

**PRAJNYA RESOURCE CENTRE ON  
WOMEN IN POLITICS AND POLICY**

**WOMEN TAKING ACTION:  
A SURVEY OF  
CHENNAI WOMEN'S  
ORGANIZATIONS**

Second Edition

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Reva Yunus**

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### **Foreword to the First Edition**

It is a very special feeling to write the foreword to Prajnaya's first research product, a survey by Sweta Narayanan of women's organizations in Chennai and their work.

From Prajnaya's point of view, this is an important first undertaking partly for two reasons. First, the objective of our first major undertaking, The Prajnaya Women in Politics and Policy Resource Centre, is to document the contributions of women to policy and social change in South Asia. This survey sets us on that road. Second, we are very new and getting to know our peers is an important initial step for us. However, since we could not find another study with this kind of information, we took a do-it-yourself approach and the results are now available to anyone who wishes to use them.

This monograph begins with a short analytical section in which Sweta Narayanan describes her research experience and makes broad comparative observations on the organizations she studied. The second and substantive section is a compilation of organizational profiles. Finally, we provide contact information for each of the organizations included. We plan to published revised and updated versions of this study from time to time.

Sweta Narayanan identified some of the surveyed organizations through existing resources and then her research led her to others. She describes the challenges of locating, contacting and meeting people across Chennai and observes both a disinterest in networking and an inability to communicate the work being done. Recent attempts to network the social sector have gone some way to mitigate this; Prajnaya's mandate also includes network-building, educational outreach and advocacy. We trust that the next edition of this work will find a changed situation.

Swarna Rajagopalan

Director, Prajnaya Initiatives for Peace, Justice and Security  
PSW Initiative Director

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## Introduction to the Second Edition

Organizations working for women's welfare are dynamic; constantly evolving in terms of their profile of work and reach across their target segment. This may be attributed to various factors – evolving demands, changes in beneficiary profiles and needs and financial/human resources. While some of them make significant progress towards their service goals, some of them are unable to go forward, for various reasons.

It is this dynamic reality of this group that this updated study by Reva Yunus aims to capture. Efforts have been made to revisit most of the organizations listed in the first study, either in person or over the telephone. The objective of this exercise has been to understand:

- Ground realities, in terms of how many of these organizations are still accessible and working for women's welfare.
- The changing profile of these organizations, in terms of the nature of work.

The updated study has thrown light on the following:

- Some organizations listed in the initial study were inaccessible owing to either their contact numbers/email addresses being outdated. However, attempts to find functional and updated contact details of these organizations were unsuccessful. Hence the work profiles of some organizations could not be updated. This is probably an indication of a larger issue – that of lack of *visibility* of many of these organizations engaged in notable work. Or the issue of these organizations being unable to sustain themselves in the long run. These issues, however, are beyond the scope of this current effort.
- The profiles of organizations that could be contacted have been updated. It may be observed here that some of them continue to work in their core focus areas and have expanded their scope of work to a small extent. For example, Pennurimai Iyakkam is also working with male workers in the unorganised sector on issues of displacement, worker rights and entitlements.
- Certain organizations have acquired new contact details, in terms of office addresses, contact numbers, websites or email. These have been updated.

Sweta Narayanan

Prajnya Researcher and Author, First Edition

December 31, 2011

## A. WOMEN TAKING ACTION

by Sweta Narayanan

The growth of organizations dedicated to serving women in India is interesting on account of its relevance and growing importance in the current scenario of accelerated women's empowerment. This paper reviews the nature and working of women's organizations in Chennai, as a lens to the Indian women's movement. Its structure will serve to highlight two major objectives of the paper – a brief overview of the course of the women's movement in the country and a detailed description of the activities of 20 organizations, from advocacy groups to service providers, currently working towards women's welfare in Chennai.

While the outline of the feminist movement is based entirely on reference material, the profiles draw extensively on one-to-one interviews with women currently involved in singular work and to some extent, on information available on websites.

The first part draws solely on information gathered from writings of women scholars in the field. An online search for information on the feminist movement in the country did not yield satisfactory results. Books on women's studies proved to be a more reliable and accurate source. But even in these, the women's movement formed only a minor section of the entire work. But the section aims to provide only a brief account of the women's movement, highlighting important milestones as it progressed.

To start my survey of women's organizations, the Internet was a useful tool to narrow down to the organizations I was likely to include in the study – put in order a list of probable profiles. Searches online threw up several leads, which then set in motion the survey in the city. But to expand the scope of the study, the CIOSA and SAHAYA directories were consulted. The study brings together Internet-based research as well as information compiled from extensive field work.

Also, though the Internet was the point of departure for the study, its use was limited to verifying and supplementing available information and sometimes, sourcing for contacts.

The focus of this study, apart from chronicling the feminist movement, is to make public the number and diversity of organizations in Chennai doing outstanding work in empowering one of the most vulnerable sections of society. This endeavor is based on personal observations during the course of the study that very little is known about most women's organizations and their activities outside their immediate circles and target groups.

### THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The goal of the study is to identify individuals and organizations striving to make a difference in the lives of numerous women either through advocacy or service. Though the CIOSA directory and SAHAYA, brought out by the Joint Action Council for Women, contain an exhaustive list of organizations serving women, children and the aged in Chennai, they limit themselves to simply listing out their activities. Also, as these directories are not updated regularly, most contacts including addresses and telephone numbers are outdated.

The interviews came first. A list of twenty-three organizations that could be covered was systematically prepared and addresses and telephone numbers found. The interviews were conducted over a five-week span, and the selection was made keeping in mind few basic but vital criteria:

- Nature of work – advocacy, service providers or both
- Geographical distribution
- Target group and
- Range of activities

Prior to setting up a meeting, a background evaluation of every organization was made to determine whether their activities would meet the objectives of the study. This was not possible with most organizations as they did not have a website or were absent on other public media. Most were accessible only through a single telephone number.

A member at a senior level was contacted and in-depth information about their programmes designed to benefit women was gathered over one or two meetings, when necessary.

At the outset of the survey, an online search of women’s organizations in Chennai threw up several names but few contacts. Access to women’s organizations was the single most stumbling block in the entire exercise. Well-known organizations, such as the All India Democratic Women’s Association (AIDWA) and Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), were easily accessible, with adequate information on them available on various sources. But getting to the majority of the other groups, albeit lesser known but involved in equally or more effective work, was quite a challenge.

Respondents were questioned on the origin of their organizations, current area of activity, welfare programmes, target groups, sources of funding and collaborations and networks. They were also encouraged to express their dreams and hopes for the future of the organization and the women they worked with and where they thought the feminist movement was heading.

#### **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT IN INDIA**

Women’s organizations, from the very beginning, were formed as a spontaneous response to counter forms of oppression, violence and patriarchal practices. Though the movement, which goes back to the early nineteenth century, over the years has witnessed changes in the character of its participants, its purpose has retained the founding principles – more autonomy for women.

The roots of the feminist movement in India can be traced to the early nineteenth century. Its evolution over the years can be broadly classified into three periods:

- The social reform era of the nineteenth century
- The powerful nationalist period of the early twentieth century up to Indian Independence in 1947 and
- The new feminist wave that began in the 1970s and is still ongoing.

#### **The social reform movement**

A unique feature of the Indian women’s movement is the fact that early attempts at women’s emancipation were set in motion by men. Social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharishi Karve and Swami Dayanand Saraswati challenged the traditional subordination of women, encouraged widow remarriage and promoted female education and equality in matters of religion, among other issues. *Mahila mandals* organized by Hindu reformist organizations such as the Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj encouraged women to step out of the confines of their homes and interact with outsiders.

Pandita Ramabai, one of the pioneers of the feminist movement, with the help of Justice Ranade set up the Arya Mahila Samaj in 1882. She envisaged creating a support network for newly educated women through weekly lectures and lessons at homes, where women could learn and gain confidence through interactions.

Women's auxiliaries of general reform associations also served as a platform for women to discuss social issues, express opinions and share experiences. The Bharata Mahila Parishad of the National Social Conference (NSC) was the most prominent among such fora. Though the NSC was formed at the third meeting of the Indian National Congress in 1887, the Mahila Parishad was launched only in 1905.

All the above efforts significantly impacted the social status of women. Early attempts at encouraging women to communicate outside their families and local committees thus, stemmed from the broader social reform movement and efforts to ameliorate the conditions of women (Kaul 2000).

But a major shortcoming of the movement at this juncture was that it was essentially elitist in character. The reforms were intended for privileged upper caste women and did not take up the cause of the vast masses of poor and working class women. Also, male-guided organizations still saw the household as the woman's first priority and did not make efforts to employ education as an instrument to enhance their participation in society.

The early nineteenth century also saw concerted efforts towards education of women. Schools and educational institutions promoting female public education mushroomed across the country.

### **The nationalist movement**

The pre-Independence period saw women's issues linked to the nationalist agenda at various junctures. Political participation of women, calling for a redefinition of conventional gender roles, was the hallmark of this phase. Women began openly demonstrating their opposition to foreign control by supporting civil disobedience actions and other forms of protest against the British. Opportunities to organize and participate in agitations gave women the much-needed confidence and a chance to develop their leadership skills. Cutting across communal and religious barriers, women associated themselves with larger problems of society and opposed sectarian issues such as communal electorates (Bhatty 2002). Political consciousness among women grew, owing to a general understanding that women's issues could not be detached from the political climate of the country.

During this period, the earliest women's organizations, formed within the historical context of the social reform movement and the nationalist movement, were the Women's India Association (WIA), National Council of Women in India (NCWI), and the All India Women's Conference (AIWC) in 1917, 1925 and 1927 respectively. Each of these organizations highlighted the importance of education in women's development.

The WIA, founded by Margaret Cousins in Madras, worked extensively for the social and educational emancipation of women. Associated with the Theosophical Society, it encouraged non-sectarian religious activity and did creditable work in promoting literacy, setting up shelters for widows and providing relief for disaster victims.

Women in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta (now Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata) through networks developed during World War I work, linked their associations together and created the NCWI in

1925. A national branch of the International Council of Women, its most prominent member was Mehribai Tata, who fiercely campaigned against passive charity and urged men to support female education.

The most important of the women's organizations of the time – the AIWC – first met in Poona in 1927. Though its initial efforts were directed towards improving female education, its scope later expanded to include a host of women's issues such as women's franchise, inheritance rights, to name a few.

The two decades post independence was marked by passivity (Desai, Patel, 1985). The Constitution of India drafted in 1950 granted equal rights to men and women. A slew of rights such as the right to vote, right to education, right to entry into public service and political offices brought in complacency among women's groups. Though scores of women took part in the sharecroppers' movement in Telangana in Andhra Pradesh in 1948-50 and in anti-alcohol movements in Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s, this period saw limited activity in the area of women's rights.

### **The contemporary women's movement**

The defining moment of the contemporary feminist movement came in the 1970s, in the backdrop of the crisis of the State and upsurge in social movements against growing inequalities (Patel 1998). The Conference on Status of Women in Mexico in 1975 and the publication of the report on the Status of Women in the same year heralded the beginnings of the new wave of the women's movement in India. A simultaneous interest in women's studies was also triggered.

The women's movement in the country owes its revival to international developments to a certain extent. The appointment of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was an outcome of international concern for women's situation worldwide (Dutta 2007). The United Nations, since the late 1960s, initiated a series of programmes in an attempt to address the universal issue of women's inequality through setting up fact-finding committees. 1975 was declared the Women's year and 1975-85 the Women's decade. These ten years were a watershed in the feminist movement in India, as it witnessed three major world women's conferences, the first being Mexico in 1975. The burgeoning movement then grew in strength.

This strand of the women's movement also traces its links to the trade union movement in India, which had remained largely indifferent to the condition of women workers (Bhatty 2002). In 1972, Ela Bhatt set up one of the most significant organizations in the history of the women's movement—the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA).

This phase of the feminist movement was characterised by experimentation and learning – efforts towards policymaking were made. The emphasis on welfare services until the mid-1970s led to the creation of a number of welfare boards responsible for facilitating formation of women's groups. The Indian government introduced programmes for women's development – the Ministry of Labour and Employment set up a Women's Cell, the Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1976 and a national Committee on Women appointed under the chairmanship of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Despite these attempts, women's issues only appeared marginally in policies and development schemes. It was only the Sixth Five Year Plan that brought out, for the first time, a separate chapter on women.

To give a fillip to women's studies, a Women's Study Unit was set up at SNDT Women's University, Bombay, in 1974 and a Centre for Women's Development Studies was formed in 1980 in Delhi.

A landmark event in the early 1980s altered the course of the feminist movement in the country. The rape of Mathura, a poor tribal woman, by police officers while in police custody and the refusal of the court to treat the complaint seriously sparked nationwide condemnation. The incident unified civil and human rights groups and the legal fraternity, who labelled the court's decision – that it was sexual intercourse with consent – a violation of a woman's integrity. They demanded that 'consent' in an act of sexual intercourse be re-defined. The Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1983, was amended to include a statutory provision in the face of Section.114 (A) of the Evidence Act, which states that if the victim says that she did not consent to sexual intercourse, the Court shall presume that she did not consent.

Urban movements in major cities then focused their attention on atrocities committed against women, particularly rape and dowry harassment. Questions were raised about power structures, women's sexuality, unequal access to resources, family violence and reproductive rights, to name a few. More women came together to voice their dissent and a mass feminist movement began to take shape.

There was a proliferation of NGOs united by a singular aim – to seek autonomy for women. Women began defining their interests, articulating their demands and assuming leadership roles.

The movement over the years has thus seen women consciously come together and organize to change the system of cultural, political and economic inequity prevailing over the years making them subservient to men.

## **Reflections**

### *Origins*

But what is the driving force behind the creation of these organizations? A comparison of the profiles would reveal that most groups for women were set up by women themselves – some by strong-willed women with a purpose and a few others by those who have successfully risen above their suffering to make a difference in another woman's life. Durgabai Deshmukh and Jaya Arunachalam are pioneers in their own way. Kousalyaa, of the Positive Women's Network, is an inspiration for numerous women with HIV/AIDS fighting for their rightful place in society.

A few, such as TNCDW and AIDWA, are attempts on part of the government or political parties to reach out to the vast masses of women in the State.

### *Structure*

Like most other organizations, several women's groups function with a top-down approach – a president at the helm and subordinates. Most of them operate from a single office managed by a few office-bearers who look after administrative functions and workers or volunteers who go out into the field to carry out welfare and awareness activities. But there are a few exceptions. WWF has achieved remarkable success over the last few years with its unique bottom-up approach, which facilitates greater participation. Poor women form the backbone of this organization, with office-bearers simply aiding in the mobilization process. Positive Women's Network (PWN+) has branches across the country that function independently, but coordinate with the head office in Chennai on a regular basis. Ideally, an organization needs to be structured in a way that can minimise hierarchical barriers to easy execution and maximise reach and impact.

### *Funding*

Funding is a crucial component of the functioning of these women's groups. A quick glance at the profiles would indicate fund flows from the following sources:

- International organizations/banks
- National institutions/business groups
- Individual donors such as friends, well-wishers
- Fund-raisers
- Public donations
- Central, State government sponsorship/ government-affiliated agencies
- National/private financial institutions
- Self-funding/membership fee/collective contributions

Though the above listing gives an impression that there are numerous avenues for funding, the reality is that most women's groups are dependant only on one or two of these sources for steady support.

### *Action areas*

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are an important constituent of civil society, with the power to give voice to the excluded – women and the poor. (Feldman 1997). There has been an unprecedented growth of NGOs, including those dedicated to serving women, over the last two decades.

New women's organizations that have emerged over the last few decades can be classified into the following (Desai and Patel 1985):

- Autonomous groups – propaganda and consciousness raising groups
- Grassroots organizations
- Service providers – groups offering services such as shelters, training
- Professional women's organizations
- Women's wings of political parties
- Groups involved in research and documentation of women's issues

Most women's groups in Chennai could also be broadly grouped under these categories. A brief description of the character of some groups prevalent in the city forms the following section.

### Advocacy groups

These are organizations involved exclusively in propagating issues affecting women and advocating inclusion of legislations safeguarding the interests of women in the framework of local or national policy making. For example, the Feminist Association for Social Action (FASA) led the way in Chennai in dissemination of information on sexual harassment and domestic violence and broke new grounds through its relentless pursuit for laws to counter gender discrimination. The work done by other organizations such as the Pennurimai Iyakkam (one of the earliest propaganda groups formed in the city) and Positive Women's network in raising consciousness in their areas of concern – general issues affecting women and fighting the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS – is also noteworthy.

Advocacy here can be understood as primarily engaging with policy-makers in order to influence policy decisions and implementation. It extends to dialogue with other social groups and sections of

society, in this case women, and members of the public. Women's groups also accord significant importance to educating and mobilizing large numbers of the public to garner support for their cause.

The Positive Women's Network, for example, constantly spreads the word about existing government schemes available to women who have tested positive for HIV/AIDS through outreach and awareness programmes. PCVC is a part of a global OXFAM 'We Can End Violence against Women campaign' that seeks to end all forms of violence against women in six countries by inspiring ordinary people to become 'changemakers'.

Demonstrations and rallies are yet another medium of expressing dissent and calling for change. The Pennurimai Iyakkam takes up issues such as violence in marriage and dowry harassment and takes on to the streets to provoke thought and bring to the fore problems that warrant immediate attention.

Advocacy also finds expression in printed or written material, such as brochures, pamphlets, research projects, annual reports or books, which help to further the awareness building function of these women's groups. For example, the Working Women's Federation brings out periodical publications highlighting its programmes and achievements, in addition to its biannual newsletter GROOTS – Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (South Asia). Such publications are mutually beneficial – public awareness on one hand and publicity for the groups on the other.

#### Service providers

Several women's organizations render an array of services for the benefit of affected women. This could include anything from vocational training for economic empowerment to free legal assistance to fight court battles. In Chennai, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), Andhra Mahila Sabha, Women's Entrepreneurship Promotional Association, the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, FICCI ladies Organization, Joint Action Council for Women, Marketing Organization of Women Entrepreneurs (MOOWES), ARUWE, Association for Non-traditional Employment of Women (ANEW) and Kaingkarya fall under this category. Each of these organizations implements a specific set of services that have been in place over several years and have proved to positively enhance the economic or social status of women.

The YWCA can boast of a host of programmes for the welfare of women, children and the aged, including rehabilitative therapy for mentally ill women, a community college, old age shelter and nurseries. Andhra Mahila Sabha, one of the pioneering institutions in women's development, runs hospitals, healthcare centers and educational institutions. Two major projects of the Joint Action Council for Women include a rural women's network and a short stay home for women and children. MOOWES is a one-of-a-kind network that brings together and trains aspiring women entrepreneurs.

Most of them adhere to tried and tested programmes, though there are a few that challenge their capacities by experimenting with novel ideas. To cite an example, the TNCDW, during its early years in the 1980s, attempted to provide training in entrepreneurship to poor women. One batch of women underwent the 7-day programme. But limited understanding on part of the women and restricted scope of the training forced the organization to rethink its approach, which then shifted to skill training.

### Advocacy cum service providers

This category, as the title indicates, implements projects as well as promotes the cause of women. A few examples would be the Family Planning Association of India, Forum for Women's Rights and Development (FORWORD), International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC), The Banyan and Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR). But a close assessment of their focus areas is likely to reveal that their service projects assume greater importance than their advocacy endeavors.

PCVC runs numerous projects such as a crisis intervention centre, an emergency shelter for women and children affected by domestic violence, a community support unit and a project for burn survivors. In contrast, its efforts at advocacy comprise only a single venture – OXFAM's 'We Can End Violence Against Women' campaign. Similarly, FPA's initiatives include reproductive health clinics, healthcare and testing centres and counselling, but the only form of advocacy it is involved in is sex education among school students.

### Grassroots organizations

These comprise mass-based organizations such as trade unions, tribal and agricultural laborers organizations. The Working Women's Forum is a typical example of this type, as it essentially has its presence among poor rural and urban working class women. It boasts of an exclusive trade union for such workers, called the National Union of Working Women, which serves as a forum for these women to fight against various forms of oppression and violence. FORWORD also, to a certain extent, involves grassroots women in its initiatives, as its programmes are spread across Kancheepuram district and concentrate on women on the fringes rather than those in the city.

Each of the 20 organizations, falling under one or more of the above classifications, profiled in this section works with diverse groups, principles, priorities, objectives and methods on a multiplicity of issues encompassing domestic violence, dowry harassment, discrimination, HIV/AIDS, health, illiteracy and poverty.

### *Networking*

A close reading of the profiles would also show that women's groups prefer to have limited networks and partnerships with individuals/organizations closely connected to their area of work. For example, PCVC partners extensively with hospitals and police stations and, in some cases, local NGOs, who refer domestic violence cases to them.

Very few attempt to build relationships beyond their area of concern. The drawbacks of limited networking will be discussed in later chapters.

### *Vision*

A clear vision for the future – where the organization and its activities are heading – is an integral aspect of the agenda of any group. Though the profiled groups seem to have a rough idea of what they want to do in the years ahead, my personal view after interaction with these groups is that they don't seem to be working aggressively towards their set goals. Sustained focus on their current projects pushes this key component to the background.

## GROUND REALITIES

The primary objective of the survey, apart from bringing several unknown women's organizations into the spotlight, is to also make a practical assessment of the impact and efficacy of their programmes. Though the work done by most women's groups in the city today undeniably changes people's lives, there are a few drawbacks in their functioning that need to be discussed.

### *Invisibility*

Most women's organizations are not 'present' in the real sense of the word. Most of them are often 'invisible' to the outside world, working with their specific target groups and their related circles alone, thus limiting their reach to those in need of help. FORWARD, for example, does commendable work in helping oppressed women rebuild their lives through education. But an already limited presence coupled with negligible publicity of its work restricts access to larger numbers of women in need. When I set out to meet its president Shiamala, the first hurdle I encountered was its location – a tiny office in a narrow street in Tambaram. Enquiries with people living in close proximity to the centre did not help me either, as most of them are even unaware of its existence.

Similarly, ARUWE, CWDR, Kaingkarya and WEPA are all 'invisible' to a certain extent to the public and needy women alike.

### *Access issues*

Getting through to several organizations comprised the most time-consuming task of the entire study, while fieldwork was relatively simpler. The lack of engagement of women's groups with public information forums was all too apparent. Internet searches threw up outdated numbers and addresses, enquiries with helplines were in vain and as most organizations do not have a web presence, acquiring authentic contacts was an uphill task.

The Positive Women's Network is the only network run by HIV+ women in the country. I had made several attempts over a month to get in touch with them through repeated searches on the Internet, their website and enquiries with other women's groups I contacted. I also visited an address mentioned on the website as their office, only to find they had shifted elsewhere. Again, their whereabouts were unknown. I was almost about to give up when a chance search on their website revealed an updated website and new numbers. MOOWES has an office in the Corporation complex in RA Puram, but hold meetings very rarely, and were unreachable over telephone. It was only through enquiries with a nearby accountancy firm in the complex that I managed to get mobile numbers of its president and a few members.

Attempts to reach the Joint Women's Programme led to a dead end with multiple outdated numbers and false addresses. As a result, few organizations were kept out of the study, not by choice but due to failure to access.

But maintaining a comprehensive, updated website has its own advantages. The Banyan's presence online and on other forums was so strong that any kind of information I required was easily accessible. So much so that I did not find the necessity to set up a meeting as all that I wanted was available in detail on their website.

### ***Closed mindset***

It is ironic that some women's groups are not open to interacting with people from outside their immediate circles, while some others actively and consistently engage in promotional ventures. This is one of the reasons why some groups don't find a mention in this study. The Centre for Development and Women's Studies offers free legal aid to women, but repeated attempts for an appointment were turned down citing flimsy reasons. Again, constant reminders to the Tamil Nadu Women's Forum over a two-month period yielded no results. The FICCI Ladies Organization and Andhra Mahila Sabha refused to grant appointments.

It is also surprising that most of these women's groups are unaware of each other's existence, except for established or well-known groups. Though several women's organizations partner with the local police, hospitals and even local NGOs, they seldom join hands to assist women in need.

### ***Friction with the State***

It was found during the course of the study that most groups are averse to partnering with the government, either for resources or schemes. Common reasons cited are erratic supply of funds or an indifferent attitude to development. CWDR president Renuka believes that government schemes are outdated. "We are constantly fighting against age-old government policies," she says. FASA too, in its early years, refused to accept grants from any source, including the government. In the words of its secretary Sarah Mathew, "We did not want to be called anybody's stooges."

MOOWES president Seetha Ranganathan feels that the government does not come forward to help women's groups. The most powerful statement comes from WWF president Jaya Arunachalam and quote: "People at the centre don't know how to reach women. Politicians are degrading and the system collapsing."

### ***Decline in advocacy initiatives***

Most groups today concentrate on financially empowering women through vocational training and placements. Advocacy has been relegated to just another function, and the number of exclusive advocacy groups is a fraction compared to those providing other services. FASA, for example, started out primarily as an advocacy group and one of the first in the city campaigning relentlessly against sexual harassment. But over the years, it has given up its advocacy initiatives and is now involved in skill training programmes. "We don't do advocacy anymore as we feel there is sufficient legislation in place. What is required is awareness," according to Ms. Mathew.

The same is the case with the Joint Action Council for Women, set up with the goal to promote policy in favor of women. They now restrict themselves to training programmes and temporary shelters for women.

### ***Funds***

Like most other NGOs, some women's groups constantly have to deal with financial crisis throughout the year. While bigger women's groups gather funds through publicity and fund-raisers, smaller ones have to be satisfied with grants from donors and well-wishers. Also, while some have one or two constant sources of funding, others often wait for funds to flow in to revive their programmes. Lack of support thus is another key reason for women's groups being limited in their reach and impact.

## THE ROAD FROM HERE

Women's groups in Chennai have played a vital role in motivating women, especially ordinary women, express themselves, overcome their problems and lead new lives with renewed confidence. They have been credited with bringing about transformation in the conditions and status of women, through crucial functions such as dissemination of information, economic independence through skill training and micro credit and the relentless fight against violence, oppression and discrimination.

Organizations today have seen success primarily owing to the increased participation of women in most of their endeavors, in contrast to the early women's movement where men took on the responsibility of decision-making. But limitations, which have been discussed earlier, do exist and need to be dealt with systematically.

In this paper, I have tried to present a detailed picture of the working of women's organizations specific to Chennai, but could not cover all organizations, as mentioned earlier. I have, however, attempted to include as diverse a group as possible.

I will conclude with a few points to ponder over and consider for future reference:

- It is imperative that the women's groups establish links with groups or movements that share their concerns and come together to forge a broad support network to bring about change;
- They need to collaborate with the State to ensure is access to larger numbers of poor women through the self-help group programmes and other schemes. Operating in isolation only limits the scope for further development;
- Women's organizations must bring into their fold larger numbers of poor women, both rural and urban, if useful welfare programmes are to make a visible difference;
- Continued awareness and education through continued advocacy is a potent weapon in giving expression to silent voices and mobilizing public opinion
- Groups need to make themselves more 'visible', come out of their closed communities and reach out to a larger populace;
- A single medium that can ensure wide reach and easy access is the Internet. Women's groups must realize the importance and power of a web presence if they are to retain the current momentum of activity.

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## B. SERVING CHENNAI'S WOMEN: PROFILES

- All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)
- Andhra Mahila Sabha (AMS)
- ARUWE
- Association for Non-traditional Employment of Women (ANEW)
- Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR)
- Family Planning Association of India (FPA)
- Feminist Association for Social Action (FASA)
- FICCI Ladies Organisation (FLO)
- Forum for Women's Rights and Development (FORWORD)
- International Foundation for Prevention of Crime and Victim Care (PCVC)
- Joint Action Council for Women (JACW)
- Kaingkarya
- Marketing Organisation of Women Entrepreneurs (MOOWES)
- Pennurimai Iyakkam
- Positive Women's Network (PWN+)
- Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women (TNCDW)
- The Banyan
- Women's Entrepreneurship Promotional Association (WEPA)
- Working Women's Forum (WWF)
- Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)

## **ALL INDIA DEMOCRATIC WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION (AIDWA)**

**How it began:** AIDWA, the women's wing of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), was officially founded in 1981 as a national-level organisation. Smaller State units, however, cropped up in the background of the freedom struggle. Around 100 people signed up as the first members of the organization on December 9, 1973, in Dindugal, according to members. Though women irrespective of class and caste are part of AIDWA, its work targets women from the less privileged sections.

**What they do :** AIDWA functions at five different levels – 'kilai' (branch), 'pagudhi' (zilla), 'mavattam' (district), 'manilam' (State) and Akhila India (All-India). Of the 1 crore members enrolled across the country, Tamil Nadu boasts of 5 1/2 to 6 lakh, with the organization having branches in 34 districts. AIDWA works to mobilise women across levels, from the remotest districts to the urban heartland. The annual membership fee at AIDWA is ₹ 1.

Demonstrations are AIDWA's most potent method of effecting change. Members take to the streets in large numbers protesting against discriminatory measures or laws, domestic violence, dowry harassment and other issues concerning women. AIDWA's legal aid centre first attempts to find a solution to women's problems by counselling parties involved in the dispute and effect reconciliation. If this attempt fails, they guide women regarding the future course of action, such as filing a police complaint.

**Networking:** AIDWA works closely with the police and are a part of the Police Advisory Committee.

**Funding:** The group depends entirely on funds received through public donations and members.

**Future plans:** AIDWA hopes to network with more NGOs for wider reach. In keeping with their objective to mobilise women, members want larger number of women to come forward and express their problems. A sustained movement to fight for change of legislation to benefit women is also on the cards.

## ANDHRA MAHILA SABHA (AMS)

**How it began:** This doyen of the women's reform movement set examples very early in her life with her radical thinking. Fascinated by Mahatma Gandhi's ideals, Durgabai Deshmukh became actively involved with the Indian national Congress. She was imprisoned during the Salt Satyagraha and sent to the Vellore jail, where the misery and ignorance of other women prisoners moved her greatly. This experience strengthened her resolve to work for the upliftment of women and the downtrodden.

In 1938, she started the Andhra Mahila Sabha (AMS), an institution dedicated to working towards the empowerment of women. The basis for the creation of the umbrella of institutions collectively known as the AMS in Madras and Hyderabad could be traced to the Balika Hindi Pathshala that Durgabai, as a young woman, set up in her hometown Kakinada. It is notable that Mahatma Gandhi laid the foundation stone for the Mahila Vidyalaya, the first of these institutions. Over the last 60 years, AMS has established healthcare centres and hospitals, educational institutions and legal aid centres for women.

**What they do:** As the premier women's organization in the country, AMS has focused its activities on education, healthcare, empowerment and caring for the aged. Its initiatives include the following:

Education – AMS works on education for girls and women through their Mahila Vidyalaya, an exclusive school for adult women, started in 1937. Today, it offers vocational and computer courses for women as well as hobby classes. The P. Abdul Reddy Vocational Institute also offers a day-centre providing infant/child care.

The AMS also runs a Nursing school for girls who have completed schooling up to the intermediary level. It offers a 3.5-year-long General Nursing course as well as government-recognised training courses for lab technicians.

The Andhra Mahila Sabha College of Arts and Science and Andhra Mahila Sabha School of Informatics also form a part of their educational initiatives.

*Healthcare:* Hospitals and healthcare centres provide free treatment to the needy, in addition to rehabilitating differently-abled children.

### The Durgabai Deshmukh General Hospital & Research Centre

Begun in 1950, it aims to provide affordable and quality medical care to the needy. As part of its outreach programme, it works with people in 6 slums in the city (provides health check-up and free medicines).

The Hospital specialises in pre- and neo-natal care of mothers and infants. They are equipped to provide treatment in areas such as ENT, Diabetology, Pulmonology, Oncology, Neuro-surgery, Haematology, and Psychiatry. It also runs the Ashwatha Eye Clinic which offers free monthly consultations.

### Orthopaedic Centre

The Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre, started in 1960, is a rehabilitation centre for physically and mentally handicapped children. Complete with a residential hotel and a vocational

rehabilitation unit, a majority of its beneficiaries have been children affected by polio. The Centre provides corrective surgery and mobility aids.

*Empowerment:* Literacy outreach programmes, counselling and teacher training programmes are a few support services available to women.

*Care for the aged:* Disadvantaged senior citizens can benefit from the shelter and food AMS provides at nominal rates. The AMS runs the P. Abdul Reddy Senior Citizens Home, which currently accommodates around 40 senior citizens. The Home is located at the Durgabai Deshmukh General Hospital & Research Centre premises.

*Hostels and shelters for women:* AMS started the Aashraya short-stay centre for women (and their children) in 1986. It was intended to offer shelter in times of distress and disaster as well as provide opportunities to acquire livelihood skills as a step towards self-reliance. For example, it runs programmes teaching paper-cover making, candle-making, tailoring and housemaid training. Women staying at Ashraya also have access to free counselling and legal aid.

## ARUWE

**How it began:** A small group of youngsters trained in professional social work started ARUWE in 1992 with a view to promote the development of weaker sections of the society, especially deprived women and the aged. The organization was registered in 2000.

**What they do:** ARUWE caters to the needs of around 30 elderly women abandoned by their families. The day care centre provides food, medical care and clothing. The women also learn to make phenyl and keep themselves occupied doing household chores. A medical professional examines the women at the Centre every Wednesday and refers them to hospitals if necessary.

ARUWE also counsels women who approach the organization for help. Most of them are victims of domestic violence, harassed physically and psychologically by their husbands. With the aid of professionally trained counsellors, attempts are made at helping these women reconcile and rebuild their lives.

Disturbed by the increasing number of suicides in the Ayanavaram community, Aruwe decided to launch a mental health project in 2010. Aruwe has began organising outreach programmes to bring to attention the incidence and causes of suicide.

ARUWE now runs 3 self-help groups for women in three slums in Aynavaram. The groups are guided to open an account with the local Indian Bank branch. The women start off borrowing small amounts, repay them and go on to take bigger loans. Two of the most active groups have managed to save ₹ 25,000 in a three-year time frame. The groups also meet every Wednesday to openly discuss family problems and suggest solutions to everyday issues such as health and hygiene, education etc. The interaction serves as a means of catharsis for these women, who otherwise have very few avenues to express their problems.

Vocational training such as manufacturing cleaning agents through resource persons is also provided to willing women. The role of ARUWE here is that of a facilitator – they suggest ideas. The onus is on the women to take it forward. The emphasis is on community participation – the interest and enthusiasm of women is what drives the groups, and consequently the programmes.

**Funding:** Most of Aruwe's funds come from local individual donors from Chennai. They also organise annual fund-raising events. German company Alcatel is a major donor.

**Networking:** The organization partners with Madras Christian Council for Social Service (MCCSS), where women are referred to for legal aid and intervention, International Centre for Crime Prevention and Victim Care and the Pennurimai Iyakkam.

**Future plans:** ARUWE hopes to provide training in tailoring for women and expand their small-scale industry activities.

## ASSOCIATION FOR NON-TRADITIONAL EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN (ANEW)

**How it began:** Annalakshmi's domestic help had numerous stories to tell – of her everyday struggle for survival and her inability to educate her children. In 1997, an inspired Annalakshmi, with seven other like-minded people, discussed ways to help the poor overcome their problems. And ANEW was born. Over 11 years, the organisation has trained around 3,013 women across 18 to 40 years in a series of activities.

**What they do:** ANEW provides free training for young women from underprivileged families and helps them to get access to practical job skills and self-sustaining employment. ANEW takes in young women who have completed at least Class X. They have to appear for a test prior to joining the course, primarily to determine their English proficiency. Training in spoken English, depending on their level, is compulsory to facilitate a working knowledge of the language.

ANEW's projects can be divided into six broad categories:

*Housekeeping:* This four-month project, started on August 31, 2007, offers training to serve in five-star hotels. The young women receive a stipend of ₹ 250 per month for two months. The course is open to girls from low income groups, from families whose monthly income is not more than ₹ 5,000, and who are unable to pursue higher studies. Regular follow-ups are also conducted once the students complete the course and receive placements.

*Diploma in Computer Applications:* The three-month computer course offers training in basic and most commonly used applications, including Microsoft Office and the Internet. Young women are required to appear for an interview, which will assess their English language proficiency and pertinent skills. Upto 63 batches totaling 1,278 women have completed this training. They also conduct courses in Desk Top Publishing Application (a training course certified by Mahindra Satyam) and TALLY and Accounting (certified by Veetech Software Solutions Pvt. Ltd.)

*Car driving:* This is one of ANEW's most novel and successful programmes. Having started off with five, ANEW has trained 51 women until now. Young women are provided driver training and are guided to obtain licenses for automobiles. Such graduates now work as chauffeurs and valet parking attendants at five-star hotels as well as automobile drivers for airline crew and passengers at the Chennai Airport. For example, in 2005, of the 51 girls trained to drive automobiles, 75% of them received placements. Around 29 girls were provided autorickshaw training. The training is carried out in collaboration with the Institute of Road Transport Corporation. Students get a certificate from the Automobile Association of South India. They are then sent to Hotel Savera for lessons in driving high-end cars.

*Autorickshaw driving:* This aim of this project is to train women to drive autorickshaws primarily to transport children to school. Around 29 girls have graduated so far.

*Home nursing:* The course imparts women skills needed to care for patients recovering at home and elders requiring home geriatric care. The target is poor girls passing out of free government schools. A Certificate in Home Nursing care is awarded on completion of the four-month course. During the first two months, women are trained in fundamental principles of home nursing in a classroom setting. The third month exposes the trainees to real life situations at the Dr. Rangarajan Memorial Hospital. The fourth month is dedicated to on-the-job training at old age homes. A stipend of ₹ 150 per month is given to the trainees. So far, 1,060 girls across 46 batches have been trained and employed in various homes in Chennai.

*Optometry:* Started in 2010, this programme was initiated based on a WHO report noting the lack of optometrists in India. The training programme is certified by Sight Care Foundation.

In addition, they also offer counseling and self awareness classes for personality development. Classes in etiquette, verbal communication and soft skills, thanks to a tie-up with Sathyam, are on every Saturday at the Institute.

**Funding:** ANEW's programs are funded entirely by donors. They also organise fund-raisers once in two-three years.

**Networking:** The organization collaborates with the Sundaram Medical Foundation, CIOSA, Chennai Willingdon Foundation, SCARF, the Banyan, Tamil Nadu Foundation and the FICCI women's wing and PCVC to name a few.

ANEW has also become a partner of the Credibility Alliance which, according to their website, "is a national consortium of non-profit organization set up in 2004 to establish consensus driven set of credibility norms for the voluntary sector in India."

**Future plans:** ANEW plans to get into heavy vehicle training for women. They are also looking to invite more resource persons for special lectures for the young women and introduce time-management courses.

## CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH (CWDR)

**How it began:** The organization was started in 1993 by three women activists who felt the need for a platform to help address the problems of poor women. What started out as an organization imparting human rights training gradually grew into the voice of numerous women domestic workers in Chennai. According to its president K.R. Renuka, the roughly 1.5 million of the “poorest of the poor” women coming under the unorganised sector in Chennai alone had no rights, no fixed pay and lead a “slavery-like life”.

The project, started initially with five slums in Thiruvamiyur, Chennai, has now expanded to cover women in 85 slums in 16 districts across Tamil Nadu.

**What they do:** The organisation's initiatives 'Manushi' and 'Snehidhi' revolve around women domestic workers and adolescent girls in slums respectively. The programmes offer counselling, leadership training, awareness of gender issues, education and training in life skills. The 'Snehidhi' programme took roots in 2002, after a need felt for sex education among adolescent girls. Mothers, who were initially unwilling to send their daughters, were also counselled on the importance of sex education for their children.

In addition, the girls were also taught tailoring and basic computer applications. Information and Communication training, including lessons in software such as LINUX, creating and updating Tamil websites and taking video and short films are also integral to the training.

The thrust of the organisation's programmes is on education to encourage girls to lead self-sufficient, independent lives.

Improving the lives of single women is another important objective of the organisation. “Single women” here refer to widows, destitutes and those who are unmarried, most of them above 35 years of age. (From 'A study about Single Women' by CWDR, December 2006). Discriminated against and denied of all rights, this vulnerable group is prime priority for CWDR.

The organization is against the SHG movement as it feels they do not discuss women's issues nor aid in empowerment. What the movement needs is an improvement in status and innovative strategies to fight competition, fees Ms. Renuka.

Leadership training is also being imparted to women in panchyats and ward members.

Advocacy and lobbying with the government forms an important part of the organisation's agenda. In 1997, domestic workers were included in the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board. With this, the movement to start a trade union for the category then gained momentum and in 2005 'Manushi' was born. In 2007, domestic workers got their own welfare board – the Tamil Nadu Domestic Workers Welfare Board. Early this year, on March 4, a Government Order (No.23) sought to bring welfare boards under the revenue department. Opposing the move, the organization met with MLAs and garnered support against the attempt, holding large-scale protests and demonstrations. By an April 10 order, the move was withdrawn.

The trade union is subscription based, with 3,000 women registered in Zone 10 alone. (Zone 10 incorporates Santhome to Thiruvaniyur, notified slums in these areas and those in Kannagi Nagar ). Women between 18 and 35 years of age are eligible to enroll in the welfare board.

**Funding:** CWDR is funded by German organization 'Andheri Hilfe', volunteers and donors.

**Networking:** The organization has tie-ups with the National Alliance for Women's Organisation (NAWO), the Tamil Nadu Women's Movement and other trade unions.

**Future plans:** CWDR is working towards initiating a movement for higher pay scales for women domestic workers and striving for professional recognition for such workers. Plans are on to introduce sensitisation programmes for men, especially the youth, on gender training and problems faced by women.

## **FAMILY PLANNING ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (FPA)**

**How it began:** AIDS, abortion, adolescents, access and advocacy – these form the core of the Family Planning Association of India's initiatives across the country. For over half a century, FPA India has been at the vanguard of a host of novel measures, ranging from sexuality and population education to women's empowerment and community participation. With 40 branches across the country, the organization broadly works towards creating awareness among people of sexual and reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS. It endeavours to promote sexual and reproductive health, especially among the marginalised sections of society. FPA India is a founder member of the International Planned Parenthood Association, the world's largest non-governmental organization advocating sexual and reproductive health and rights.

**What they do:** From reproductive health clinics to awareness programmes in schools, FPA's activities are spread across a host of sectors. The Reproductive Health and Family Planning Centre (RHFP) looks after abortion cases, emergency contraception and other issues related to reproductive health. Women and children are the focus group of the AVM clinic in Vadapalani, offering pre-natal and post-natal care, treatment for general ailments and other medical assistance, including regular follow-ups. Counselling for women and adolescent girls forms a vital part of their programmes. Women receive guidance in child care and young girls are given lessons on the physiological changes they experience during adolescence and in hygiene.

An urban centre in K.K. Nagar, aided wholly by the Chennai Corporation, provides vaccination facilities for women and children. The Integrated Counselling and Testing Centre offers facilities for HIV/AIDS testing and blood tests.

FPA believes in involving the community for better results. Field workers sensitise people by inviting them for sessions on various topics. The organization also trains policewomen in dealing with distressed couples. The women direct couples with marital problems to FPA India, which then initiates appropriate measures to effect reconciliation.

FPA India launched a pilot project on lessons in sexual and reproductive health at the higher secondary level in four of the twenty government schools in 2006. It aims to cover 15 by the end of this year and the remaining by next year.

Another important ongoing project is the Japan Trust Fund initiative. FPA India runs a drop-in clinic for Men having Sex with Men (MSM), persons with substance abuse, Intravenous Drug Users (IDUs) and commercial sex workers. The highlight of the programme is the participation of transgendered persons in spreading awareness of the causes and possible prevention measures of HIV/AIDS among the above mentioned sections.

**Funding:** The entire gamut of FPA's programmes are funded by the Japanese, as they are the primary source of funding for the IPPF as well.

**Networking:** The organization has joined hands with a number of local non-governmental organisations, CAPACS, the city Corporation, schools and other educational institutions for advocacy and promotion of sexual and reproductive health and rights and for tie-ups for capacity building and technical support.

**Future plans:** FPA is initiating a movement to introduce sex education in schools. This is of great significance especially in times of eroding family relationships, feels Chennai branch manager S. Gopalakrishnan.

## FEMINIST ASSOCIATION FOR SOCIAL ACTION (FASA)

**How it began:** It was yet another session at the laboratory for Julie John, a doctorate student of botany at Madras University during the late eighties. A pretty girl, she was habituated to attention from the opposite sex. But what she was not prepared for was misconduct by a fellow researcher. A complaint registered with the head of the department, with the aid of two department teachers, was in vain. Eva Mathew, principal of Ethiraj College at the time, then wrote to the governor demanding an investigation into the matter.

The case then went to court. The male student was let off with a warning, but not before being severely reprimanded by the judge. He filed two cases, one against Julie and one against a lecturer for having defamed him. It was the financial strain and mental harassment faced by the lecturer over the years that cemented Feminist Association for Social Action founder Sarah Matthew's determination to set in motion the movement for a legislation on sexual harassment. It was also this incident that brought FASA, started in 1989, to the forefront of the struggle against sexual harassment and domestic violence.

What followed was a major workshop on sexual harassment, the first of its kind in Chennai, funded by the National Commission for Women. A study to determine the extent of prevalence of sexual harassment in the city, conducted by Dr. K. Shanti, professor of Economics at Madras University, brought out into the open instances of harassment. This initiated change – the Vice-Chancellor of Madras University introduced a methodology for reporting such incidents, which then became the model for other such legislations in University Grants Commission universities.

FASA, in its early years, also contributed to the Domestic Violence Act. Prior to the introduction of the present act, FASA organised regional workshops to help promote collective thought and suggestion on the issue. The amended legislation now mandates that a Protection Officer be appointed in every district, in contrast to the earlier Act where the only recourse was to register a complaint with the police station. Also, the officer was made accountable to a higher authority to make his/her role more effective.

The birth of FASA also coincided with the beginning of the women's studies movement in the country. With the spotlight on advocacy, the organisation's primary objective was to counter different forms of gender discrimination and spread awareness of gender issues. FASA, in the initial years, spoke out extensively against domestic violence, sexual harassment and desertion.

Ms. Matthew, after years of handling cases of domestic violence, is of the opinion that most women suffering from violence only want to end it, not break away from family. She feels one-third of distressed families can be reconciled through counselling. "But if reconciliation cannot be effected, the officer involved in the case should be willing to go the whole hog to protect the woman," she adds.

**What they do:** As an advocacy organisation, FASA primarily conducts seminars and workshops to educate women on the course of legal action available to them in cases of domestic violence and sexual harassment and inform on how to access information and legal recourse.

At the start, FASA felt the need to experience the victimisation of women first-hand. A counselling centre in the government estate in 1992 served as a forum for affected women to voice their grievances until 3-4 years ago. Another initiative started this year revolves around rural women. With a view to augment income, FASA's vocational training programmes include nursing aid, beautician course and needle work for women in Tiruvallur.

In collaboration with Rotary, FASA also reaches out to young women in rural areas through the 'Selvi' project. A personality development programme for the women incorporates and disseminates a fair amount of gender empowerment and awareness. "The goal is to try and work with each individual woman and strengthen her," says Ms. Matthew.

She also emphasises the need for financial independence for women. This is what FASA aims to achieve through its vocational (guidance) centre - empowerment of women through income-generation. The current scope of FASA's work has changed from politico-legal over the years to social.

**Networking:** FASA has joined hands with the Rotary Club and few other organisations for their initiatives. But it is looking to develop partnerships with several more to reach out to more women through its awareness programmes.

**Funding:** The organisation's activities are funded by contributions from members, in addition to funds received from donors or through fund-raisers held occasionally. Insufficient funding is a major hurdle to implementation of FASA's initiatives.

**Future plans:** FASA's role over the years has transformed from an organization comprising only academics and professionals discussing issues in women's studies from different perspectives to one engaging in development of women. Development advocacy is FASA's agenda for the future. The emphasis will be on spreading the word on existing laws, as there is sufficient legislation in place but not enough awareness among women regarding the same, according to Ms. Matthew.

FASA is shifting to a new office in Thiruvalluvar in order to facilitate its work with rural women.

## FICCI LADIES ORGANISATION (FLO)

**How it began:** It was twenty years ago when five women were determined to create a space to promote entrepreneurship and business acumen among women professionals. FLO was born, providing a platform for women to express their concerns and an opportunity to excel in their chosen business endeavours. Headquartered in Delhi, the movement now has now spread throughout the country, carrying out its objectives through several chapters with over a thousand members.

The Chennai Chapter, the first regional Chapter of FLO, was set up in 1996. With 'power to empower' as their mission, other FLO chapters in Coimbatore, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Kolkata and Mumbai serve as nodal centres and reach out to other areas of the country.

**What they do:** FLO, through its diverse programmes, works in the areas of economic empowerment, education, community development, health and literacy. The only national-level trade organisation, it also serves as a forum for women to interact and share ideas, experiences. They include the following:

*Personality development* – experts are invited to address members to encourage them to strive to succeed.

*Awareness programmes* – FLO organises seminars, debates and discussions where women-specific issues, from health to investment planning, are taken up and the women guided to make the right decisions.

*Business consultancy* – such cells in Delhi, Chennai and Hyderabad offer free professional guidance to entrepreneurs requiring assistance in running their units.

*Training* – workshops and training programmes under three broad categories help to enhance awareness and cultivate skills – income generation programmes for the unemployed and artisans, skill development workshops for educated youth and skill enhancement programmes for managerial groups. Women are also imparted vocational training in a host of professions including manufacturing and the service industry.

*Recognition* – outstanding contributions of entrepreneurs, professionals, social workers and institutes are recognised every year and awards presented under two categories namely 'Outstanding woman entrepreneur' and 'Outstanding woman social worker'. The Chennai Chapter instituted its own awards in 2004-05 to encourage women at the regional level. The 'Woman of the year' award is given to either an entrepreneur or a professional.

*Young FLO* – Young professionals between 20 and 39 years are a part of this community that lends vibrancy to FLO's endeavours

**Funding:** The organization functions under the aegis of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, with adequate support in terms of resources and infrastructure.

**Networking:** FLO collaborates with government bodies and other like-minded groups that address specific needs. Hanns-Seidel Foundation, a German organisation, supports the training programmes organised by FLO. An inter-state meet conducted every year allows women to interact with members from other chapters.

## FORUM FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT (FORWORD)

**How it began:** Shiamala Baby was under the impression that it was her husband's right to beat her. Having been brought up to be submissive and taught to avoid confrontation, she didn't stand up to him or seek out help. Abused and confined to a room for 10 years, she was totally unaware of her rights until human rights organizations, journalists and the police came to her rescue in 1987. Her husband was arrested. But Shiamala knew what she wanted to do in the future – educate women on their rights. FORWORD thus came into being in 1992 to help battered and deprived women live emotionally, socially, educationally and, most importantly, economically secure and self-sufficient lives. "I was brought up to be passive and timid. Even today, most educated women too do not know their rights," she says.

**What they do:** With self-identity and self-confidence as buzzwords and a holistic, 'abundant' life for women as their motto, FORWORD reaches out to oppressed women primarily through awareness and education programmes. Apart from counselling programmes and advocacy, regular seminars and workshops on domestic violence are conducted. FORWORD works with various groups, across Chennai and its suburbs and in Kancheepuram district, at different levels:

- Dalit women/ adivasis
- Women in unorganised sectors
- Women in crisis (victims of domestic violence)
- Sex workers/ women with HIV/AIDS
- Tsunami victims
- Children of the above mentioned sections

The organization has evolved suitable programmes for women across coastal, rural and urban areas. The spotlight is on providing revolving fund for women along the coast for selling fish. Women in villages are trained in agricultural operations, organic manure making, vermiculture and organic farming, while their urban counterparts are encouraged to set up small scale industries.

Sex workers are offered health and emotional support and encouraged to fight the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

Around 350 children attend evening classes across FORWORD's 13 centres. In addition to academics, the emphasis is on imparting value-based education and promoting debate and discussion.

FORWORD also strives to promote mass movements. The East Coast Land Protection Forum fights to safeguard the land rights of people residing in coastal areas. The Single Women for Social Justice Forum works to create and protect livelihood rights of single women. "When a woman is deserted, even banks are not ready to give her a loan," says Ms. Shiamala. The initiative's agenda revolves around helping women secure their fundamental rights. Some of their demands include a minimum of two acres of land for them and issues regarding its location etc.

Ms. Shiamala is of the opinion that it is high time that age-old practices and superstitious ideas be challenged. She cites her own case. "The significance of the 'thali' is questionable. My husband tortured me because he assumed he had the right to do so because he had tied the thali," she says. Such blind beliefs are regressive and a hurdle to a woman's progress in society, she avers.

FORWORD works extensively with women in rural areas, motivating them to emerge out of the shackles of patriarchal control. To this end, it encourages participatory leadership as the road to future development.

FORWORD's programmes receive able support from its 13 part-time staff, 50-60 volunteers, skill trainers, field workers and programme coordinators.

**Funding:** FORWORD receives its funds from international agencies to support its programmes.

**Networking:** The organization works closely with other like-minded organizations, individuals and NGOs, including the police and advocate groups.

**Future plans:** A church for women with no religious and traditional barriers – this is Shiamala's dream for the future. Moving away from the normal definition of a church, the Deprived Women's Church of El Shadai will serve as a platform for women to meet to share experiences, relax, pray and sing. "This will be one place any woman can call her own," says Ms. Shiamala.

## INTERNATIONAL FOUNDATION FOR CRIME PREVENTION AND VICTIM CARE (PCVC)

**How it began:** Every six hours in India, a young married woman is burned alive, beaten to death or forced to commit suicide. Statistics indicate that 14 wives are murdered by their husbands' family every day, according to a United Nations report. The scourge of domestic violence claims several lives across the world, yet is often invisible. The International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care was created in 2001 with the sole aim of countering domestic violence and providing a range of services for victims. The founders of the organization are three women, from the fields of criminology, criminal justice sciences and sociology.

**What they do:** All of PCVC's initiatives and services fall under two broad categories – crisis intervention and prevention. They include the following:

- *Shanthi* – crisis intervention centre for domestic violence victims
- *Astitva* – emergency shelter for women and children. The shelter offers temporary accommodation, where in the woman stays in the shelter until she learns a skill and is confident of living independently.
- *Udhayam* – community support unit working in tandem with all-women police stations
- *Nam Kudumbam (Our Family)* – PCVC's community strengthening initiative
- *Vidiyal* – project for burn survivors of domestic violence
- *Smiles* – a PCVC programme to reduce risks and improve lives of children in family violence
- *WE CAN* – OXFAM's We Can End Violence Against Women campaign: With over 20 alliances across the State, the South Asia regional campaign aims to get across the message that violence is not acceptable in relationships. The goal of the six-year, six country campaign, covering Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Afghanistan, is to educate and save 5 million women. The focus will be on fighting against trafficking of women and girls in Nepal and honour killings in Pakistan. By 2011, the campaign hopes to influence 50 million ordinary men and women across South Asia to oppose violence against women and adopt more gender-equal practices in their own lives. Be a "changemaker" is their watchword – over five million 'change agents' will be mobilised. A series of community programmes will take the mission forward.

Most domestic violence cases are referred to the PCVC through police stations where complaints are registered and at the Kilpauk general Hospital's burns ward. "Around 250-260 women come for treatment of burns," says Prasanna, vice-president, PCVC. The mental anguish the women suffer at that point of time makes immediate counselling impractical, she adds. However, supplementary support services such as a place to stay, treatment for physical injuries, counselling for emotional abuse, psychiatric treatment for mental abuse, support to regain economic stability, awareness on her rights, legal aid and child care, including their education and if necessary adoption, are offered.

Prasanna believes that violence in India has its roots in culture. "We think one person should be in control of the relationship. We just don't know how to be in a healthy relationship," she points out.

PCVC comes across women across age barriers and social strata with a variety of problems. "We have newly-weds coming and telling us this was not what they had expected. Also, we see women above 50-60, whose children have settled down, expressing their desire to be free," according to Prasanna. Tolerance levels are fast dropping, women don't want to put up with violence any more, she adds.

PCVC also conducts awareness programmes in schools and colleges and among corporates on tackling domestic violence at home or dealing with victims. Women working in corporate offices are trained to identify and deal with sexual harassment at workplace.

**Networking:** The organization partners extensively with hospitals and police stations and, in some cases, local NGOs, who refer domestic violence cases to them.

**Funding:** PCVC is supported by research and training projects undertaken by the organization and individual donations.

**Future plans:** The organization is looking to set up a national-level domestic violence helpline. More community programmes in villages are also on the cards.

## JOINT ACTION COUNCIL FOR WOMEN

**How it began:** Several groups, different agendas, one purpose – women empowerment. In 1982, senior members of around 50 NGOs discussed the need for a common platform to voice women's concerns and actively promote policy formation. The Joint Action Council for Women thus came into existence to support, uphold and protect the interests, status and dignity of women. A politically non-aligned, non-sectarian feminist association, it was formed as a spontaneous response to a call for combined action by women activists and groups. It was formally registered on July 14, 1983, functioning until then as an ad-hoc committee.

From working towards securing just rights and equal opportunities for women, a centre for counselling women in distress and in need of assistance and striving for the economic and social development of women through various projects, JACW's projects mirror its founding principles of aiding oppressed and exploited women.

**What they do:** JACW is involved in two main projects:

*Sahodari* – this network caters exclusively for rural women, offering them opportunities for personal growth such as vocational training, job placements, legal counselling self employment and awareness programmes on women's rights and development. Six Sahodari centres were set up during 1983-90, two in Chennai and the remaining in Tirunelveli, Salem, Ooty and Kumbakonam. 75% of women who approach the centres are from the lower middle class, with family incomes of ₹ 500 per month, according to Sanjida Khwaja, Secretary, JACW.

*Aashraya:* This short stay home offering transient shelter for women and children is a joint effort of the Andhra Mahila Sabha and the JACW. Aashraya takes in victims of domestic violence, widows or women forced to leave homes into its fold. They are counselled and guided to become self reliant, reintegrating them into society. The centre receives annual grants towards capital and recurring expenditure from the Ministry of Human Resources Development since 1986, the year of its inception. Aashraya currently provides shelter to 30 women and 10 children.

The *Centre for Counselling, Research and Development (CCRD)*, a unit of JACW set up in 1985, has to its credit three editions of *Sahaya*, a directory of services for the poor, handicapped, the aged and women and children.

JACW has initiated a few projects in a slum in Greams Road, with help from MRF and the Tamil Nadu Slum Clearance Board. They include adult and child education, tailoring classes for women, a computer centre and a free clinic set up in collaboration with REACH to provide medical assistance to tuberculosis patients.

**Funding:** JACW's receives funds from the Central government and from individual donors.

**Future plans:** The organization is looking to set up a documentation and research centre soon.

## KAINGKARYA

**How it began:** Kaingkarya (meaning *noble deed* in Sanskrit) was the brainchild of Kaveri Natarajan, a service-minded teacher, and came into being in 1991 with a view to serve the two most vulnerable sections of society – women and children. Kaingkarya primarily works with the needy at Thirusoolam, Chennai.

**What they do:** The organization's maiden initiative 'Project Vazhikatti: empowerment through education' was launched in 1992. The project was born out of a need observed, after extensive fieldwork and interaction with the poor, for information on opportunities available for school dropouts and the semi-literate to earn a decent living. An intensive study on vocational training programmes offered to women and youth by government agencies led to a book, 'Vazhikaati' (the guidepost), listing out avenues for skill development and training.

In 1994, Kaingkarya conducted an AIDS awareness programme, with domestic helps and marginalised sections as the primary target. Over 2,400 women across Chennai learnt about the disease and prevention measures. Family service centres were opened in four localities in Chennai in 1995, offering career counselling for women and youth besides short-term training programmes for girls in West Mambalam, K.K. Nagar, Ashok Nagar and MGR Nagar.

In 1996, Kaingkarya conducted a study of the physical and psychological stress likely to affect girls working in readymade garment manufacturing units. Apart from awareness programmes on sex education and HIV/AIDS, a team of social workers, medical practitioners, dieticians and HR experts designed programmes on food and nutrition and imparted interpersonal skills to the women. The 18-month-long projects covered nearly 10,000 women.

A six-month nursing training programme was specially developed for girls from low-income groups unable to pursue education beyond the tenth standard. On since 1996, the programme has covered around 1,000 students. During the course of the programme, the students are sent to hospitals for practical exposure. After completion of the course, the students are guided to secure placements in hospitals and nursing homes across the city.

*Self-Help Groups (SHGs):* Kaingkarya also runs SHGs for women in Thirusoolam, a suburb with a large population of women quarry workers. 170 SHGs were formed in Zone 9 and 8 of the Chennai Corporation covering Ashok Nagar, Saidapet, Mambalam and MGR Nagar. Women were trained in tailoring, jute and paper products, home-made sanitary products, household items and food processing techniques. A good number started their own small milk distribution units, roadside eateries etc or found work mostly in government export factories. But administrative and a host of other problems prompted the organization to hand them over to the SHG Federation, which has taken up the programme.

**Funding:** Kaingkarya depends on grants from donors and friends, though they have been receiving aid from Japan from 2003 for infrastructure development and non-recurring expenditure.

**Networking:** The organization has tie-ups with various hospitals and nursing homes in Chennai where the graduates of the nursing programme receive placements. They are also associated with the Ramakrishna Math.

**Future plans:** Kaingarya's goal for the future is to build a full-fledged hospital in Thirusoolam to expand health services to the needy.

## MARKETING ORGANISATION OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS (MOOWES)

**How it began:** MOOWES, a pioneer in assisting women entrepreneurs market products, was the brainchild of Seetha Ranganathan and Janaki Ananth. It came into being in 1990 with initial assistance from the Indian Bank. MOOWES works to encourage women to set up their own manufacturing units or trade in products of their choice. Creating products is easy but getting them to the end consumer is a challenge – this was what drove the creation of MOOWES.

**What they do:** MOOWES offers members a platform to reach consumers primarily through participating in exhibitions or by conducting exhibition-cum-sales. “This facilitates direct consumer interaction as there are no middlemen. Customers can approach the women directly and place orders for products of their choice,” according to president Seetha Ranganathan. This kind of an interface also boosts their confidence, she adds.

On an average, women members of MOOWES take part in four to five exhibitions, normally during or in the run up to a festival, in a year. Such expos usually see 30-40 members taking part. From a modest 12 members, MOOWES now boasts of over a 100.

Women receive training in jute making, food processing, tailoring and leather technology to name a few. Products typically include handicraft items, jewellery, jute bags and dress materials. The members largely employ women in their units, thus providing employment opportunities to many.

In addition, MOOWES’ annual feature ‘Shakthi’, an exposition comprising seminars, workshops and exhibition, is the largest stage for members to showcase their products as well as learn new skills. The seminars cover a wide range of topics such as food processing, cosmetology, handicrafts, jute, export regulations and information technology.

Apart from these, women are counselled on entrepreneurship opportunities, encouraging them to expand businesses and identify new areas of growth.

**Networking:** MOOWES is a life member of the Federation of South India Producers’ Association (SIPA) and Women’s Indian Association (WIA). It is also associated with the Association of Jute Entrepreneurs of South India (AJESI) and the national Council for Jute Development (NCJD). MOOWES takes part in shows organised by the Jute Manufactures’ Development Council (JMDC).

**Funding:** It does not receive funding from external agencies. Members collectively contribute in the event of an exhibition or activity.

**Future plans:** Initiating rural women into the entrepreneurship movement is top priority for MOOWES in the near future. It hopes to take into its fold motivated rural women, train them to develop skills and help them market their products in urban areas. The organization is also looking at setting up showrooms and mobile sales counters to help members sell more of their products. Setting up a food processing unit and training centre to enable women from low income families become self-sufficient is yet another project that MOOWES hopes to undertake.

## PENNURIMAI IYAKKAM (WOMEN'S RIGHTS FRONT)

**How it began:** One of Chennai's most well-known groups in the forefront of the fight for women's rights, Pennurimai Iyakkam began its journey in 1979. It was started by a group of students and teachers essentially to assist and secure justice for the most vulnerable of this section – marginalised and downtrodden women. The movement now boasts of 4,000 members from across the State.

**What they do:** The organization deals with the issue of women's rights and gender justice at two levels – at the domestic level (individuals and families) and at the level of policy-making. Primarily an advocacy group, the organization adopts a three-pronged strategy to empowering affected women:

1. The first stage involves counselling, dialogue and discussion with the parties involved.
2. If talks fail, members then take the issue on to the bigger stage through agitations and demonstrations and hand over representations to officials concerned.
3. The final step is to approach courts to secure justice.

Pennurimai Iyakkam helps women assert their rights in the face of problems like domestic violence, sexual harassment in the personal and the work space, dowry-related harassment, polygamy, divorce and child-support, gender-based discrimination in employment and trafficking. It also conducts sensitisation and awareness campaigns to sensitise people on such issues. It also refers women to short stay homes or hostels for temporary shelter until their issues are resolved. Counselling facilities for women are also offered.

The organization also operates at the level of political activism, with the most important part of its work revolving around workers in the unorganised sector. Though the focus is on women, it also works with male workers – on issues of displacement, workers' rights and entitlements under various policy provisions. About 10,000 women (from the areas where PUI has a presence) working in the unorganised sector are members of the organisation.

Another core area of the organisation's efforts are directed towards helping slum dwellers fight for their rights. From illegal and forced evictions to access to clean drinking water, sanitation, electricity, roads and proper drainage Pennurimai Iyakkam takes up issues affecting the poor living in slums.

**Networking:** Pennurimai Iyakkam has joined hands with other advocacy groups and organisations working in the arena of women's rights to meet its objectives. For example, it relies on AMS Aashraya for shelter or Aruwe for counselling and vocational training.

**Funding:** A membership fee of ₹ 65/- collected every year goes towards funding its various activities. Despite this, funding is a major concern for the organisation.

## POSITIVE WOMEN'S NETWORK

**How it began:** She gave 'positive' a whole new meaning. Forced to marry her cousin at 20, Kousalyaa tested positive for HIV a few months into the marriage. Seven months later, her husband died. She was just coming to terms with her positive status when a property dispute threatened to make matters worse. Undeterred by her status becoming public, she approached district authorities to fight her case. She came out of her despair, driven by a mission - not to let what happened to her happen to somebody else and strive for a dignified life for women like her. In 1998, she started the Positive Women's Network, an exclusive network of women living with HIV, advocating change and working to improve the quality of life of women and children living with HIV/AIDS.

**What they do:** PWN+ is essentially a rights-based organisation, involved in capacity building, increasing access to rights, developing partnerships and advocating for programme and policy changes. A nationwide movement, its work is spread across 13 States, with regional-level centres in each of these States functioning independently. Women, when they approach State-level branches for help, become a part of PWN+ through their support meetings. The Tamil Nadu PWN+ network alone has 2,000 members. PWN+ activities include the following:

- Bringing together women from all walks of life to build an active national network and providing opportunities for capacity building and skill training.
- Working towards social integration of women living with HIV/AIDS.
- Creating awareness of existing government schemes available to women, outreach services and information to enable women make sound decisions for the future.
- Improving access to available services for women – counseling, treatment and health care.
- Advocacy programmes at district, state and national levels to address issues such as discrimination, health, livelihood, prevention and care and support of women living with HIV
- Evaluation of existing schemes of government departments and suggestions to amend these policies to cover affected women and children.
- Providing livelihood opportunities (employment, vocational training and credit) for women through government schemes and the business unit of PWN+, Social Light Communications.
- Ensuring access to quality education and a dignified life for children affected by HIV/AIDS.

PWN+ members run a business unit in Villupuram district, marketing sarees. It has also set up free legal aid centres, in partnership with SACS and UNDP, in Namakkal, Madurai, Dindugal and Karur.

**Funding:** All its projects are supported by international organisations such as the American Jewish World Service, UNIFEM, UNAIDS, UNICEF, in addition to assistance from the European and Canadian High Commissions.

**Networking:** PWN+ has a wide support system, collaborating with several State organisations such as CAPACS, the Social Welfare Department and the State Aids Control Society, tie-ups with hospitals and banks such as Standard Chartered.

**Future plans:** The organization is looking to set up SHGs for women in Nagapattinam district.

## TAMIL NADU CORPORATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN (TNCDW)

**How it began:** TNCDW was set up in 1983 by the State government to facilitate the socio-economic development of women. The aim of the department was to bring about empowerment through forming and sustaining self-help groups. TNCDW, which was under the administrative control of the Social Welfare Department till 2006, is now a part of the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department with a view to streamline implementation of schemes meant for SHGs. The organisation's activities cover women from the rural and urban sectors, most of them from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families.

**What they do:** Most of TNCDW's programmes revolve around their 'Magalir Thittam' scheme. Based on the SHG approach, the scheme involves non-government organisations and other civil society groups to bring about community development. Of the 3, 64,000 groups formed, TNCDW is looking to cover 1,50,000 groups by the end of his financial year.

TNCDW is involved in formation of SHGs, skill training for its members and credit rating to make them eligible to approach banks for loans. Prior to this programme, women were imparted training in entrepreneurship development for a seven-day period. But owing to limited interest and output, TNCDW revamped its programme to train women in soft skills. A range of skills is taught depending on each group's requirements, capacity and educational background. Women learn plastic moulding and manufacturing, shoe and chappal making, fashion designing, zardosi work, computer-aided learning, Desk Top Publishing and polytechnics.

Under the 'Magalir Thittam' scheme, women are initially provided a subsidy of ₹ 10,000 as revolving fund under the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). A significant feature of the scheme is the intensive training provided to both SHG member and resource persons. Office bearers, called Animator and Representative, are given lessons in leadership, team building and maintaining accounts.

Credit rating, an exercise undertaken to grade the group and assess its credit worthiness, is a hallmark of the scheme. SHGs become eligible for credit rating once they complete six months. Decisive factors during the course of evaluation include repayment ability, regularity of meetings, systematic maintenance of registers and promptness in savings. Once approved, each group is eligible for a minimum of ₹ 40,000 as loan, in addition to the subsidy of ₹ 10,000 allotted under SGSY. They can also receive loans from banks or directly from the State. A successful second credit rating after a lapse of another six months allows them to start an economic activity, with assistance from SGSY or banks.

Under the 'Magalir Thittam' scheme, groups of SHGs at the village panchayat level come together to form Panchayat Level Federations (PLF). Women form several specific committees among themselves – those looking after social issues, education and civic issues to name a few. Pooling in talent and resources and encouraging a participatory approach will aid in empowerment, according to S. Madumati, general manager, TNCDW.

The Corporation also encourages marketing of products through block level committees, which serve to evaluate demand and manufacturing potential. The block-level federations at Erode and Pudukottai are examples. Around 72 PLFs across the State, accredited as non-governmental organisations, monitor SHGs coming under their purview and credit rate them.

State-level exhibitions are organised every year during festival such as Navratri for a period of 10-15 days. This apart, every district actively conducts monthly and quarterly exhibitions on a regular basis.

Apart from programmes centered on women, TNCDW also conducts separate training programmes for the youth, who then receive placements.

**Funding:** TNCDW, as a Government of Tamil Nadu undertaking, is entirely funded by the State.

**Networking:** TNCDW partners with NGOs, government departments and a host of private companies such as Nokia, L&T, MRF and Saint-Gobain and educational institutions such as NIFT and Anna University and TANSACS for aids awareness programmes.

**Future plans:** Marketing societies, formed by the Department of Rural Development, have been brought under the Magalir Thittam and will, from now on, showcase products made by members of the various SHGs. TNCDW also hopes to bring destitute women, widows into its SHG fold within the next few years.

## THE BANYAN

**How it began:** An act of compassion paved the way for the creation of this unique rehabilitation centre for mentally ill, homeless women. Vandana Gopikumar was pursuing her Masters in Social Work when she spotted a mentally ill woman wandering on the streets near her college. Along with friend Vaishnavi Jayakumar, her attempts to find shelter for the woman yielded no results, with most NGOs and mental health institutes unwilling to take her in. They met with the same response over the next few months. Disheartened, the two then took it upon themselves to do something to help such women.

The Banyan was set up in August 1993, initially as a shelter and transit home for destitute mentally ill women having wandered to Chennai from across the country. Over the years, the organization has helped 1,500 women and successfully rehabilitated over 800. The Banyan's scope has gradually widened to include vocational training and a several more initiatives to integrate such women into society.

**What they do:** The Banyan's immediate goals are to ensure timely treatment and rehabilitation for the mentally ill women. Its treatment and rehabilitation model ensures that the women not only receive shelter and care, but are also encouraged to lead normal, productive lives. With vocational and recreational therapy incorporated into the treatment process, the organization prepares them for a life of self-belief and self-sufficiency.

The organization also provides support to those who cannot return to their families and communities. It provides long-stay cottages, under the Community Living project, where these women can share living space and lives. It helps families of patients by providing a Disability Allowance to ease the financial pressure caused by the imperative of taking care of the patient. Further, by facilitating meetings for such family members, the organization also provides a platform for families to exchange ideas and share worries and strategies.

Adaikalam (Tamil for 'home') and the Long Stay home in Otteri currently provide shelter to around 380 women, in addition to housing facilities such as consulting rooms, vocational training unit and a recreational therapy unit.

Treatment at The Banyan is a combination of medical, recreational and therapeutic care, divided into short-term, mid-term and long-term goals. The first step is equipping the resident with skills required for everyday life, from personal hygiene to social interaction. Occupational therapy and vocational training come next. The final phase focuses on finding employment for the women and reuniting them with their families.

Occupational therapy activities include games, yoga, handicrafts to improve concentration and enhance group interaction.

An important aspect of the rehabilitation programme, vocational training is introduced once the women are able to satisfactorily engage and interact with others. Professional skill instructors assess the interests and capacities of each woman and design programmes best suited to their individual requirements. Training is provided in tailoring, weaving, block printing, embroidery and beautician courses.

Follow-up is an integral part of the entire process, with teams looking up rehabilitated residents at home or maintaining contact through phone or by post.

The Banyan also strives to increase awareness of the plight of the mentally ill and garner support to aid their cause. It seeks to bring about changes in government policy and position towards the mentally ill. To this end, the organization launched its legal aid clinic at the Madras High Court in 2002. Operating from The Banyan, the clinic ensures that the legal rights of mentally ill men and women are safeguarded.

The Banyan's Outpatient Clinic (OP), set up in 2007, offers free psychiatric consultation to rehabilitated residents and lifelong free medication. Members of the public in need of psychiatric treatment can approach the clinic for assistance.

**Funding:** The Banyan meets its expenses through donations fund-raisers.

**Networking:** The organization networks with local NGOs and the police, who bring to their notice cases requiring attention. Tie-ups with garment factories, beauty parlours and supermarkets facilitate placements for women who have undergone vocational training at the rehabilitation centre.

## WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROMOTIONAL ASSOCIATION

**How it began:** The problems she encountered running her small plastics manufacturing unit ten years back set her thinking. Prema Desikan was upset by the near-total absence of women in the industrial sector and the complete lack of training for the existing few. With years of industry experience behind her, she then began training women in the manufacturing of plastics, her area of expertise. Consequently, the Women's Entrepreneurship Promotional Association was set up in 2001 to aid women entrepreneurs in various aspects of their work.

**What they do:** WEPA continuously strives to experiment with and implement new and effective methods in training women for employment, entrepreneurship and marketing and canvassing for their products. With emphasis on monitoring and mentoring, WEPA empowers women in the following ways:

- Training in entrepreneurship development
- Imparting information on health and hygiene
- Vocational training
- Exposure through seminars and workshops
- Exhibitions
- Training for disabled, keeping with their needs and capacities
- Guidance and consultancy services

Cosmetics, computer applications, plastic products, food processing, baby foods and web designing are most preferred by women opting for training programmes, according to Ms. Prema. Any women in need of help can become a life member of WEPA for ₹ 2,000.

Ms. Prema is critical of the functioning of most women's organizations in the current scenario. "They start with good intentions, but are not persistent. Women's organizations and NGOs meet rarely, conduct exhibitions once or twice in a year and then disappear," she says.

Elaborating on WEPA's stand against the self-help group movement she explains: "SHGs involve only revolving funds, which hardly help women. They make them dependant on another source." Also, according to her, there are too many of them, as a result of which the movement lacks cohesiveness. "It is too random. A woman SHG member may not even know the head of the NGO supporting her."

The movement is heading in a different direction, moving away from its founding concept, according to her. "Instead of just disbursing funds, work of women in SHGs should be monitored and they should be helped to grow," she suggests. Even the government has woken up to the reality, she adds. "Officials are now granting funds or other assistance only after checking the progress of activities."

Contrary to most other women's organizations, which cite lack of government support or erratic support as hurdles to effective implementation of projects or schemes, Ms. Prema is of the opinion that the State is coming forward to do its bit. Rather, it's the women who are indifferent and lack the drive for entrepreneurship, she feels. "There are several opportunities and schemes, but very few women want to use it. They want the easy way out. Interest among women in entrepreneurship has come down."

But excess and unwarranted political intervention sabotages efforts to bring about women's development, she acknowledges. "Formalities are way too many. Also, higher authorities keep changing. There are no sustained efforts and there is too much politics."

**Networking:** Though WEPA is not part of the SHG movement, it provides vocational training to members of SHGs run by other non-governmental organizations. It networks with individuals and organizations to set up units for women entrepreneurs.

**Funding:** WEPA is supported by the State Bank of India, Indian Bank and has joined hands with SIDBI, NABARD for several schemes. It also receives direct assistance from the Central government.

**Future plans:** Efforts are on for a display centre to showcase products manufactured by the women entrepreneurs. WEPA is looking at encouraging innovative projects with good scope for the future and initiating 'technology-based' entrepreneurship as the way forward.

## WORKING WOMEN'S FORUM (WWF)

**How it began:** Heavy floods in 1978 in southern India brought to the surface the squalor and helplessness of poor women. Jaya Arunachalam, then working with the women's wing of the Congress party, was appalled by the extreme poverty, hunger and invisibility of marginalised women that she saw all around her while involved in distributing relief to the affected. Discouraged by the limited extent to which grassroots-level programmes 'tricked down' to the needy, a determined Dr. Jaya set about giving shape to her idea of creating a common platform to benefit the poorest of women through self-participation and promoting leadership.

The Working Women's Forum thus came into existence in 1978 as a responsive organization, working towards the rights of poor women and facilitating access to credit, education, healthcare and other fundamental services. With 14 branches in urban, semi-urban and rural areas across Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, WWF has now evolved into a social movement of over 10 lakh women spread across 3,407 villages and 2,152 slums.

**What they do:** WWF is essentially a movement of grassroots women, an initiative covering poor rural and urban working class women in three Southern States. The forum's workers include weavers, sericulture workers, fisherwomen, beedi rollers, lace makers and handicraft producers and landless agricultural laborers. The Forum, over the years, has been able to mobilize scores of women through its innovative institutional structure that allows them to participate in the governance of the organization, thus integrating the poor at all levels. Through a bottom-up approach, WWF has succeeded in achieving a cost-effective, large-scale outreach. WWF's programmes cover the following areas:

1. Credit and savings
2. Unionization
3. Reproductive healthcare
4. Micro insurance
5. Leadership training
6. Child labour rehabilitation
7. Lobbying

WWF has promoted two subsidiary institutions to work towards empowering poor women:

- The Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW), which started with 800 women, encourages the social and financial independence of women by providing them low interest loans to start micro enterprises. Registered as an autonomous Micro Finance Institution, ICNW has reached out to over 4,27,925 poor entrepreneurs. The Network was born out of the women's need for easy access to credit. With formal banking institutions unwilling to come forward to give loans and women unable to pay huge collaterals, women of WWF created a new informal system. Around 2,500 leaders with a share of ₹ 20 each and seed capital of ₹50,000 began their own Working Women's Cooperative Society in 1981, now registered as the ICNW. Women in ICNW are involved in 165 different enterprises both in the urban and rural areas.
- The National Union of Working Women, as the WWF's trade wing, fights for the rights of poor women, including labour, land and housing rights and representation in local governance. Women take it upon themselves to organize and overcome common issues of oppression such as human rights violations, conditions of work and female foeticide, to name a few. It reinforces the belief that the poor themselves play a vital role in their self-development process, motivating them to consciously take on leadership roles within the community.

WWF's reproductive healthcare project, the brainchild of community health workers themselves, echoes the concerns of poor women in issues such as family planning, surgery etc. The Reproductive and Child Health Programme draws on people's participation in healthcare measures to put into practice sensitive family planning measures and enhance the woman's economic contribution. Women in the reproductive and post-reproductive age group are counselled on a wide spectrum of issues such as nutritional requirements, antenatal care, postpartum care, immunisation, contraceptive practices and HIV/AIDS. Well-trained Community Health Workers (CHW) carry on health advocacy and ensure an effective network for delivery of health services. The healthcare system has impacted a population of about 1 million, covering 16,00,000 families in 720 slums and 340 villages.

Yet another of WWF's pioneering initiatives is micro insurance. Through several micro insurance products, such as healthcare schemes, social security and maternity benefits, WWF has helped improve the living and working conditions of marginalised women. Social security coverage for members is provided through tie-ups with the Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) and Royal Sundaram Alliance Pvt. Limited (RSA). Women are covered under life, accident, disability and health through the ICNW.

WWF conducts an impact study every five years to evaluate reach of schemes and progress among members.

The creation of WWF came at a time when the women's movement in the country was slowly gaining momentum. But the movement at present is losing ground, according to Dr. Jaya Arunachalam. Political inaction is squarely to blame for the plight of women, according to her. "Politicians are deteriorating by the day, the system is collapsing. People at the Centre don't know how to reach people in need," she says.

**Funding:** The organization receives funds from the Labour Bank and Citibank.

**Networking:** WWF is affiliated to the International Raiffiessan Union (IRU), Germany, and International Chemical Energy and Mine Workers Union, Brussels. It is the founder member of Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (GROOTS) and enjoys a consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

## YOUNG WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION (YWCA)

**How it began:** The apparent loss of values and neglect of spiritual life by young women during the times of the Industrial Revolution worried Mrs. Arthur Kinnaird and Emma Roberts. It was a time when numerous young women were leaving homes to work in factories and industries. In an attempt to help address their problems, Mrs. Kinnaird started a group for in London for women and Ms. Roberts a prayer union for women in the English village of Barnet. But it was not until 1877 – when the two women, unaware of each others' work, met over a cup of tea 22 years after they began their work – that the international movement serving young women was born.

The Madras Y.W.C.A, like the Y.W.C.A movement founded in England, owed its origin to two different groups. The first group in Madras was set up in 1884, eight years before it came to be known by the present name. Known as the Madras Christian Women's Association, the group was organised shortly after a missionary conference in Kolkata. It was noteworthy that despite the Association being founded by British women, it reached out to women across colour, creed and language. However, the Y.W.C.A at Madras came into being after the movement was well established in other cities such as Bombay and Poona.

**What they do:** Y.W.C.A boasts of numerous initiatives benefiting a cross section of people. They include the following:

*Y.W.C.A. Sahodari project:* Distressed women, victims of marital abuse and harassment and mentally ill women find succour through counselling or legal aid at this Y.W.C.A centre. The first step is intensive counselling over several sessions to reconcile the estranged parties, the women and her family. In case both parties do not reach common ground, the woman is offered shelter at the centre or outside until she becomes gainfully employed and economically independent. The Centre is associated with the Tamil Nadu State Legal Service Authority to offer women free legal aid if attempts at reconciliation fail. A woman lawyer appointed by the Court counsels women and assesses the status of cases every Thursday. Once a case is registered, the client files an appeal with the Authority, who then appoints a lawyer.

*Navajeevan:* This project, started in 1975, is dedicated to the care of mentally ill women, providing them occupational rehabilitative therapy. The women stay in short-stay homes and are taught basic vocational skills, such as pickle making, typing and tailoring, during the course of their stay. After regular counselling sessions and medical treatment, the goal is to integrate them with mainstream society through employment. The clients, registered under the Institute of Medical Health, receive continuous psychiatric monitoring and psychotherapy.

*Community college:* School dropouts get another chance to pursue their dreams at the community college, affiliated with the Tamil Nadu Open University. They can choose from courses such as MS Office, nursing assistant, Desk Top Publishing, health assistant, corporate secretary ship, all varying from periods of three months to a year. The students also receive placements.

*Old age home:* The Mary J. Cherian Cottage provides food, shelter, clothing and medical aid for abandoned senior citizens. A day care centre for poor senior citizens allows them to spend the entire day at the centre and return to their families by evening.

*Nursery and balwadi:* Y.W.C.A also runs a free pre-school for children from poor families.

*Rural Development project:* A famine relief programme initiated here in 1952 expanded into a multi-faceted programme empowering women. The project aims to develop and maintain outreach

programmes in villages, expand rural development activities and form women's groups. The activities at the village include a nursery school, day care home for elders, tailoring programmes and SHGs for women, adult literacy programme, health care and vocational training for women.

**Networking:** Y.W.C.A collaborates with local NGOs and police, who bring in distressed or mentally ill women to the centre for rehabilitation.

## CONTACT DETAILS OF PROFILED ORGANISATIONS

### **All India Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA)**

AIDWA Office, No.13, Mosque Street, Chepauk, Chennai - 600005

Telephone 91-44-28511231

Email [aidwa@vsnl.net](mailto:aidwa@vsnl.net)

### **Andhra Mahila Sabha**

12, Durgabai Deshmukh Road, Chennai – 600028

Contact person Additional Secretary, Andhra Mahila Sabha

Telephone 91-44-24938311

Email [amstour2000@yahoo.com](mailto:amstour2000@yahoo.com)

Web <http://andhramahilasabha.org.in>

### *AMS Aashraya*

No. 21/12, Rosary Church Road, Chennai – 600004

Telephone 91-44-2464 2566

Email [ddghrc@sify.com](mailto:ddghrc@sify.com)

### *AMS Working Women's Hostel*

12, Rosary Church Road, Chennai – 600004

Telephone 91-44-2494 2566

### *AMS Mallamma Devi Mahila Mandiram*

#109, Luz Church Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600004

Telephone 91-44-4216 8979/2499 4761/2498 7172

### *AMS Tourist Hostel*

12, Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Road, Chennai – 600028

Telephone 91-44-2493 3811

Email [ddghrc@sify.com](mailto:ddghrc@sify.com)

### *AMS P Abdul Reddy Vocational Training Centre*

#109, Luz Church Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600004

Telephone 91-44-4216 8979/2499 4761

Email [amsabha@satyam.net.in](mailto:amsabha@satyam.net.in), [amsulz@rediffmail.com](mailto:amsulz@rediffmail.com)

### *The Durgabai Deshmukh General Hospital & Research Centre*

No. 11, Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Road, Chennai – 600028

Telephone 91-44-2493 8311

Email [ddghrc@sify.com](mailto:ddghrc@sify.com)

### *AMS Iswari Prasad Dattatreya Orthopaedic Centre*

12, Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Road, Chennai – 600028

Telephone 91-44-2493 8311

Email [ddghrc@sify.com](mailto:ddghrc@sify.com)

### *AMS Sri P Obul Reddy Senior Citizens Home*

12, Dr. Durgabai Deshmukh Road, Chennai – 600028

Telephone 91-44-2493 3811

**ARUWE**

No.11, Solaiamman Koil Street, Aynavaram, Chennai – 600023

*Contact persons* Aspy Johnson, Secretary, 98411-27680,  
Simon Johnes, Programme Coordinator, 98412-33115

*Telephone* 91-44-26454615/26446109

*Email* [info@aruwe.org](mailto:info@aruwe.org)

*Web* [www.aruwe.org](http://www.aruwe.org)

**Association for Non-traditional Employment of Women (ANEW)**

AH-16/107, 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Shanti Colony, Anna Nagar, Chennai – 600040

*Contact person* Sujitha Raveen, Project Manager, 97103-04305 or [sujitharaveen@yahoo.com](mailto:sujitharaveen@yahoo.com)

*Telephone* 91-44-26200697, 26210492

*Email* [anew\\_an@yahoo.in](mailto:anew_an@yahoo.in)

*Web* [www.anewindia.org](http://www.anewindia.org)

**Centre for Women's Development and Research (CWDR)**

No.23, Jeyaram Street, Vasanth Apartments 'D', Kuppam Beach Road, Thiruvanmiyur, Chennai – 600041

*Contact person* K.R. Renuka, Executive Director

*Telephone* 91-44-24455868, 92822-33642

*Web* [www.cwdr.org](http://www.cwdr.org)

*Email* [cwdrindia@yahoo.com](mailto:cwdrindia@yahoo.com)

**Family Planning Association of India (FPA)**

AVM Charities Health Centre Building, New No.54, Arcot Road, Vadapalani, Chennai – 600026

*Contact person* Sujatha Natarajan, Vice-President, 98406-04599

*Telephone* 91-44-23760463, 23760439

**Feminist Association for Social Action (FASA)**

New no. 157, Verghese Avenue, Ashok Nagar, Chennai – 600083

*Contact person* Sarah Matthew, Secretary

*Telephone* 91-44-24729159

**FICCI Ladies Organization (FLO)**

C/o. Shriram Group Companies, Mookambika Complex, II Floor, No.4, Lady Desika Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600004

*Telephone* 91-44-24990356, 24993075

*Email* [flochennai@gmail.com](mailto:flochennai@gmail.com)

**Forum for Women's Rights and Development (FORWORD)**

No-117, Suddananda Bharathi Street, East Tambaram, Chennai – 600059

*Contact person* Shiamala Baby, Executive Director, 98407-02226

*Telephone* 91-44-22396081, 22790236

*Email* [shiamalaforword@yahoo.com](mailto:shiamalaforword@yahoo.com)

**International Foundation for Prevention of Crime and Victim Care (PCVC)**

21/11, I Floor, Bharatiyar Street, Mehta Nagar, Choolaimedu – 600094

*Contact person* Prasanna, 98410-61184

*Telephone* 91-44-252053280, 25279805

*Contact* **WE CAN**, P.O. Box No. 5403, Chennai-600029.

*Telephone* 91-44-43111143  
*Web* [www.wecanendvaw.org](http://www.wecanendvaw.org), [wecantn@gmail.com](mailto:wecantn@gmail.com)

#### **Joint Action Council for Women**

12, Rosary Church Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600004  
*Contact person* Dr. Sanjida Khwaja, Secretary, JACW  
*Telephone* 91-44-24643827

#### **Kaingkarya**

*Regd office* 32, 11<sup>th</sup> avenue, Ashok Nagar, Chennai – 600083  
*Telephone* 91-44-24893829  
*Project address* Kaingkarya Social Welfare Centre, 2/459, Kannabiran Koil Street, Thirusoolam, Chennai-600042.  
*Telephone* 91-44-22641945  
*Email* [kaingkarya@rediffmail.com](mailto:kaingkarya@rediffmail.com)  
*Web* [www.kaingkarya.org](http://www.kaingkarya.org)

#### **Marketing Organisation of Women Entrepreneurs (MOOWES)**

No.26 &27, I Floor, Corporation Shopping Complex, 3<sup>rd</sup> Cross Road, Raja Annamalaipuram, Chennai – 600028  
*Contact persons* Seetha Ranganathan, 98417-91915  
Kasturi Santhanam, Treasurer, 98406-55246, 91-44 24488966

#### **Pennurimai Iyakkam**

92/62, Dr. Alagappa Salai, Purasaiwakam, Chennai – 600084  
*Telephone* 91-44-26611905

#### **Positive Women's Network (PWN+)**

Door No. 29/13, Kummalamen Koil Street, Taylors Road, Kilpauk, Chennai -600010  
*Telephone* 91-44-2647 2127  
*Email* [poswonet@pwnplus.org](mailto:poswonet@pwnplus.org)  
*Web* [www.pwnplus.org](http://www.pwnplus.org)

#### **Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women**

Mother Theresa Women's Complex- I Floor, Valluvar Kottam High Road, Nungambakkam, Chennai 600034  
*Telephone* 91-44-2817 3412  
*Email* [tncdw@tn.nic.in](mailto:tncdw@tn.nic.in), [tncdwho@yahoo.co.in](mailto:tncdwho@yahoo.co.in)  
*Web* [www.tamilnaduwomen.org](http://www.tamilnaduwomen.org)

#### **The Banyan**

6th Main Road, Mugappair Eri Scheme, Mugappair West, Chennai – 600037  
*Telephone* 91-44-26530504, 45548350/51/52  
*Web* [www.thebanyan.org](http://www.thebanyan.org)

#### *The Banyan Centre*

66/5B, Spurtank Road, Chetpet, Chennai – 600031  
*Telephone* 91-44-4223 3600, 2372 0677  
*Email* [info@thebanyan.org](mailto:info@thebanyan.org)

*The Banyan Adaikalam*

6th Main Road, Mugappair Eri Scheme, Mugappair west, Chennai – 600037

Telephone 91-44-4223 3650

*The Banyan Community Mental Health Project*

Banyan Health Centre, 2/242, Pillayar Koil Street, Kovalam Village, Kancheepuram – 603112

*The Banyan Day Care Centre*

Social Resource and Training Centre (SRTC), Jawaharlal Nehru Inner Ring Road (Near to Udhayam Theatre), KK Nagar, Chennai – 600083

Telephone 91-44-2474 2479

**Women’s Entrepreneurship Promotional Association (WEPA)**

2G, Abirami Coral View Apartments, 30, Link Road, Chennai – 600032

Contact person Prema Desikan, President

Email [prema\\_desikan@yahoo.co.in](mailto:prema_desikan@yahoo.co.in)

Telephone 91-44-22440683, 94440-44068

**Working Women’s Forum (WWF)**

#55, Bhimasena Garden Road, Mylapore, Chennai – 600004

Contact person Dr. Jaya Arunachalam, president, WWF

Telephone 91-44-24993937, 24992853, 52107486

Email [wwforum@eth.net](mailto:wwforum@eth.net)

Web [www.workingwomensforum.org](http://www.workingwomensforum.org)

**Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA)**

1078-87/2, Poonamalee High Road, Chennai – 600084

Telephone 91-44- 25324251, 25324261

Email [ywcamadras@sancharnet.in](mailto:ywcamadras@sancharnet.in)

## Notes



### **About Prajnya**

Prajnya is a non-profit centre for research, public education and networking, working on issues relating to peace, justice and security, based in Chennai, India.

Documenting women's work and working with others who share our values and objectives are important elements of our vision and mandate. This study, in its second edition, contributes to realizing both of these.

### **About the authors**

**Reva Yunus** did her first post-graduate degree in Physics. Even as an undergraduate, she worked with orphaned children and with children from slums. That led to an interest in their education, and then in deeper questions regarding the meaning, relevance and mechanisms of education in India. So she went on to obtain a second Master's in Education from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and is planning to pursue doctoral studies in the area of gender and education. As a volunteer with Prajnya, Reva took on the task of updating the directory section of 'Women Taking Action' in July-August 2011.

**Sweta Narayanan** holds a Masters in International Relations from the University of Sussex, U.K. She holds a Post-graduate Diploma in Journalism from the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai. She worked as a sub-editor at The Hindu, from June 2006-August 2008. She is currently working with an educational services company in Chennai, doing curriculum and content development. Sweta Narayanan has been a volunteer with Prajnya since January 2008, undertaking research, programming and outreach responsibilities. Sweta researched and wrote the first edition of this study in 2008.

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