them in community level activities that had special focus on women's issues.

In 1988, with the help of the Centre, the college introduced women's studies as part of 'value education' for the first year undergraduate students of the entire college. It is interesting to note that this course initially was offered only to the non-Christian women students who could opt for it under the scheme of 'value education' instead of a course on social studies. The Christian students were offered only religious instruction and could not opt for the introductory women's studies course.<sup>35</sup> The reasons offered for the gender and religious divide within these courses throw considerable light on how the college envisaged women's studies primarily as imparting values to students. The 'value education' programme that included women's studies, was not assessed formally in terms of grade or marks though there were short tests with 'objective' type questions. In order to provide visibility to the women's studies course, in the early 90s, a prize for the best performance in women's studies was distributed on college day.

Over the years, however, the introductory course on women's studies could not attract students for several reasons; these include the pervasive notion that this course was mainly for non-Christian women's students in a college that has substantial Christian students, strong opposition from the male teaching staff, lack of participation by the science faculty in various women's studies related programme, the absence of formal assessment in terms of marks and grades that would compel students to be regular with women's studies course etc.

However, from 1992, under the co-ordination of a retired physics professor, and the Dean of women students, the Centre's activities acquired new dynamics. Having come from the science background, she first oriented herself with women's studies by reading, attending various programmes and through networking with women's groups. In the same

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.4.

year when she took over as co-ordinator, a women's studies Cell was started mainly for 'out reach activities' of the Centre. While the Centre continued to concentrate on academic pursuits like evolving course works, building library and documentation on women's issues, the Cell was expected to carry out 'social work' such as creating awareness on health, legal and social issues among the 'uneducated employed / unemployed women'. In course of time, the Cell's activities and identity was merged with the Centre. Around this time, the women's studies course offered to first year female undergraduate students was opened to non-Christian male students. But their participation continued to be very minimal given the peer pressure of not to opt for a 'soft course' that is explicitly titled as 'women's studies'.

Despite the low level of participation in women's studies courses, the Centre's activities attracted funding from United Board of Christian Higher Education in Asia (UBCHEA) which not only invited the Centre to be part of a conference on 'Approaches to Women's Studies in Asia' held in Korea but also funded research projects on women's issues. Though the project fund was available for the departments to carry out research, given the then principal's concern for 'outreach programme', the possibilities for good academic research in women's studies seemed to have been lost. The project money was not even spent on building up the infrastructure for the Centre.

Despite these constraints, between 1994-99, the Centre carried out five major projects under the titles of 'Curriculum Development and Awareness Generation in Women's Concerns' and 'Women Development Projects', funded by UBCHEA. Under these projects, efforts were made to involve the science students and staff and also male staff of all the departments. The Centre encouraged other departments to undertake small surveys and seminars on women's issues; brought out publications based on these seminars and surveys; organized women scientists to address the issue of science and women. During these years, with the efforts of the Centre, many departments revised their curriculum to include women's studies. For instance, the Department of History conducted a workshop on 'Restructuring the Women's Studies Course for the Post Graduates' (PG) after which a new course called 'Gender in Indian History' was introduced as compulsory course at the PG level.

Over the last few years the diminished funding and change in leadership of the Centre has had an adverse impact on the functioning of the Centre and on the orientation of women's studies in MCC.

### **2.2.3 The Self-Financed Private Institutes in Women's Studies**

1. Since 1995, the self-financed Valliammal Institution in Madurai offers a course in women's studies as correspondence course along with two days of contact classes. The lessons on women's studies are sent out with response sheets for evaluation. From 1995 to 2003 around 400 students had enrolled and completed the course. The lessons cover topics like what is feminism, patriarchy, myths and stereotypes about gender roles, approaches to women's liberation, role of religion, language and history in women's liberation, violence against women and economic and political rights of women. The duration of the course is six months with students attending two full day contact classes/lectures for the entire course. Each student is expected to pay Rs.500 for the course. There is one full time director and two assistants to run the entire institute's activities. It has to be noted here that this institution does not offer women's studies with the objective of 'integrating' and/or 'mainstreaming' women's studies within the conventional social science disciplines. The courses in women's studies offered by this institute aim mainly to provide access to the job market in the NGO sector; the latter demands at least a minimum knowledge of women's studies.
2. From the year 2000, the International Christian Mission (ICM) Sisters in Dindigul near Maduari have been offering one-year residential course in women's studies for Christian women only. Mainly funded from the internal funds of the ICM, the course focuses, not merely on women and religion but also on contemporary social and political issues along with theories of women's oppression and feminism. A ten month course module on 'Women Studies' covers a range of topics like globalization in the socio-political context of India, Development debate and Women in Development, Theories of Patriarchy and its presence in scripture and religious tradition, Feminism and Feminist Movement in India, Female Sexuality, Identity, Feminist theologians and the critique of religion, etc. Since the women's studies course is offered for women theologians special attention is paid to studying sacred scriptures from a feminist perspective. Courses such as 'Biblical Hermeneutics', 'Prophets in Scripture and



Prophetic Role Today' are taught for the maximum number of hours. The lectures are complemented with field level activities where course participants have to network with women's organizations, organize inter-faith dialogue among the village communities and even undertake six month education programme such as, for for drop-out dalit women in villages, etc.

#### **2.2.4 UGC initiated Women's Studies Centres and Courses<sup>36</sup>**

##### *a) Alagappa University, Karaikudi: The Department of Women's Studies and the Centre for Women's Studies*

The women's studies programme in this University came up mainly through the initiative of a former Vice Chancellor Dr. Radha Thiyagarajan who was earlier part of the expert committee that recommended founding of Mother Teresa Women's University. The Alagappa University has a Department of Women's Studies as well as a Centre for Women's Studies started in the same year (1989) and funded by the UGC. In the words of the former head of the department, the idea of starting a separate department for women's studies was to give it a disciplinary status and offer degrees in women's studies<sup>37</sup>. Since its inception the department has been offering a two-year course called *Master of Women's Studies*, which was renamed in 1998, as *Master of Women's Studies and Computer Applications*. Justifying this renaming, the department claimed that, "[the new job oriented course] is designed to be passports to ready employment and, of course to give our girls a new socio-economic profile and enable them to find their place in the mainstream of national life".<sup>38</sup> Other than offering a paper on feminist thought the entire course has been designed as training in leadership and computer applications and in 'action-oriented methodologies' along with internships in companies, in NGOs and in administrative agencies.

The women's studies course at the Alagappa University is advertised as 'educative, employable and empowering'. The justification given by the director was that "the women's studies course has to confront the chronic unemployment and underemployment

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<sup>36</sup> Other than the three important UGC sponsored Centre for Women's Studies discussed in this report, some new Centres have come up in other universities in Tamilnadu such as the Centre for Women's Studies at the Bharathi Dasan University, Trichi which we have not taken up for this study since they were founded after this survey was completed and also they are at the incipient stage for any kind of review of activities.

<sup>37</sup> Regina Papa, 'Crossing Boundary Politics: Centre for Women's Studies, Alagappa University', in Devaki Jain and Pam Rajput (eds), *Narratives from the Women's Studies Family*, p.

<sup>38</sup> Alagappa University, Women's Studies Division, *Handbook*, n.d, p. 11.

situation in the country”. Though the department offers regular and part time M.Phil and Ph.D programmes, for the past few years there has been no students registered for research degrees and not even for the ‘job oriented’ two year Master’s degree. At the time of this survey there were only nine students (including the male students) enrolled for both the first and second year of the M.A course.

Initially, when the department was formed the courses were offered only to women students. Since there was a decline in their enrollment the course was opened for male students. Even after this, no male students joined for the regular course, though there seem to be some of them taking up the course through distance education. Due to the network with international organizations the department occasionally attracted few foreign students to enroll in women’s studies. Although the Department claims that its wider network with NGOs, different Government departments and other national and international institutions (the handbook enlists in detail these networks) combined to make the course relevant and had enabled its students to find lucrative jobs, the courses as such do not seem to attract students. The entire course work and teaching seem to be channelized into various outreach programmes as well as training activities which seem to overlap with the women’s studies Center’s activities. The only difference being that the courses of the Department, designed more in the form of training, are offered only for the enrolled students while the programmes of the Center are offered to women outside the University.

*The Center for Women’s Studies: ‘Our mother-house’*

The University’s Centre for Women’s Studies is the first UGC approved Centre in Tamilnadu. In keeping with the UGC’s thrust on extension work as outlined in the UGC guidelines of 1998,<sup>39</sup> the Centre has focused its attention exclusively on outreach programmes like providing free legal aid, EDP (Entrepreneur Development Programme) training programmes etc. Entrepreneurship Development, the Centre claims, is their ‘prime specialization’ and believes that ‘self-employment is feasible remedy to feminisation of poverty’. Its EDP programme had been developed in collaboration with Banks etc. The Center is a “designated agency to run entrepreneurship development training programmes under the Prime Minister’s Rozgar Yojana”.

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<sup>39</sup> The UGC guidelines for development of women’s studies brought out in 1998 and also the Approach Paper clearly prioritizes the ‘extension work’ over research and teaching and also itemizes those works. See footnote 17 for details.

This Centre, like the one at the Mother Teresa Women's University, is actively involved in forming women Self Help Groups and in coaching the rural women for professional courses entrance examinations. It is also a nodal agency for all kinds of gender sensitization training programmes. It also "serves as a nodal resource agency to co-ordinate and monitor research programmes on women and women related issues". The Centre claims that one of the important aspects of its curriculum designing is combining of 'field-based women's development programmes with computer applications'.

Though the Center does not offer any degree course or diplomas or conduct refresher courses for teachers in women's studies, being the first UGC authorized Centre, it has claimed the mandate to orient other women's studies centres in Tamilnadu and also to advise colleges in framing syllabus related to women's studies for various disciplines.<sup>40</sup> For instance, the Department of Women's Studies at the University was involved in framing a syllabus 'Women in history' for an undergraduate course at the Lady Doak College. It is also interesting to note that neither the Department nor the Centre has faculty that has specialized in the necessary disciplines needed to undertake the task of curriculum designing for various departments and disciplines.

Given its location within a predominantly science University, the Centre has a marginal role to play in the academic activities of the University. It has not been able to attract the faculty from the science departments to participate in the Centre's activities. The various science departments have also not incorporated any syllabus on women's studies. In fact, there seem to have been no dialogue on science and women's studies unlike in MCC where at least the Centre was involved in organizing a conference for women scientists. The director of the Centre, a sociologist, appointed mainly to carry out the activities of the Centre also is the head of the Department of women's studies. There is one research officer, a research associate and a project fellow, all of them are men from the Department of Sociology. The Centre's staff is strictly expected to carry out the work assigned by the director who designs the entire activity, networking, planning and monitoring.

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<sup>40</sup> Recently, the UGC has upgraded the Centre as an advanced centre under phase II with a grant of 40 lakhs. As per the UGC guidelines, in Phase II, the centres are expected to conduct foundation and other courses for students and also expected to assist in incorporating women's studies in other disciplines. The centre for women's studies at the Alagappa University seemed to have applied for placement of the centre in phase III in which the centre would serve as resource and nodal centre of the entire region with a special mandate.

Unlike the Department of Women's Studies, the Center having autonomy within the University and being involved in various government welfare programmes, receives funds from various departments of the Tamilnadu government along with funding from UGC. The Center claims to be the first women's studies centre to run successfully the Tamilnadu government's empowerment programme. Commenting on the success of the Centre the UGC review committee in 1994 observed that "The Center has been playing a leading role in providing training support in the implementation of the various developmental schemes for women launched by the government...The private sector also looks up to the Centre for providing training to women entrepreneurs".<sup>41</sup>

While the Center has managed to acquire its visibility purely through its networking with various agencies including the state agencies, the Department of Women's Studies does not even have regular classes. It appears that to retain its identity, the Department along with the Centre carries out the same task of 'extension work' at the cost of teaching and research.

Women's studies being primarily perceived as a discipline pertaining to social sciences, the location of the Centre for Women's Studies as well as the Department of women's studies within the University which exclusively caters to the interest of science and technology reveal the limit to which academic activities can be carried out. The Centre had been quite successful in implementing its agenda of making women's studies relevant mainly by undertaking development programmes on behalf of some NGOs and the Government agencies, though there had been very little academic activities. Their so-called extension activities do not feed into academic practices like reworking of the curriculum and teaching or even systematic documentation. However, some programme are arbitrarily treated as academic exercises and included in the course without any systematic evaluation of the course or teaching method. For instance, programmes like gender sensitization of police, skill building for self-help groups, awareness campaigns on HIV- AIDS and rainwater harvesting etc., are also considered as part of 'research activities' and therefore bringing out handbooks, newsletters and posters become academic outputs.

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<sup>41</sup> Surprisingly the review committee has made very little and virtually no observation about the curriculum or syllabus or teaching programme of women's studies at the university and also on the research output of the Centre. This is intriguing given UGC's equal emphasis on the academic interventions of women's studies center.

*b) Centre for Women's Studies: Avinashilingam Home Science College for Women*

The Avinashilingam Home Science College for Women which has become a deemed University, offers more than 20 different courses through six faculties-home science, science, humanities, education, business studies and engineering for over 3000 students. The University claims that courses at the undergraduate and post graduate level are of an applied nature catering to the academic needs of women students. The major areas of research by the students and the faculty are related to issues on family relations, employment and income generation, resource management, health and nutrition, reproductive health, women's rights and legal issues, political participation, environment and technology transfer. Since the 'community work' is part of the academic activities for many departments of the University, the University felt the need to introduce the subject 'women's studies' for all undergraduate and post-graduate students 'to sensitize them to women's issues'. In the early years, the women's studies curriculum and projects were mainly to reflect upon the University's involvement in the non-formal education for women.

The University had been involved in various 'outreach programmes' like conducting courses on basics of nutrition, food preservation and popularization of wheat and soya products for women. From 1996 onwards, the home science extension Department has been training rural and urban women as well as the students of the University on leadership and voter awareness, particularly preparing them for the election to local bodies and also on issues of immunisation, environment protection, water conservation, rural and urban pollution control and low cost sanitization efforts, fuel energy conservation, growing medicinal plants, population education etc. The Department was also involved in forming of women Self Help Groups, both in the rural and urban areas, for thrift and credit activities.

The Centre for Women's Studies, started as late as 2000, was to continue some of these outreach programmes and also to oversee women's studies courses within the University. One need to note here that women's studies in this University emerged out of the conceptualization of women as 'home makers' and women's needs as 'family needs' which also inform subjects like Home Science and Home management that are taught here. In other words, right from the beginning women's studies was perceived to be

complementary to other disciplines taught in the University and not as new perspective to interrogate the stereotypes about women that have been internal to the disciplines like Home Science.

As the Centre's Director perceptively states, "women's studies and home science are almost allied subjects. When we started it our conception of women's studies was based on the idea that change and reform of women's life is crucial for the entire family". Therefore, women's studies was conceptualized as an extension of some of the above activities with an insertion of one or two courses like feminism which are the requirements of UGC to receive funds. However, the Director of the Women's Studies Centre was clear that feminism should not be part of women's studies as it was 'destructive'. According to her feminism is an antithesis of women's development. As she remarks, "Although we have feminist theory as part of our course at the M.Phil and Ph.D level, we are not feminists. We want to stress the development aspect of womanhood and not the destructive aspects".

The Centre, which functions within the Department of Home Science Extension, offers a course on women's studies for M.Phil students as a compulsory course and also a course for the second year post graduate extension department students. Since the UGC has mandated the women's studies centres to focus on issues related to environment, law and human rights, the Centre offers courses on the above themes for the undergraduate students.

The Centre also offers certificate course for non-University women like Diploma in Women's Studies. Currently, about 82 M.Phil students from the departments of management, Home science and humanities have opted for women's studies as an area for research to whom the Centre 'offer(s) relevant research topics to be researched and also some scholarship'. The research areas and topics identified by the Center revolve around the issue of making women's studies 'relevant' not merely to the students who undertake research but also to the 'target groups' and to the University itself which had been emphasizing on the 'applied nature of course for women students'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> CWS, profile published in 2001. The research areas identified by the Centre is quite revealing in terms of the Centre's anxiety to combine activism with academic work. Following are some samples of research areas identified by the Centre: "The Empowerment of Women for realizing their full identity and power in all spheres of life; Participatory Approach to Women's Development by identifying their needs and Planning Programmes in Partnership to foster systemic learning; Entrepreneurship Development for Solving the Problems of Underemployment and Unemployment and thereby help in the Empowerment of Women; Literacy and Education for Empowerment of Women; Technological Changes and Choices for the Contribution of Women towards National Development; Women and Reproductive Health Care for the better

Other than carrying out short research studies, the Centre has been mainly involved in ‘outreach programme’ that closely resemble the ones carried out by the Centre at the Alagappa University. The Centre had been closely collaborating with the state and district bodies that are involved in ICDS programme. It has provided gender training to women councilors, training of police force in gender issues, carrying out various campaigns like safe drinking water, disposal of garbage etc. Skill trainings are offered to women on the preparation of detergent powder, cleaning powder, fruit juice, soft toy making etc. It is interesting to note here, that these trainings are offered only to the women and not for men of the same community. The University’s core assumption that women are the ‘homemakers’ engenders all its projects. The Centre is also involved in advocacy work like forming of SHGs, extending marketing facilities for the Self-help group members who are engaged in producing artificial jewellery. As one of the research staff at the Centre notes, “Every year we organize two days of Market *mela* to patronize their products. This *mela* is meant only for the college staff to purchase the products from the Self Help Groups”.

In the context of the Centre’s extensive involvement in ‘extension work’, it is interesting to note that it has defined the multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies through its activism and network and not through its academic work like teaching and research.<sup>43</sup> For instance, if one looks at the research projects carried out by the Centre, there is hardly any attempt to integrate research methods used in other disciplines. On other count, the stress on the interdisciplinary nature of women’s studies, even as the Centre considers women’s studies to be complimentary to disciplines like home science, seem to be merely related to the politics of how to claim an identity or carve a niche for itself within the University that has already claimed to be working only for the interests of women. The ‘multi-disciplinary approach’ seems to be only in terms of the Centre’s collaboration with the science departments in organizing joint seminars etc.

In this context, it is interesting to note that whenever the Centre had collaborated with the science departments within the University, it has come up with a curious

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Health of the Future Generation”. One may note here, that in the anxiety to make women’s studies ‘relevant’ to women, the Centres for Women’s Studies across various institutions in Tamilnadu carry out research projects that offer ‘results’ / ‘findings’ in the form of simple ‘solutions’ to complex contexts and do not make critical enquiry into systems and ideologies that mediate women’s lives.

<sup>43</sup>The centre’s collaboration with other women’s studies centres or Cells, with other faculties of the University, with the government and NGO agencies and with the local communities are considered as defining the inter-disciplinary nature of the centre. See, CWS, profile, 2001.

conceptualization of gender equality and power. For instance, in collaboration with the Department of Physics, the Centre for Women's Studies had organised a one day seminar on "Power and Perspectives of Women in the Changing Society and Concept of Gravity by Newton, Einstein and Vedadri".<sup>44</sup> The attempt here seems to be to simply equate notions of power and energy as understood within the discipline of physics with the notion of power for women as understood by women's studies/movement.

The Centre's 'interdisciplinary' courses for the students in the University include courses like 'Tailoring Techniques and Fashion Designing'. In a recent interview the Vice-Chancellor of the University sums up the purpose of the women's studies centre as "Educating the girl students about their role in the society, developing leadership and creating awareness about our rich culture, heritage and at the same time updating them on the current knowledge in the field of technique." Traditional yet modern in their outlook is what was required of the girl students and women's studies was expected to equip them with this.

As far as funding is concerned, other than UGC Funds, the Centre has been receiving funds from British Council and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for collaborating with them in organizing workshops and for conducting research on distant education for rural women. The Centre has received a special grant to offer a certificate course in women's studies. In terms of academic work, the Centre considers itself as extending the established University interests in home management and nutrition etc and therefore it considers the UGC funding as facilitating the ongoing works.

*c) The Centre for Women's Studies, Pondichery University.*

With the recommendation of the UGC Standing Committee for women's studies, a Centre for Women's Studies was started in 1999 at the Pondichery Central University. The Centre for Women's Studies has been given a Department status and it offers various courses like the PG diploma course in Women's Studies (from 1999), and a part time M.Phil course followed by full time M.Phil course (from 2003). The one year PG Diploma in Women Studies has four hard-core papers and three soft-core papers offered in two semesters and along with these M.Phil students are expected to take up projects. As of now there are many PG Diploma students who have completed their projects. The Women's

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<sup>44</sup> CWS News letter, Vol. 1, no. 6, January- March 2002.



Studies papers are of interdisciplinary nature covering range of subjects like, ‘Women in Indian Society and Their Right to Law’, ‘Women’s Economic Development’, ‘Women’s Writings’, ‘Gender Mass Media and Popular Culture’ and ‘Women and Science and Technology’.

Unlike the other Centre for Women’s Studies, this one has primarily concentrated on the academic activities. Similar to the other departments of the University, women’s studies here has been involved only in teaching and carrying out some research projects. There has been no ‘extension activities’ though some experts in different field, including activists from NGOs have been invited as guest faculty to deliver lectures at the Centre.

The fact that this Center like any other department merely offers courses and grants degrees in Women’s Studies does give it a status of a department. But it faces host of other problems, the main being the poor response from students to take up this course. As one faculty at the Centre observes, “they [the students] do not see any job opportunities in doing these courses or in obtaining a separate degree or diploma in Women’s Studies”. From 2001, given the poor response to the courses, the Centre has dropped the Diploma course in women’s studies. After much persuasion, as the faculty member notes, few students from other disciplines take this course only as a ‘soft course’. Though the Centre has been given a department status by the University, unlike other departments it has inadequate faculty with no permanent faculty to co-ordinate and teach the women’s studies courses. At present there is only one reader who is in charge of the Centre and also teaches the courses along with guest faculty who teach various courses. This Centre is a case in point about what happens when the Centre for Women’s Studies take up only degree granting programme like other departments but without a disciplinary status and without adequate infrastructure to teach the course.

### **2.2.5 Other Departments Offering Women’s Studies Courses**

From the 1990s, the pedagogy of women’s studies has gained enormous significance which is evident from the number of courses and papers in women’s studies being introduced within various disciplines /departments of social sciences in the colleges of Tamilnadu. In Chennai, out of the 18 institutions covered by the survey, 13 institutions including the Madras University offer a course in women’s studies in the Department of History, either for the undergraduates or for postgraduates or at both levels. The

Department of Economics in six colleges and in the University offer courses on various aspects of women and economy. From 1994, the Department of Economics in the University also runs a Center for Gender Studies. While four colleges offer women's studies within the Department of Social Work, two colleges offer it in the discipline of Psychology, three in Sociology and three in the English department. In Trichy, two colleges offer women's studies within the Department of History, two in Economics, two colleges within English, and one in Social Work and two in the Department of Tamil. In Madurai, out of the six institutions covered, one college offers courses in women's studies within the Department of History, one in Sociology, two in the Department of English and one within the Tamil department. Women's studies is also offered through a separate department of women's studies and by the center for women's studies in two Universities. It needs to be noted here, that women's studies, by and large has been introduced only in women's colleges with the exception of a few co-education / men's colleges; the latter are mainly the Christian colleges.

In almost all colleges, depending on the requirement of the course within various disciplines, on an average at least 40 to 60 students at the undergraduate level and 20 to 40 students at the post graduate level attend the course.<sup>45</sup> However, in the co-education colleges, mainly women students opt for the women's studies courses. In some colleges, the male students seem to take up the courses only if the job prospect is part of the papers offered. Also, since the Tamilnadu government excessively focuses on the development of women entrepreneurs, within the business degree courses like BBA and B.Com at least one or two units on women entrepreneurship is offered which the male students, opting for these courses, cannot avoid.

However, over the years in these colleges, women's studies courses seem to have lost out to other 'job oriented' courses. Even within the conventional social science disciplines / departments, the number of students opting for women's studies courses has dwindled. The high visibility of women's studies could only be retained by offering it as 'job oriented' course. In Loyola College, where only male students are admitted for the undergraduate courses, an optional paper, introduced in 1992, entitled, 'Women and Dalits' has attracted male students to opt for it since the paper is 'topical and relevant'. Whereas, in the same

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<sup>45</sup> For more details on the courses offered in women's studies within various disciplines, the nature of student participation and the methods of evaluation etc. see, Appendix-III.

college, when a paper called 'Gender Justice' was introduced in the Sociology department for the undergraduate male students, until 2004 not a single student had opted for this paper. In some colleges, like in the case of St. Joseph's College in Trichy, even if the male students choose the courses in women's studies as part of their research degrees, research on any theme or issue related to women or gender especially at the M.Phil and Ph.d levels are undertaken only by female students.

Even in women's colleges, if the course offered is not 'job-oriented', the number of students attending the course seems to be drastically dwindling. For instance, in Stella Maris college, where women's studies is offered as an optional paper against other 'job-oriented' or vocational courses, only very few and sometimes none of the students opt for it. In WCC, for more than ten years beginning from 1982, the History Department offered a one semester paper entitled 'Women's Studies' as an optional paper open to a cross section of undergraduate students. While the response to the paper in the 80s was said to be good, by the early 90s, it appears to have lost out to more 'job oriented, technical and vocational courses' that were available, and this optional paper on women's studies had to be withdrawn. Other optional papers offered by the History Department, such as Human Resource Development, Tourism, Art and Architecture seem to have attracted students in large numbers. Similarly, at the St.Joseph's College, Trichy, in the Department of Human Resources, for three years women's studies was offered as an allied paper for the final year post graduate students. Because of poor response from students the entire paper had to be dropped.

In some cases, departments have considerably modified the women's studies courses to accommodate the students' interest in 'job-oriented' courses. For instance, in SDBVN college in Chennai, in the Department of Psychology, a paper called 'Personality Theory and Women's Studies' was introduced in 1996 but was dropped in 2002 since there were no students opting for this paper. Instead, a paper on 'Entrepreneurship Development and Women' has been introduced to attract the students. Sometimes, when an established discipline in social sciences like History, did not find adequate numbers of students enrolled for their courses, these departments themselves have been converted into departments of, for example, Human Rights, which in turn offer one or two papers on women. It is significant to note that across different colleges in Tamilnadu, within the

Department of History, a shift from 'women's studies' to 'Human rights' has occurred. For instance, at the Holy Cross college, Trichi, from the early 90s, a paper 'Women's Studies' was offered to the undergraduate students of history which received a good response from them. However, when the Department, in 2003, wanted to introduce women's studies at the postgraduate level it decided to have papers like 'status of women' only as part of the course on 'human rights'. It also consciously included projects and field works as part of the teaching method, unlike in the case of other papers in history. The course on 'human rights' seems to be attracting substantial numbers of students who perceive that this course on Human Rights will facilitate jobs in the NGO sector. Again, in Ethiraj College in Chennai, the Department of History once had a compulsory paper called 'women's studies' for the undergraduate students. In 2002, when the department shifted its focus from women's studies to human rights, the paper 'women's studies' was reduced to a unit within a paper on 'group rights'. Further, within a paper on 'duties of citizen' a unit on 'duties of women' was introduced.<sup>46</sup>

### **2.2.6 Women's Studies Cells in the Colleges**

Other than offering papers in women's studies some colleges have been actively involved in promoting women's studies through the establishment of women's studies Cells. Although we do not have much details about the founding and functioning of Cells in the colleges, from our brief survey, it is quite clear that even when the UGC gave up the idea of a Cell within the colleges by 1998, the Christian colleges continued to establish the women's studies Cells which were funded mainly by the Christian Institutions for Higher Education. Elsewhere, we have seen how the three prominent Christian higher education institutions started the women's studies Centres along with Cells. Similarly, from 1976 onwards, the Christopher College for Women in Chennai has a Centre for Women which is designated as Department to carry out various activities like a library and documentation on women, holding exhibitions and quiz competitions for the students. While all students of the College are expected to participate in these activities, there are no marks or credit assigned. The Fatima College in Madurai, has a women's Cell started in 1988. Guest

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<sup>46</sup> Similar change has been introduced in other colleges like the Presidency College where the Department of History has replaced a paper called 'women's studies' with a paper on human rights. It is also interesting to note here that in some colleges, the paper on women's studies continues to be taught at the undergraduate level but the paper on human rights is introduced to the postgraduate students especially in the government arts colleges where very few students have enrolled for history.

lectures, group discussions on women's issues, field visits, networking with NGOs and women's forums are the main activities of the Cell. All undergraduate students of the College are expected to participate in these activities; the latter is made compulsory to complete their degree course. While five lecturers from different departments form the core team to co-ordinate the activities, the All India Association for Catholic Higher education (AIACHE) funds the activities. The Holy Cross College and the Bishop Heber College, both in Trichy have started women's study Cells in 2002. The former has a study centre as part of the Cell which offers a paper called 'Wholesome Living' for the third year undergraduate students, for 30 hours a year, mainly with the help of resource persons from outside. This is an elective course without any evaluation. The Cell functions with the help of student volunteers. In the case of the Bishop Heber College, which is a co-education college, the Cell mainly does counseling for the post-graduate women's students apart from organizing lectures on women related themes. The Cell functions from the Department of Economics. At St. Joseph's College, another co-education Catholic college, a Women's Cell was started mainly for the women's students to take part in its activities. Even though the entire college is expected to participate, the male students seemed to have avoided taking part in the Cell's activities. The Cell mainly organizes the International Women's Day and counsels the girl students. In Chennai, another Catholic institute, the Stella Maris College for women, runs two kinds of women's Cells. One for the women faculty, started by the principal in the 80s and the other, for the students functioning like a forum which is also involved in social work outside the College.

### **Part - III**

#### **3.1 Women's Studies Curriculum - 'Making it Relevant'**

It would be interesting to analyse the aims and objectives of women's studies curriculum which in turn would signify the academic content of the women's studies programme. The 'Objectives' enumerated by different colleges for introducing specific papers in women's studies, is revealing for the palpable anxiety to be 'relevant'. The changes in the content of various courses over time and the change in the nomenclature show, that this business of making women's studies relevant is articulated in very many ways.

Some Christian Colleges, to begin with, introduced women's studies as part of 'value education' to emphasize the moral values underlying women's issues. In the Madras Christian College, from the beginning it was emphasized that "Women's Studies is not a clarion call for asserting women's superiority. There is absolutely no question of any debate on male-female superiority, but on the other hand a definite emphasis on male-female parity".<sup>47</sup> In the same College, a Staff handling the course on women's studies in the Department of History observed that the change in nomenclature from women studies to gender studies has evidently increased the comfort level of male students, who now opt for this course in greater numbers. Although the Department is reluctant to share the curriculum and the details of the course, even the rough outline of the syllabus gives the idea that unlike the Centre's course in women's studies, the emphasis of the history department seems to be on making the course relevant by encouraging students to take up projects of contemporary relevance and by linking themselves with the women's movement.

Similarly, in Women's Christian College, Chennai, too, within the history department the women's studies course was restructured to make it more 'topical' and 'relevant' by titling the course as 'gender studies'. At the Holy Cross College, Trichy, the Department of Economics claimed that a paper on 'Women and Development' aims to 'motivate [the students] to participate effectively in community building'. Reading through the syllabus, it is clear that the course is no way geared to critically engage with the discipline of economics. Rather the paper is structured to 'inform' students of the lacuna in our understanding of economic processes because of the exclusion of 'women' as a category. From a study of the 'economic situation' of women, papers on women's studies in the economics department, in general, end up trying to promote 'women as entrepreneurs'.

In Mother Teresa Women's University right from the beginning, the anxiety was how to make women's studies accountable to the government's development programme. For instance, in introducing the aims and activities of the University to the principals of the colleges the former vice-chancellor warned that the "research projects must be such as are

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<sup>47</sup> Rukmani Sampathkumar, 'Women's Studies - The Madras Christian College Experience', in *Consultation on Women's Studies*, p. 4.

relevant to the needs of the times and respond meaningfully to the demands of national development’.<sup>48</sup>

At the Avinashilingam University, the anxiety seems to be to make the women’s studies relevant to the students by offering job oriented courses to them. As the Director of the Centre comments,

being relevant is important for women’s studies to grow and to be beneficial to all women. Therefore there is a need for even a separate department for women and computer application and not just a course. With the lofty ideals of women and nutrition as subject of study, no student is coming forward to take up those courses. Therefore, we need to have courses like ‘women and visual communication’ with a syllabus etc. But for this UGC concurrence is important. These job oriented courses then could be offered as P.G / M.Phil courses to all the students of the seven departments at the University. This would enable the students to get jobs.<sup>49</sup>

The anxiety to ‘sustain’ women’s studies’ departments / centers [in order also that the staff employed in these are retained] is evident from the change in titles of departments and courses to attract students. For example the Mother Teresa Women’s University, following the department of women’s studies at the Alagappa University, has titled the M.A degree course as *Women’s Studies and Computer Applications*.

### **3.2 Institutionalisation: Some Observations**

The above descriptions of how women’s studies have been carried out in different academic institutions with wide variety of courses, projects and extension activities not only enable us to make sense of what has come to constitute as women’s studies in Tamilnadu, but has also brought home the fact that a) the ‘women’ in women’s studies have gained enormous visibility; b) women’s studies has been able to achieve one of its objectives of institutionalizing it in the higher education bodies; c) it has gained pedagogic significance especially from the 1990s as we can see from the number and variety of papers being offered as courses within the social science disciplines in the colleges. d) The centers have provided visibility to women’s studies through its wide ranging and good quantities of

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<sup>48</sup> Report of an address by the Vice-Chancellor, K.Vasanthi Devi at the Conference of Principals of Women’s Colleges of Tamilnadu, in Mother Teresa Women’s University Publication I. P.4.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Dr. K. C.Leelavathy, Director, Centre for Women’s Studies, Avinashilingam Deemed University, Coimbatore, 14 February 2005.

publications like regular research reports, newsletters and booklets or handbooks etc unlike in the case of other social science disciplines. However, this ‘successful’ institutionalization of women’s studies contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction since women’s studies has come to be perceived as a career and not as ‘an alternate vision of knowledge’.<sup>50</sup>

### **3.3 Women’s Studies or Academic Activism**

From the earlier narrations on the practices of women’s studies it is quite clear that the Christian higher education institutions had, even before the entry/mediation of the UGC on the subject, engaged extensively in the debates on making women’s studies primarily an academic discipline. At the outset, in these institutions, women’s studies was defined primarily as women’s education. i.e conscientising the entire academic community on women’s issues and also to some extent rethinking social science disciplines from a women’s point of view. In introducing women’s studies, these colleges were quite clear that there had to be intensive faculty reorientation through training and orientation programmes for an active involvement of the teachers and students in curriculum designing or in evolving new course structure for women’s studies.

In other words, the academic pursuit of women’s studies followed an activist mode in that enormous thrust was given to generation of new knowledge relating to women and women’s issues, raising awareness among the academic community about the need to put together a curriculum and build a discipline of women’s studies. Capacity building of the faculty to teach the women’s studies course was also given high priority within the women’s studies programme. As one can see from the efforts made by colleges like Lady Doak, in the initial years of introducing the courses it was realized that the faculty which came from different disciplines required a special orientation before they taught the course. However, this was not always the case with all the Christian colleges. For instance, in the Madras Christian College, when the course on ‘Women in Historical Perspectives’ was introduced to the history students, it was taught by three teachers including a male who had neither done any academic work in women’s studies nor did they have any previous training or experience in handling the course.

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<sup>50</sup> For a similar argument see, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, ‘Blazing a Quarter Century Trail’, P. 110. Maithreyi states that women’s studies seen as career ‘indicates the risks inherent in institutionalisation’.



While one could attribute the success of the women's studies programme in these colleges to the motivation and funding offered by the International Christian Higher education bodies, to a large extent, the local level and individual initiatives within each of these colleges shaped the meaning and content of women's studies. For instance, at the Lady Doak College, the Principal, namely, Ms. Shanthi Manuel's efforts and initiatives were responsible for launching and engaging with women's studies primarily as an academic activity. The collectivity and involvement of the staff in curriculum planning, and in capacity building of the faculty were significant aspects of her initiatives. Similarly, but in contrast to Lady Doak college, in MCC, a former principal diverted the funds [meant for women's studies research projects to be carried out in various disciplines] to 'outreach programme' which gave a different thrust to the entire programme.

Despite such systematic engagement with the women's studies programme why were most institutions/colleges unable to make women's studies a successful academic programme in terms of teaching and research? There is no one answer; yet, what becomes evident over time is that, most institutions/colleges, however promising their beginnings, also got entrapped in the business of making women's studies relevant and accountable to women other than the academic community. By 1990s many of the Centres and Cells within these colleges became catalysts in carrying out 'outreach programme' and not paying adequate attention to curriculum revision and academic research in women's studies. In the area of teaching the colleges had to modify women's studies courses to suit the interest of the students of self-financed courses and make women's studies more accessible to job aspirants. In response to changing requirements, the theme of making women's studies 'relevant' meant that a women's studies courses had to demonstrate its interest not just in women's development but also in 'human development' and further, that it was not opposed to male interests.

In other words, even while constituting an identity for women's studies as one where the primary interest was women's development, these courses and centres were quick to add that women's studies is not to exclude men and that they are neither anti-men nor feminists. The latter is the common refrain used by a number of women's studies practitioners in these institutions as well as in the women's studies centres funded by the UGC. Put differently, women's studies or gender studies need not adopt feminist

perspective. The fact that both the teachers and students within women's studies constantly reiterate that they are not feminists but support equality of sexes reveal that the women's studies programme in Tamilnadu share the idea that equality can be achieved and has been largely achieved without feminism.

### **3.4 The Pedagogy of Women's Studies: Some Critical Reflection**

Within the teaching of women's studies, since none of the papers that we have come across so far, interrogate their respective disciplines, there is very little variation in the content of the courses that have been introduced whether in the History, Sociology or Economics Department. If it is a paper introduced by the History Department, it generally begins with, 'Women through the Ages', comes down very quickly to 'History of Women's Movement in UK, USA and then to India with a paper on 'Prominent Women Personalities', and from then on the terrain is more or less similar across all disciplines: namely, discussing the different kinds of Feminisms, Women and Economy, Women and Education, Women and Politics, Women and the Legal System, Women and Human Rights, etc.<sup>51</sup>

Often, women and gender studies have been used interchangeably as nomenclature for the courses or for the centers. What is offered at the UG level as women's studies is renamed as gender studies at the PG level. As with the promotion of degree course, women get promoted to gender! Otherwise there seems to be no rationale behind why the UG students are offered 'women's studies' while the PGs are offered 'gender studies'. A related but equally important issue that needs to be highlighted is the following: a paper or course offered by, say, a department of History, does not consider it necessary to interrogate the discipline itself. Hence what we have observed is not the 'integration' or 'mainstreaming' of women or gender within a discipline but an addition of a separate course called 'women / gender studies' (though the differences in nomenclatures of these courses are unexplained)

In other words, what we are emphasizing is that there is *no engendering* of scholarship in different disciplines through the introduction of women's studies courses. While it is true that there is very little of an interdisciplinary base for teaching women's

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<sup>51</sup> We were keen to learn the rationale for introducing women's studies courses as *major or core or optional*. These distinctions would not only have revealed to us the method of curriculum planning in Women's Studies but also how certain methods have enabled or disabled new knowledge production within women's studies. However, none of the institutions that we have surveyed provided the details or rationale for introducing courses under various streams.

studies, the courses on women's studies introduced by different disciplines / departments have not paid sufficient attention to the existing methods and practices of different disciplines, and, therefore, they are insufficiently geared towards interrogating whether or not these methods are adequate for studying gender. The sheer number / variety of papers offered in women's studies, in our opinion, seem not to add up to the problematic of 'integration' or 'mainstreaming' gender into various disciplines. They are additive in the sense of being added to the existing or even new and emerging disciplines like Human Rights, Environment etc. Therefore, women's studies as it is currently conceptualized in the institutions of higher education in Tamilnadu does not challenge existing disciplines and / or disciplinary practices. On the contrary, given the perception that gender is marketable, courses like women and entrepreneurship have acquired immense popularity. Further, women and women's studies today has become an acceptable topic for research; the latter is often undertaken uncritically without the preliminary exercise of examining a discipline's basic concepts, theories and methods that would very often have constructed and validated exclusion and marginalization of women in the first place. In order to do so, there is a need for women's studies scholars to have strong foundation in established disciplines. As Maithreyi observes, "...persons exposed exclusively to women's studies may develop sensitivity to issues and pick up its language and rhetoric, but somehow lack the foundation of intellectual discipline that comes from grounding in a parent discipline and exposure to readings in other areas that are linked with mainstream developments".<sup>52</sup>

In short, from the detailed survey of the curriculum we are unable to comprehend how the women's studies courses, taught as part of various disciplines, transcend accepted premises and methods of the discipline. In other words, what are the aspects of the course that challenge disciplinary practices such as the mode and content of teaching, the curriculum and the examination models? Does the aspect of making it relevant automatically challenge the disciplinary boundaries? The institutionalization of women's studies has hardly challenged the strict disciplinary boundaries maintained by institutions of higher education. On the contrary, as Mary Romero observes, "...the ... institutionalization of women's studies increases the multi-discipline structure rather than "interdisciplinarity"... [where as] critical interdisciplinarity, is aimed at critiquing and

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<sup>52</sup> Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 'Blazing a Quarter Century Trail', p.108.

challenging the organization of knowledge into disciplines and the reward system that maintains it".<sup>53</sup>

The course outlines or reading lists for papers on women's studies within various disciplines, even by 2000, hardly changed to reflect the recent and emerging feminist scholarships and the politics of women's movements. Therefore, we find that papers and courses on women's studies continue to focus only on the experiences and voices of upper caste women who serve as models for understanding 'femininity' and 'womanhood'. Differences and inequalities among various groups of women were neither acknowledged nor formed part of the teaching or research in women's studies.

We have already alluded above to the fact that in quite a number of colleges and in the centres for women's studies both faculty and the students emphatically stated that they are not feminists and that women's equality could be achieved without adherence to feminism. The association of feminism with militancy, aggressiveness, and as alien to India, were perceptions that were deep-rooted but without any base in scholarship. It is interesting however to note that, both the faculty who teach the course and the students who opt for the course, when asked to explain what made them teach or opt for the course, stated, among other things, that they did not perceive the course as 'too political' and therefore found it acceptable; they also considered women's studies courses as 'soft subject' and hence also non-rigorous. The perception that women's studies courses are non-rigorous is quite pervasive in Tamilnadu and across the country and has contributed in no small measure to women faculty preferring to remain in their 'original' disciplines and departments even while researching on issues of gender and feminism from an interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary perspective.

In comparative terms, women's studies as a degree-granting programme has been quite successful compared to the minimum level of research undertaken in these institutions. Nevertheless, a glance at the women's studies curriculum offered in various disciplines seem to indicate that it has benefited very little from numerous research in women's studies undertaken by feminists scholars in India; it has also not adequately motivated students to undertake research in women's studies. Further, there is a complete lack of conceptualization of gender as a system of relations that connects to polity,

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Romero, 'Disciplining the Feminist Bodies of Knowledge: Are We Creating or Reproducing Academic Structure?' *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, p. 158.

economy and society. Today, women's studies centers with their various programmes are not the places where feminist knowledge is produced.

### **3.5 The UGC women's Studies Centers: Domains of Knowledge or Portfolio of Community Activism?**

As is clear from the above descriptions, right from the beginning the UGC- initiated women's studies programmes were conceptualized and implemented mainly as outreach programmes and community activism in which the students and the teachers of women's studies were expected to involve themselves instead of concentrating on academic activities like the other departments. The plethora of community activities carried out by the different centers was to exemplify the inter-disciplinary nature of women's studies since it was combining activism with academic degrees (not necessarily academic output in terms of research papers and academic publications). To a large extent, these centres have been quite successful in implementing the UGC guidelines through their extension work. The pedagogical and the intellectual legacies of these centers are marked by insignificant scholarship among the faculties who otherwise play an important role in making women's studies primarily an 'extension activity'.

In this context, it becomes important to enquire how far these centres, especially the oldest ones like the Centre for Women's Studies at Alagappa University have been able to mainstream gender within the other disciplines that are taught in the University. Being located within the University for Science and Technology, how has the centre been able to work across the social science and science divide?<sup>54</sup> From the reports of the activities of this Centre it is quite clear that though its activities involve drawing help from other science departments for training the rural women in handling electrical appliances or motor winding etc. there seem to be no academic intervention in the form of interrogating science from a gender perspective or any attempt at methodological fusion etc. The curriculum and teaching in women's studies hardly examines how scientific enquiry and practices are gendered. On the contrary, both the Centre and the Department for Women's Studies function as separate social science departments, quite isolated and as activity centres without any academic recognition. As we noted earlier, despite the popularity of the

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<sup>54</sup> The two Centres which have gained popularity as well as been appreciated by the UGC for their extension works are, The Centre for Women's Studies at the Alagappa University and the CWS at the Avinashilingam Deemed University. Both of them have departments primarily dealing with science and technology subjects.

University for the its sound academic programmes in science subjects, the Department for Women's Studies, for some years, hardly drew any student for the its degree or research programmes. In other words, the Centre's survival has been largely due to the harmonious nature of its relationship with the government and its complimentary role in carrying out and executing government programme which has been quite well noted by the UGC.

The case of Women's Studies Centre at the Avinashilingam Home Science University is quite different. As we noted earlier, in this University, women have been quite central to many subjects that are taught [by virtue of the underlying philosophy informing the subjects, namely that of women being the 'home makers and managers']. In fact, academically speaking, the Centre plays a complementary role in reinforcing some of the ideas about women that are part of the disciplines like Home science. Here, the question of mainstreaming gender does not arise; the more fundamental questions here of the understanding of gender itself and the uncritical perspective on gender that the institution offers and reinforces. Again, the Centre is mainly recognized for its extension work rather than for its academic contribution within the University. Like the Centre at the Alagappa University, it plays a major role in implementing government welfare programme for women but hardly challenges the government policy on women's welfare or child care etc.

Why is it that the UGC sponsored women's studies programme in Tamilnadu is largely successful only as an extension programme and not as an academic one? Why are these centres not recognized as centres of excellence in academics? From the limited engagement with these questions it appears that, this, to some extent has to do also with the state's higher education policy that has consistently marginalized teaching and research in social science subjects in favour of what the state considered as more important, namely, vocationalising higher education.

It is not only that the entire higher education in Tamilnadu is tuned towards providing employment oriented and professional courses, but equally, within the higher education policy, women's studies was conceptualized only as a programme that would offer women students career-oriented courses. Towards this it was expected that the women's studies centres would implement government programmes for women's

empowerment.<sup>55</sup> In other words, although the UGC guidelines identified various sets of activities including teaching and research along with extension work, the centres in Tamilnadu, in order to be recognized by the government for future funding, preferred to constitute women's studies either as career-oriented courses or as activism to implement government programmes. Even 'activism' was narrowed down to outreach programme. For instance, within the university campuses, by and large these centres hardly engaged in any activism – hardly taking up issues like sexual harassment of women staff or students or even the special needs of women employees. While the centres do not network among the women employees or students of the University, they have been actively networking with the government agencies and the NGOs. This has had adverse implications for research activities as revealed in various research projects.<sup>56</sup>

Given the orientation of women's studies as outreach programme, one is also left wondering, why in a few cases the UGC has approved a Centre when a Department for women's studies already exists.<sup>57</sup> In the case of colleges, the intervention by bodies such as the UGC seems to have bypassed and/or not taken cognizance of initiatives already in place in the few colleges mentioned earlier. It is not clear whether a 'rigid' application of UGC norms killed local initiatives or whether College managements found the UGC norms handy to stop activities that had begun to raise uncomfortable questions on a range of issues, not necessarily confined to pedagogy.

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<sup>55</sup> The Tamilnadu government empowerment programme in higher education include involvement of all higher education bodies in organizing entrepreneurship development programme, within the science programme, developing a data base on women scientists, free coaching for women students to appear in the IAS/IPS examinations, employment oriented diploma programme for women's students etc. The Government Higher Education Policy Note (2005-2006) clearly envisages the main activities of Mother Teresa Women's University as 'providing consultancy and monitoring services for the department's welfare schemes for women'. In the case of Avinashilingam University for Home science the policy lists the women's studies as 'career oriented programme'. See, <http://www.tn.gov.in/policy notes/higher-education.htm>.

<sup>56</sup> It may not be out of place to quote Manorama Barnabas who raised serious concerns about outreach programme gaining importance in women's studies: "These out reach programmes stem from the philosophy that 'study without action is futile'. If such programmes are to be called women's studies as they frequently are described, then a reasonable question to ask is in what way are they different from social work programme? From what feminist perspective are they planned and what do they seek to achieve?" see, Manorama Barnabas, 'Introduction' in Gita Rani, (ed ), *A Consultation on Women's Studies*, p.1.

<sup>57</sup> Given the marginalized identity of these centres, as one director of one of the women's studies centres states, the desire to have a department for women's studies is mainly because the department has more power and prestige like all other departments within the university and is recognized for its academic works like offering degrees etc. Centres, on the other hand, have a visibility mainly among the non-academic community.

However, it is quite clear that much of Women's Studies in Tamilnadu is all about institutional activism devoid of an epistemological base and there is very little scholarship. Women's Studies with its mandate of activism and even rethinking course work along these lines seem to have enabled the restoration of women's traditional image as responsible beings and their role as volunteers. Undoubtedly, the identity of women has become central to women's studies but there has been no shift to such expansive terms like gender and sexuality studies despite some good critique of the exclusive focus on *women* in women's studies.

The institutionalization of identity or the fact that identity politics has become central to the institutionalization of Women's Studies, the concerns of the latter is no longer the acquiring of "critical perspective" but of activism. It has achieved institutional power and this power itself is 'producing' its subjects. For instance, increasingly, within women's studies women get 'produced' just as in the case of state's empowerment programmes. In other words, institutions define and situate women and their needs. Tamilnadu women's studies has yet to critically engage with this institutional power politics.

### **By Way of Conclusion**

The teaching and research on women's studies in Tamilnadu have not moved beyond what Leora Auslander calls as "recovery Projects".<sup>58</sup> *i.e.* documenting women's experiences and recovering of positive female role models. Making women visible by centering of women's voices and experiences have been integral to women's studies but unless these develop into concepts, methods and analysis in women's studies they would remain mere self-validation without scholarship.<sup>59</sup> The problematic of providing visibility to women through centering of women's experiences but without subjecting these experiences to academic enquiry, has been quite well elaborated upon by feminist scholars.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Leora Auslander, 'Do Women's + Feminist + Men's + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?' *Differences*, Vol. 9, no. 3, Fall 1997.

<sup>59</sup> For a detailed discussion on experience and analysis in women's studies see, Joanna De Groot and Mary Maynard, 'Facing the 1990s: Problems and Possibilities for Women's Studies' in Joanna De Groot and Mary Maynard (eds.), *Women's Studies in the 1990s: Doing Things Differently?* (London: Macmillan) 1993, pp. 149-178.

<sup>60</sup> There seems to have been a fairly detailed discussion among feminist scholars based in the American universities on the question of engaging with 'women's experience' as knowledge in women's studies. See for instance, Marilyn J. Boxer, 'Unruly Knowledge: Women's Studies and the Problem of Disciplinarity', *NWSA Journal*, Vol.12, No.2, 2000.



Academic enquiry into women's experiences, exploring the interconnection between gender, sexuality, and caste, and, the linkage of women's studies with various disciplines have not formed part of the women's studies programme in Tamilnadu. Even as these centres are incapable of influencing government policies related to women, the outreach programme have gained popularity among the government agencies since the women's studies centres have been instrumental in uncritically carrying out state's 'women's empowerment' programmes.<sup>61</sup> At one level, given the high visibility accorded to women's studies programme one could suggest that Tamilnadu had a 'women's studies movement'. But the question that begs an answer and detailed analysis is whether this 'women's studies movement' has been able to achieve the kinds of intellectual, institutional and political changes promised by the founders and votaries of women's studies centres and departments in Indian Universities.

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<sup>61</sup> Feminist scholars have already critically reviewed the concept of empowerment and empowerment projects for their 'assimilation and instrumentalisation' of women. For details see, Saraswathi Raju, 'Limited Options-Rethinking Women's Empowerment 'projects' in Development Discourses: A Case from Rural India', in *Gender, Technology and Development*, Vol. 9, no. 2, 2005 and for a critical understanding of the concept of empowerment in women's studies research see, Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 'Research in Women's Studies : Need for a Critical Appraisal', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, no. 28, July 9, 2005.

## **Appendix-I**

### **Details of Institutions Covered by the Survey**

#### *1. Madurai and Southern Tamilnadu*

In the southern parts of TN, especially around Madurai, six institutions including two universities (Mother Teresa Women's University and Alagappa University) were covered by this survey. Two autonomous colleges run by Christian management, two private institutes were part of the survey. About four centers including a cell along with nine departments that offered courses in women's studies were covered for the survey.

#### *2. Institutions in Trichi*

Four colleges (Holy Cross, St. Joseph, Bishop Heber and Seetha Lakshmi Ramasamy college) all of them are autonomous and affiliated to Bharathidasan University, Trichi are covered by the survey. Eight departments from these colleges along with two women's centers that offer women's studies were taken up for the survey. The activities at the Centre for Women's Studies, started recently at the Bharathidasan University were covered but not critically analysed.

#### *3. Institutions in Chennai*

In Chennai the survey covered about eighteen institutions including one University (the Madras University) and also a center of the Mother Teresa Women's University located in the city. A detailed case study of two Christian autonomous colleges was also conducted along with the survey. While all the colleges are affiliated to the Madras University most of them have become autonomous colleges having their own course designs and credit system with internal assessments etc. The survey also covered three colleges from the new group of colleges which came up from 1980s known as arts and science colleges which are mainly women's colleges offering mostly job oriented courses for girl students.

#### *4. Institutions in Coimbatore*

In Coimbatore, along with survey and interviews, a detailed case study of the Centre for Women's Studies of the Avinashilingam Home Science College for Women and a Deemed University was carried out.

#### *5. The Private Institutes and Certificate Courses*

Our survey covers two private institutes, which offer certificate courses in women's studies for a period of six months to one year.

## Appendix-II

### **Programmes and Projects of the Centre for Women's Studies at the Lady Doak College**

- a) Identification of resources available on the campuses in Madurai.
- b) Organisation of definite study programmes at the Centre on selected areas like Women and Law, Women and Media, Self-Image of Women, Women in the socio-political context today in India, for students and faculty of the college, interested alumnae, members of the public and faculty and students of other colleges and schools. Experts in these areas will lead such study programme with the help of the faculty core group for the programme.
- c) Exposing the core group of faculty members to works of other centers for women's studies in India and also women's organizations.
- d) Enabling interested faculty and students to participate in, and present papers at academic conferences or seminars on women.
- e) Preparing instructional materials like monographs and project abstracts on selected themes.
- f) Networking with agencies at the Asian level and other parts of the world to collect materials for the center which would enable research and study projects to be undertaken. Dissemination of information including studies from the Centre to other academic institutions would be undertaken.
- g) Building a documentation and library with adequate journals etc.
- h) Some faculty members of the Social Sciences and History departments of the college have already been teaching a course on 'Women toward a better Future'; some members of the English and Tamil Departments have been working on projects relating to women; some members of the economics department have participated in study programmes on women. Faculty has also guided student projects on women. These form the core group on campus in the initial stages.

#### *Courses Offered in Women's Studies*

1. The college offers a 'Value education Course' for all undergraduate students of the college in their second year.
2. The college offers a foundation course on Women's Studies for all III year students in their 5<sup>th</sup> semester in batches of about thirty each. The purpose of the course is to create awareness among the students on women's issues in India and to enable them to identify constraints and possibilities in empowering women and also in the process empower the students to 'fight the challenges'.

The Foundation course is for 28 hours with 2 contact hours a week. It has a) an introduction to feminism and women's studies b) creative women in different fields and their achievements c)

Women and Media taught for 4 hours explaining misrepresentations of women and violence against women in media and also positive role models d) Women at home and outside- roles and conflicts and also expectations. Problems at work place etc. e) Women and self-defence: the need and methods f) Women and Law: personal law, property rights, abortion and rape. g) women and health h) women in religion: one unit on women in the Bible and Church I) Defining feminism j) Women's organisations, programme and women's movement k) a freewheeling discussion on the problems and joy of being a woman.

3. At the department of history, a course called women's studies is offered as a paper for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year P.G students from 1988. This is the oldest department within the college to offer a paper on Women's Studies, which is a compulsory, and a core paper. On an average 15 students at the PG level avail this course.
4. From 1997 onwards the department of English offers a two-semester course on women writers from a feminist perspective at the P.G level as a core paper and also a paper on women in Indian literature in English as one semester course for the PG students.
5. The Tamil department offers a course on Tamil feminism from 1978 onwards for the P.G students as a core paper. Also, from 2000 the department offers a course on Bharathi and women's selfhood as an optional paper for the second and third year undergraduate students of the department.
6. Six faculty members have taken up issues relating to women for Ph.D. research.
7. At the under graduate and post-graduate level study and research projects and assignments related to women have been undertaken.

### Appendix-III

#### **Women's Studies Curriculum offered in Select Colleges and Universities of Tamilnadu and at the Pondicherry University.**

##### *Anna Adarsh College, Chennai:*

1. In this college, from 1985, a paper called women's studies was offered at the 6<sup>th</sup> semester to UG students of the Department of History. Later this paper was dropped after the retirement of a particular teacher who had shown interest in teaching this course. Instead a paper on Constitution of India was introduced in 1995.
2. Within the Department of Public Administration few units on women are offered to students.
3. In the Department of Economics at the P.G level a unit on Women and Entrepreneurship is offered as part of a paper on Entrepreneurship (A Major) at the 4<sup>th</sup> semester attended by a class of 20 students. At the 4<sup>th</sup> semester, as part of a project at the PG level, students mostly take up the issue of women and economic problems.

##### *Bharathi College, Chennai:*

This women's college offers a course on 'Women's Studies in India' at the UG level for the 150 students of the Department of History during the 6<sup>th</sup> semester. At the PG level the department offers a paper entitled 'Gender Studies with Special reference to India' Usually the course is taught for eight hours per week. In the English department the course offered is again called 'women's studies' which is offered as a Major from 1999 for 20 students each year at the PG Level. This course is taught for 5 hours a week for a year.

##### *Bishop Heber College, Trichi:*

1. This co-education college offers a paper called 'Women in Modern India' at the Department of History for the UG students at the 6<sup>th</sup> semester for the entire class which at present has 25 students. This paper was introduced in 2000. This is quite different from other colleges that offer only 'women's studies' as a paper within history.
2. At the Department of Economics a paper on Women and Entrepreneurship is offered to the 4<sup>th</sup> semester P.G students.
3. The Department of Social Work, though it does not offer any course on women, it encourages students at the III semester to take up projects related to women's issues. At the time of this survey atleast 5-6 students including 2 male students had taken up projects relating to women's issues.
4. The college also has a 'Women's Cell' started in 2002 which is housed in the Economics Department.

*Christopher College for Women:*

1. This B.Ed. college offers women's studies as a paper for the II semester UG students as a elective course. In the class of 180 students atleast 50 –60 students opt for this paper. This paper was introduced around 1993.
2. There is also a Centre for Women started in 1976. All Students are expected, to participate in its activities without any marks or credits.

*D.G. Vaishnav College:*

This college has introduced a paper on 'Women and Development' as a Major for the P.G students of Social Work at the II semester which has 13 female and 26 male students attending it.

*Ethiraj College, Chennai:*

1. In the early 90s the Department of History introduced a paper 'Women's Studies' for the UG students at the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> semester as a Major. As the focus or thrust area shifted from women's studies to human rights within the college, in the history department, as part of a paper on 'Group Rights' a unit on women's studies was introduced in 2002. There is also a unit on 'Duties of Women' within a paper called 'Duties of Citizens' which is taught in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester.
2. The Department for Human Rights has also introduced women related themes. There is a paper called 'Gender and Human Rights' offered to the PG students at the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester.
3. The Economics Department offers a paper on 'Women and Entrepreneurship' from 2002.

*Fatima College, Madurai:*

Other than offering papers like 'Women in Literature' and 'Women's Studies' through the Departments of English and Sociology respectively at the U.G Level, it has a Women's Cell started in 1988. Part IV activity for all UG students is offered through the Cell at the fourth semester. This is a must for all those who want to complete and get their degree. This activity is organised for 2 hours a week. There has to be regular attendance with participation etc. Five teachers chosen from different departments form the core team to conduct the activities of the Cell. 300 students of the college are part of the Cell activities which are funded by the All India Association for Catholic Higher Education (AIACHE). The activities include lectures and group discussions other than networking with NGOs and other forums.

*Holy Cross College Trichi:*

1. In the early 90s 'Women's Studies' as a paper was introduced in the History Department for the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> semester UG students as allied course, which had 50% of the class opting for the course. When in 2003, a Department for Human Rights was established within the

Department of History, a paper called 'Status of Women' along with papers on 'projects and field work related to women's issues' were introduced at the PG level.

2. From 1992 the Department of Economics offers a paper called 'Gender and Development' for the UG students at the 6<sup>th</sup> semester as allied course. Students from other departments too attend the course. In 2003, within the department, out of 46 students, 39 of them opted for this course along with 12 students from commerce and one from the English department.
3. There is a Women's Cell which is also known as Study Centre which again offers a paper called 'Wholesome Living', for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year UG students for 30 hours a year with the help of resource persons from outside. This is an elective course without any evaluation. This Cell was started in 2002 and it has 42 students as volunteers.

*Loyola College, Chennai:*

A co-ed (only at the P.G level) cum men's college offers variety of papers at various degree levels.

1. From 1993 onwards, at the Department of History, for the PG students at the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester, it offers a paper called 'Women Through Ages' as a Major. At the UG level, a paper on 'Women and Dalits' has been introduced in 1992 as an elective /optional at the 6<sup>th</sup> semester which is attended on an average by 35 students a year.
2. The Sociology Department has introduced a paper called 'Gender Justice' for the 2<sup>nd</sup> year UG students from 2003. So far no student has opted for this elective paper.

*Madras Christian College:*

1. The Department of History offers a one semester course entitled, 'Women in Historical Perspective' for P.G students. It was first an optional paper but turned into a compulsory course in 1997. It is allotted 6 lecture hours and two seminar hours per week. The Department also offers an optional paper called 'Women and US' for Undergraduate students from any departments. However, the title of this course and also course itself was redrafted later in 1997. The new course offered in the fifth semester is now called, 'An Introduction to Gender Studies'. On an average at least 12-15 male students out of a maximum of 20-25 students are opting for this course. It is allotted 5 hours a week. While a pass is mandatory, the marks scored are not added to the final aggregate to get the degree. This paper is assessed through continuous assessment tests and an assignment.

2. From 1996, the Department of English offers a course called, 'Women Writing' for the P.G. Students as an optional paper. Over the years the number of students opting for this course has varied from 10-15. For the undergraduate students of the department, two compulsory papers on American and Indian women's writings have been offered as one semester courses with 35 students attending the course.

3. In their first and second years, the undergraduate students are offered 'Part II' English courses. From 1996, two anthologies of women's writings brought out by the Centre for Women's Studies in the college called 'Other Eyes and Other Voices' (I and II) have been prescribed as textbooks for the first year UG students who are offered the Part II English courses. On an average 80-100 students attend the course. Due to strong opposition to the teaching of these anthologies, the English course itself was revised to drop these but some parts of the textbooks are taught in the classes.

4. In the Department of Social Work gender issues have been quite well integrated into various compulsory courses taught for the post-graduate students. The course on 'Study of Indian Society' has one unit on social movements in which women's movement is taken up. The units on 'family and social change in the Indian context' extensively deal with questions of gender. Within the paper called 'human growth and development' gender related health and development issues, fertility, and sexuality have focused on women. Legislation related to women, family settings and welfare of women, rural and urban concept of women self-help groups, women's empowerment are important issues covered by various papers within the courses on Indian society. Every year about 25 students attend these courses with atleast two or three of them taking up research projects on issues relating to women. In 2003-4, the department has introduced a new elective called 'Gender and Society'.

5. The Centre for Women's Studies, under the theme of value education' offers a course, 'women's studies' for all first year under graduate students for one hour a week for two semesters. This course was initially offered only to the non-Christian women students and later to all non-Christian students as well. Women staff from various humanities department handled the course. Short tests were conducted but no marks or grade was given for this course.

*Meenakshi College, Chennai:*

This women's college offers a paper called 'Women's Studies' for the UG students of the History department at the 5<sup>th</sup> semester as a major with 50 to 70 students attending the class. This paper was introduced in 2001.

*Patrician College, Chennai:*

This self-finance college started as late as 2001 offers mainly business courses but also offers one or two units on women within a paper called 'Entrepreneurial Development' for B.com and BBA Students who are mainly male students.

*Presidency College, Chennai:*

1. From 1995, this co-education college offers a paper called 'Women and Entrepreneurship as a Major at the UG level within the Department of Economics.

2. In the Department of History as part of a paper on Human Rights a unit on 'Rights of Women' is offered for the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester P.G.Students.



3. The Psychology Department has introduced a unit on women within a paper on Community Psychology.

*Quaid-e-Milleth Arts College for Women:*

1. The History Department offers a paper 'Women's Studies' for UG students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year. This paper was introduced around 2000 as a Major with 130 students attending it. At the P.G level within the paper on Human Rights a unit on women's right has been introduced.
2. The college's NSS programme has activities related to women's development like the Legal awareness programme for women celebrating International Women's Day etc.

*Queen Mary's College, Chennai:*

1. A paper on 'Women's Studies' has been offered as a Major for both UG and PG students of the History Department from 1990. At the M.Phil level, atleast 10 students take up projects related to women.
2. At the Sociology Department a Paper called 'Sociology of Gender Studies' [if it is sociology department it is sociology of gender studies unlike the history department where it is history of women's studies]is offered in the 4<sup>th</sup> semester.
3. Again in the English Department a paper called 'Women's Studies' is taught as a major.
4. The Department of Mass Communication has a unit within a paper on advertisement, which deals with how women are portrayed in 'man media'. [note: it is not mass media]

*SDNBV College:*

1. The Economics Department offers a paper on 'Women and Economy' for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year UG students as a Major.
2. The Department of Psychology has introduced a paper called 'Personality Theory and Women's Studies' in 1996 and dropped it in 2002. Instead there is a paper called 'Entrepreneurship Development and Women'.

*Seethalakshmi Ramasamy College, Trichy:*

The English Department offers a paper called 'Women Writing' for the 3<sup>rd</sup> semster PG students as a major and the Tamil Department has a paper on 'Feminism and Human rights' for the UG students which was introduced in 2003.

*SIET, Chennai:*

This women's college offers a unit on women within a paper on Behaviour modification for the PG students at the Department of Psychology, introduced in 2000. The women's question is introduced as units within papers like Counseling across life span and group counseling.

*St. Joseph College, Trichy:*

1. This college offers a paper on women's writing as major by the English department for the 35 PG students in which there are 6 female students.
2. In the Tamil Department, women form part of the papers on Literature for Social Change and Contemporary Literature. 80% of these classes are female students. Though both the gender opt for women's issues as project topics to complete their M.Phil course work only women students (two of them) have chosen women related topics for their dissertation at the Ph.D level. Also within this department at the undergraduate level the papers on Human rights have substantially replaced women or gender issues.
3. In the Department for Human Resource which was earlier known as social dynamics at the P.G level, Women's studies was offered as an allied paper for the II year students from 1992 to 94 and since there was a 'poor response' from the students the paper was dropped.
4. In 1990 Women's Cell was started within the college, which allowed participation only of women's students though the entire college is encouraged to participate in the Cell's activities. The Cell primarily organizes the March 8<sup>th</sup> international Women's Day and counsels girl students other than organizing seminars.

*Women's Christian College, Chennai:*

1. In 1982, the Department of History introduced a paper entitled 'women's studies' for third year undergraduate students of history as a major in their final semester. This was a core paper and allotted 6 teaching hours a week. Two additional hours a week were utilized for women's studies related activities like guest lectures, media programme and field visits. There are internal and external assessments with tests, assignments and seminars. Seminars could be based on the specific topics contained within the syllabus; assignments could be on a range of topics. A research project (equal in weight age in terms of assessment, to any core paper) was a compulsory requirement for all final year history major students. Approximately one third of the students chose the topics related to women's studies. In 2001, this course was modified and introduced as 'gender studies'. It has been allotted 7 teaching hours a week with 6 credits. 30-35 students attend the classes. The Department also offered an optional paper for all undergraduate students of the college. This paper 'women's studies' offered from 1982 had to be dropped since there had been poor response from the students.
2. From 1997, the Department of English offers a Major course on 'Feminist Perspectives: An Introduction' for the B.A. students. Approximately 45-50 students in each batch attend the course. It is a compulsory paper offered at the final semester with 7 teaching hours a week. At the end of the course, students are expected to do a project for 10 marks, critically examining literary texts, or music, art etc., from a feminist perspective. The department also offers an optional course on Audio

Visual Media in which one unit entitled 'ideologies and value messages presented by media with special reference to gender analysis portrayal of groups', is offered. Students opting for this course have to pay extra fees.

**Women's Studies Curriculum at the Universities:**

*The Alagappa University, Karaikudi:*

The Department of Women's Studies offers a two year Master Degree in Women's Studies and Computer Applications from 1989 as a core paper for both men and women. Until 1998 (from 1989 when the department started) the PG courses were offered only to women students. The first three semesters offer an assortment of papers on feminism and computer management. The last semester has internship with NGOs, service organizations, and government agencies. The internship carries very high marks unlike the regular classes. The paper on feminist thought has a unit which offers a detailed history of women's studies in India from 1970s onwards. Within this, the syllabus also deals with UGC initiatives in women's studies and locates it as part of the history of feminism in India. "A concise history of Tamil Women from Sangam Age till date" also forms part of the history of feminism and feminist thought. The Department also offers M.Phil and Ph.D programme as regular and part-time programme. Other than regular classroom lectures the department networks with NGOs and government agencies which has enabled the students to access jobs in these sectors and also to carry out projects and internship with these agencies.

*Mother Teresa Women's University:*

1. The Department of Tamil Studies, from 1999 has introduced a paper on Feminism and Tamil Litreature, and Folk literature, for the PG students as Major and elective respectively. An elective course called Feminism in Different Fields' has been introduced as an elective for students of other departments. For M.Phil students, a course on 'Women through Ages' as gleaned from Tamil Literature is taught as a major. While about 14-22 students at the M.Phil attend the course there are 13 students for the PG courses. There are 12 Ph.D candidates at the Department.

2. In the Department of Education at the PG level there were no students for some years. At present, at the PG level atleast 3-5 students attend the course on 'Guidance and Counseling on women's Issues' while 35 students have enrolled for part time and full time Ph.D. degree programme. The Department offers a paper on 'Counseling for the M.Phil Students.

3. The Department of Family Life Management offers M.Sc degress with papers like Family Resource Management and Textiles and Clothing started in 97 with five students. From 1896 the Department offers M.Phil degree with courses on Family Life Management mostly for the teachers and lecturers.

4. Within the distance education programme, the M.Phil course in historical studies offers papers like 'Women through History' (only till 1985) and a separate paper, 'Women in Modern India'. The M.Phil course in Tamil has a paper called 'Status and View of Women through the ages-Historical Perspective'. The M.A courses in women's studies include papers such as 'Gender and Development', 'Women's Rights and Technology', Women and Management, Women and Environment. In the second year the students are taught papers like Women and Entrepreneurship and NGO Management.

5. The Centre for Women's Studies offers M.A in Women's studies from 1988. The syllabus includes papers like Women and NGO Management, Micro-credit management, Catering technology, Women Science and Technology and Women's Empowerment.

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1. First, a PG diploma course in Women's Studies was offered by the Centre from 1999 to 2002. Also a part time M.Phil course was started followed by full time M.Phil course in 2003. The one year PG Diploma in WS has four hard-core courses and three soft-core papers offered in two semesters and along with these M.Phil students are expected to take up projects. As of now there are many PG Diploma students who have completed their projects.

The hard core papers include:

1. Women in Indian Society and their Right to Law
2. Women's Economic Development in India
3. Gender Apartheid and Women's Empowerment
4. Women and Science and Technology
5. Women Writing in India
6. Project

The Soft-Core Papers:

1. Women in Modern India
2. Feminist Fiction
3. Women's Entry into non-conventional disciplines
4. Women and Theatre
5. Gender Mass Media and Popular culture.

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