CHAPTER FIVE
CHAPTER 5

EMERGENCE OF WOMEN AS LEADERS AND THEIR
CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

"Everyone has the right to take part in the government of
the country, directly or through freely chosen
representatives. A proper representation of women in
political affairs will ensure their views and needs reflected
in public policies that affect their lives most". 1

In educational institution we learnt that the lives of great men remind us to make
our lives sublime, so that, while departing, we may leave behind “foot prints on the
sands of time.” A majority of women as mothers, leave impressions on the minds and
hearts of their children, which continue to inspire them all their adult lives. History
and literature exalt the lives of men for the most part, yet grudgingly, give credit to
women by the saying: “Behind every great men is a woman.”

This chapter, recounts “her stories”: six stories of women who showed by their
lives how the state which was under the Portuguese rule for 450 years could be more
equitably transformed “ Smt. Nirmala Sawant (Politician); Smt. Victoria Fernandes (a
Social Worker and Politician), Smt. Suman Pednekar (an Educationist); Smt. Shanti
Fonseca (a lawyer); Dr.(Smt.) Maya Ghanekar (a doctor) and Smt. Auda Viegas (a crusader for women’s rights)

They depict the various roles women are called upon to play. They show that women are endowed with great thoughts and abilities. Also, that they are capable of hard work, of overcoming difficulties and carrying tremendous responsibilities which enable them to achieve their goals. This selection of women does not pretend to be comprehensive. Several other exceptional women no doubt could also have been chosen. However, the criterion was to present those women, who emerged as leaders in various walks of life and contributed towards the empowerment of women in this state. This chapter largely depends on oral history particularly, as far as the personal life of the six Goan women are concerned. They have been interviewed with regard to their specific positions/careers, demonstrating their caliber and progress made in many fields.

Their interests are different. The cause of women is dear to them. They work to educate the women and want them to share the responsibilities, happiness and sorrows of their men folk. Bhikaji Rustam K.R. Cama, better known as Madam Cama, when she addressed a meeting of men in Egypt, she asked for the women of Egypt who were absent. She told them: “Remember that the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that moulds the character. That soft hand is the chief factor in national life. So do not neglect that powerful hand.”

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Smt. NIRMALA SAWANT- A POLITICIAN

Early days of her career.

Smt. Nirmal Sawant (FIG. 32) was born in Ponda Taluka, Marcel is the name of the village, where she lived and completed her early studies there and High school at People's High School, Panjim. She obtained the Bachelor's Degree in Arts at Dhempe College and post-graduation, M.A. from Bombay University. To be a teacher as per the required qualification, she did her B.Ed and later L.L.B. Due to her knowledge of French she easily got the job and for sometime she taught English and French in People's High School for thirty years. In 1991, she took up leadership and opened an English school in Old Goa. 3

Married Life:

In 1978 Nirmala married to Prabhakar Sawant, who was an engineer by profession. She was blessed with two sons named Athray and Paresh. She lives in a bungalow on Manas- between Tivrem and Banastarim. She has a dock in Pilganv where barges are repaired. 4

Krishna Vasudev Parab was a freedom fighter and for this reason till Nirmala was nine years old, they lived in Panjim. Her father along with her two brothers was
32 Smt. Nirmala Sawant (Politician)
imprisoned by the Portuguese and in this situation they have shift to Marcel. In this particular village she became aware of the poor living conditions of the people and from then on she decided to work for the upliftment of the society. As she comes from a village, she has always seen that women in the villages are scared of the peer group and they do not want to break the shackles of tradition that curbs their freedom. They are diffident to give up the orthodox conventions, in spite of the efforts made by the persons, who desire to upgrade them. From birth the woman has been told that she has to depend on a man-father, brother, husband or son and has to serve him. Often it is very difficult to solve the problems, especially family problems of women in the villages due to the restrained attitude of the women. However, the situation is slowly changing and women are coming forward to fight for their rights.

**Brother’s support and encouragement boosted her position:**

Most women who have managed to reach positions of power in social and political life have neither found encouragement or support from their family or community. Fortunately, Nirmala did not face any opposition. As it is already mentioned above, that her father was a freedom fighter and people even their own relatives used to shun them due to fear of Portuguese oppression.
Her elder brother Yeshwant Parab was the motivating force to her to reach thus far like in sports, social life, politics, etc. Hen encouraged her to join Congress Party, as he felt that it was better to go to the Congress house rather than visit cinema houses with her friends. She had been actively connected with the Congress in 1967 when she was a teenaged collegian and has stayed with and committedly worked for the party ever since.  

Congress Loyalist:

She has been associated with the Congress since 1967 with the Opinion Poll. This party had brought about the Liberation of the State. And her family was actively associated with the Freedom Movement. Her father as a freedom fighter was shot dead, after being tortured in the police custody. They were forlorn, in such moments the family looked forward to the Congress Party for assistance. So, right from the time she entered the Congress during the Opinion Poll, she worked to preserve the identity of Goa and her attachment for the Congress party has kept growing. Her belief is that. Congress is the only party in which the interests of every community, caste and creed are protected. There is no way she will ever desert this party. In 1966, the then Congress President Shri Purushottam Kakodkar mentioned that Nirmala did not misused the freedom and responsibility that was given to her by the Party. Later she became the General Secretary of Goa Pradesh Congress Committee and then its
Secretary. Seeing her good works, the Party gave her a ticket to stand for State election from Cumbarjua constituency in 1989.

Before entering into the politics she had conducted Womens’ Mandal tailoring classes etc. Former Prime Minister and Congress President Shri P.V. Narsimha Rao suggested that she accept the responsibility, as she wanted to practice Gandhi’s Gram Vikas idea by forming a trust.  

Nirmala as Congress Party President:

Nirmala’s association with the Party over a period of 37 years, has credited to her experience and she has discharged duties in various capacities, first in the junior wing and later as a senior member of the Party.

Being of an amiable nature and able to shoulder responsibility, she appeared to be the right person for the task she had been entrusted with by the Congress High Command, then. Infact, she has grown with Congress and reached the position of GPCC-(Goa Pradesh Congress Committee) President step by step.

Nirmala Sawant comes across as a veteran politician and an active Congress leader. She has been with the party since its inception in the state. The success has not come easily to her. She had to battle against criticism from the opposition party leaders and sometimes, even her own party members. A woman of immense will
power she has survived, while her rivals have perished, she still continues to shine in Goan politics.  

Smt. VICTORIA FERNANDES- A SOCIAL WORKER

Victoria Fernandes is not an ordinary personality. She is not only a familiar figure in every nook and corner of Goa but her name has transcended the vounerties of this tiny state. She stands out like a moon among stars in this male dominated society, illuminating the lives of masses from Goa as well as the neighbouring states who often rush to see her with the hope of coming out from the dark dungeous of oblivion and poverty.

Though not always in the corridors of power and without any position in the so called Government of the people and by the people, she has her distinct place in the hearts of the Goan masses. Acquiring the power is immaterial to her. She is a social worker at the core and has sacrificed the political power at the altar of social service. She has not only witnessed the post liberation political developments in Goa but also contributed to the political life of Goan society. Hers is a militant brand of politics. She personifies militancy and communicates it to those around her. She is hyperactive, radiant and always smiling even during the worst adversities. Smt. Victoria Fernandes (FIG. 33) is compared to a lightening how it strikes and ignites.
33 Smt. Victoria Fernandes (Social worker)
She was not proud when she won the state election. She had to go through many
difficulties, however came out lustrous as copper comes out from fire.¹²

**Her early years of life**

Victoria was born in 1934 at Curtorim, Salcete, Goa. She spent her childhood in
Belgaum. She has 5 sisters and 3 brothers, she is the eldest of all. Her father was
working as a ‘Range Forest Officer’ in the forest department of Karnataka. That time
she had the opportunity of going round the forest areas such as Hukkeri Hattigeri and
Kulani. She observed the miserable living conditions of the people. Adivasi tribe lived
in those areas. She took keen interest and decided to do something for them. Social
work is her obsession. It is not something that she has started recently, it had been
right from her student days. She used to visit the villages of the Harijan and work for
them even during her younger days. Infact, she had the desire to be a nurse like
Florence Nightingale and serve the people. It did not materialize. When she was all
set to take up the job of a nurse, she got a marriage proposal. Hence she had to
relinquish the idea of nurse’s job; and give in to her mother’s wishes in order to settle
in life. Anyway, she has no regrets, even after her marriage she has been able to do
render her services to the society.¹³
Married life

She married Romeo Andrew Francis Fernandes, to her good luck, her husband did not accept any dowry from her. on the other hand gave full support in her social work. After her marriage, she settled down in Goa. Initially, she worked as a teacher in People’s High School - Panjim.

Social welfare activities

To look into Victoria’s Social Work is like digging a mountain. While working as a teacher she came in contact with the women (parents of students) who were oppressed in their homes as well as by the society. She began to gather the women and conduct programmes such as, tailoring classes, competitions in culinary. Associating with one another gave them an opportunity to voice out their problems.

Fruit and vegetable women vendors had no place to sell their produce in Panjim market. When they sat at the side of the footpath, the Municipality officers harassed them. Due to Victoria’s efforts the women vendors managed to get some place to sell their goods. More than solving their problems, she empowered them to find solutions to their own problems.

To fight against the injustice done to women Victoria suggested to the government that every police station need to have a cell for women which will enable women to
complain freely about their woes. She worked hard to make it a reality. She protested and fought for the cause that Santa Cruz and other neighbouring places may not be linked with Panjim Municipality. She formed Santa Cruz citizen’s Samiti, thus she won the battle. She is the President of Santa Cruz Tenant’s Committee. All the problems in her village and neighbourhood affected her, so she involved herself and assisted people to fight for their rights. She is connected with many Goa’s social and cultural organizations. She is a member of societies like Social Welfare Centre; All India Women’s Association; Red Cross Society; Akashwani Panjim; Konkani Bhasha Mandal; Goa Boxing Association; Goa Tourism Department and Goa Nursing Organization.

Fishermen’s (Raponkar) Agitation is Goa’s main worker’s movement. She took part in this movement and was even imprisoned, also with regard to toddy-tappers’s problems. She could be justly described as the “Iron Lady of Goa”. Fearless in the strictest sense of the word, she has won her spurs crusading against injustice to the poor and the downtrodden.

**Her role in Politics**

A social worker with a proven track record, she has been an important participant in several mass agitations that Goa witnessed since Liberation. (Appendix 1) Her role in aborting the bid for Goa’s merger with Maharashtra during the Opinion
Poll was indeed laudable. Also, her participation in the Konkani Movement which earned for Konkani the status of being the sole official language in the State.\(^{14}\)

During the Opinion Poll Victoria was invited by persons like Ravindra Kelekar to join the movement. It was unbelievable, for the first time the doors of the Secretariat had to be closed during that agitation when she came to Panjim with her troupe of women from Santa Cruz constituency. When they were being lathi-charged during ramponkar agitation, she caught hold of the lathi and pulled it off. That picture was carried in the newspapers, local as well as national. On seeing that photo in the newspaper the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi expressed a wish to see Victoria, in person. But she did not go to meet her. She was impressed with the social work Victoria was doing.\(^{15}\)

She considers herself more as a social worker than as a politician. Without any power she managed to solve a number of villagers’ problems. She perceived that if she is in power then it will be possible for her to work efficiently towards the welfare of the society. Thus, twice she stood for elections in Santa Cruz constituency.

In June last year, she was at it again repeating her win in the same constituency, for a change, as a Congress candidate. And thus while working as a social worker she got into politics.
When Victoria held the charge of the Women’s Welfare portfolio, she fought for the welfare of Anganwadi workers. They were demanding for higher payment. In Delhi they refused to pay them as it would amount to an additional expenditure of crores of rupees. Anganwadis are prevalent all over the country. They assured Victoria if she wants to increase, she can do it at the State Level. It took sometime to end their stir, but their grievance was redressed. The government allotted an additional Rs.1.5 crore to raise their salaries.

Victoria had received instructions from the higher authority to reduce the widow’s pension to Rs.300 from the existing amount of Rs.500. She refused to do so saying that she herself is a widow and knew what it is like facing the hardships of a widow. She did not agree to decrease their pension. She looked at people’s problems by putting herself in their place. That is why she can give justice and selfless service to them. Achievement of the goal is the primary concern for her and she is ready to face any amount of dangerous situations to achieve it. The quality seen rarely in today’s mass leaders and social workers! Social commitment according to her is a quality one has to have in the blood.

Victoria feels that she has the zeal and enthusiasm which enables her to work for others inspite of her busy schedule. It is not her characteristic/nature to refuse help/assistance to others. She attains fulfillment/satisfaction by working for others. She was awarded the prestigious Mitra Bir” award. She has been felicitated by a
Committee under the presidentship of the famous writer Shri. Ravindra Kelekar. A book has been published in her honour. (Appendix II)

Victoria is ready to serve the people as long as she is alive. According to her belief, she is a servant of God and that she has been sent to be of service to humankind. And that is what she will continue doing irrespective of her religion, community, caste or creed.  

Smt. SUMAN PEDNEKAR – AN EDUCATIONIST.  

There is a direct link between education, employment and social status enjoyed by a woman in society. Without education and training an individual cannot fully develop his or her capacity to think, decide and act independently; nor is she equipped to take up gainful employment. Thus lacking the capacity to be self-supporting and self-reliant and unable to contribute to the development, progress and well-being of her family, community and society at large, an uneducated and unemployed person cannot achieve high status in the society.

Education is a common search by teacher and students to develop knowledge and skills to be able to contribute better to the development of society.
Early years of life and education

Smt. Suman Pednekar (FIG. 34) was born in August, 1940 at Pernem, Goa. Her parents were Arjun Pednekar and Subhadra. Originally they are from Pernem, North Goa. Since her father was a hotel manager at Panjim they lived in this city. Suman also has an older sister.

During the pre-liberation period Suman obtained her elementary education in Marathi. The educational institutions which she attended:

i. Mustifund Vidhyalaya - Panjim

ii. Ramdas Vidhyalaya – Panjim

iii. Kanyashala – Panjim

For her secondary education Suman had no other go but learn Portuguese at Liceu National, Afonso de Albuquerque – Panjim and then she attended English – Progress High School – Panjim, to complete her S.S.C.E

Suman desired much to be a teacher. In order to achieve her goal she had to be a trained teacher. Hence she attended Escola Normal Luis de Camoes, Panjim (Teachers’ Training Course in Portuguese) this was the only training institution existed during the Portuguese rule.

During post liberation period Suman complete her graduation and post-graduation in the following institutions:

i) Dhempe College of Arts and Science – Panjim
34 Smt. Suman Pednekar (Educationist)
ii) Bhavan’s College – Mumbai

iii) Centre of Post Graduate Studies – Panjim

iv) Regional College of Education – Bhopal (NCERT)

Educational Qualifications:

Besides the Primary Education in Marathi and Portuguese; Portuguese Lyceum Course; Rastrabhasha Kovid (Hindi); Curso de Escola Normal (Teachers’ Training course in Portuguese). She holds the Bachelor’s degree in Arts, specialized in English and French, Double Master’s degree in English and Sociology respectively; Bachelor’s degree in Education; Managerial Training – attended various Programmes courses organized by NCERT and NIEPA Delhi in planning, Administration and Management.¹⁸

Work in Educational Field:

Suman initiated educational career as Teacher in Government Higher Secondary School in July 1966. In 1983, she was selected by Union Public Service Commission, in Delhi for the post of Deputy Education Officer; Principal of Higher Secondary School in Goa (Group A, class I – gazetted post)
Her desire to be a teacher:

She loved being with children and very early in life Suman Pednekar decided to take up teaching as a profession. She desired to be a teacher and never repented for being one. All through her career she has tried to create awareness among the common people, the importance of education. As it is mentioned in the Bhagvad Gita the Nishkama Karma theory which says, that one should work without looking for the fruits of her/his labour. In education one has to be patient. The teachers can only sow the seeds believing that they will grow to maturity. 

Her father was keen that she completes her education and take up a job and be self-reliant. As a teacher she earned love and respect from her students. Later, she went on to become an administrator because she wanted to raise the standard of education in general and for the betterment of women’s education in particular.

Prominent woman in public sphere:

As a woman prominent in ‘public sphere’, Suman had to face many challenges since she was a woman, however she managed to fight against the discrimination regarding her career. Once she proved her strength of the intellect, then she and her work was given due respect.
Teaching is not for the ordinary, it is for a spirited person who is willing to accept the challenges of the world, is concerned about what happens to the world and wanting to do something about it. Suman undertook this very serious responsibility. She got the highest fulfillment by being a teacher. For Suman academic excellence is one component but the integrity of the teacher is more important. For her, a teacher is someone with an open mind, heart and hands. She/He should be ready not just to take but also to give. The teacher should also be able to relate with others in the profession. As the Director of Education, Suman was an unassuming personality. The heads of the schools, who approached her with the problems of their educational institutions always received her assistance and amicable solutions.

In Education Department she worked in different capacities:

Suman was a Teacher/Headmistress of Government High school; Principal of Government Higher Secondary School; Zonal Officer of central Education Zone; Assistant Director of Education; Deputy Director of Education; Principal of District Institute of Education Training (D.I.E.T.)

Director of Education (Retired on 1st October, 1999, after working in Education Department for 33 years) Academic and Administration.
Director of Education:

During her tenure as the Director of Education from 1997-1999, she emphasized on the importance of educating women. In Goa the problem of girls’ education is not so acute as in several other states as the number of girls enrolled is almost equal to the number of boys enrolled but the girls’ dropout rate is high compared to boys. As Director of Education, attempt was made to monitor the Elementary Education Act, where it is essential for a child between the age of six and fourteen to attend school.

Compared to other states the rate of literacy in Goa is much higher. Emphasis has been on education for all irrespective of their sex. Most of the time mothers are educated and they emphasize on educating their children.

The educated Goan girl has learnt to bring about a harmony with the changing trends and tradition. On one side, she respects her tradition and at the same time she works for her own betterment. Even the society no more curbs girls’ freedom in the name of tradition and religious identity.

Post retirement Activities:

Presently she is involved with some projects of NCERT. She has contributed NCERT project and Encyclopedia of Indian Education – Status of Goa Education. She has been appointed as a Government Consultant in the NCERT project State Studies in School of Education. Actively involved and interested in the activities of child and
Woman Education Programmes, Empowerment of Women and Child Guidance Programme.

**Unfulfilled Dreams:**

Suman desires to work with the handicapped children and towards the empowerment of Woman.

**Future Plans:**

At present, she is involved in social activities related to the betterment and education of the poor and the needy. In future, she wishes to more involved with children and towards their progress in education.

**Smt. MAYA GHANEKAR – A DOCTOR**

Doctors often practise their profession in a very difficult situations and strive very hard to maintain high ethical and professional standards. In so doing they contribute greatly to the profession, society and the country. Doctor Maya Ghanekar can be included in this category of doctors. A well-qualified woman engaged in curative and preventive work.
Her Early days:

Dr. Maya Ghanekar (FIG. 35) was known as Maya Ragunath Prabhu Nasondekar from Panjim. She completed her early studies upto S.S.C.E in People’s High School, Panjim. After that she pursued her higher studies in Science at Dhempe College, Miramar, Panjim. Thereafter, she sought admission to Goa Medical College. Dr. Maya’s father Ragunath Prabhu Nasondekar is also doctor, and her another sister followed the same profession. She has one brother who is an engineer.

Family life and specialization:

After her M.B.B.S she got married to Dr. Sitakant Ghanekar. Both are working in their own hospital in Panjim. Their only daughter Supriya took up Home Science at Bombay. Dr. Maya has specialized herself in Gynaecology. It was her desire to work for the welfare of the society. When she completed her M.B.B.S there were no other professional courses available in Goa, hence she was compelled to pursue her studies in medicine. A good example, both wife and husband are actively engaged in the process of bridging the gap between the haves and have-nots in the health care and delivery system.
35 Smt. Maya Ghanekar (Doctor)
Doctor upholding certain principles:

Dr. Maya does not show any discrimination between a girl and a boy, as society does. She is also against abortion, however, she is of the opinion that there should be family planning. When a birth of a child has to be medically terminated, it is a different case. But when a woman wishes to abort because it is a girl child then Dr. Maya is of the opinion that women must ask herself what would be the reaction on her part, if her parents had to abort her? She feels that women themselves cheat women.

Her service to people:

As she practices privately, she has to attend emergency calls at any time. In early days doctors would live up to the medical ethics and were like friends, philosophers and guides to the families/patient but to day they impelled to accept the bribes and not exempted from corruption that exists in the society. Human lives are in their hands to save or to destroy. Great is their responsibility and accountability towards life. However, Dr. Maya Ghanekar continues to practice medicine not for money but as service with total dedication and commitment to her medical profession.21
Smt. SHANTI MARIA FONSECA – AN ADVOCATE

Smt. Shanti Fonseca, (FIG. 36) a woman who strongly believes in her self. Today with great pride she says that she has achieved her goal and she attributes all her success to God – who is supreme in her life. She says “her main aim is to prove to the world that justice is not for those who can afford it but for those who are oppressed and poor.”

Her early days:

Shanti was born and brought up in Bombay. Originally, from Assagão-Goa, but her parents Estella Sequeira and Stanley Furtado were educated, got married and settled in Bombay. Shanti too studied in Bombay and completed her graduation there. She is one of the seven children, she is the sixth child of her parents. Among her brothers-in-law, one is a Muslim, another one is a Hindu and the third is a Parsi. So they celebrate all feasts and festivals in their house.

Qualifications:

Shanti has done her post graduation in Sociology, M.Com (Finance) and L.L.M (Human rights) She also holds Diploma in Communication (Madras), Diploma in
36 Smt. Shanti Maria Fonseca (Lawyer)
Theology (Kristu Jyothi, Bangalore – sponsored by CBCI – Delhi.) Diploma in Journalism (Sponsored by Times of India.)

Work Experience:

After her graduation Shanti began to work in Shah and Shangi as the Assistant Director, in charge of manpower and planning. It was her wish to learn more though she is a lawyer by profession. She firmly believed that all other things like land, labour, capital, etc. will diminish some day but knowledge acquired remains with the person, forever. So she left her job in pursuit of knowledge and set on a tour, visiting all the places in the country. She stayed for long period of time in Chandigarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Calcutta, Darjeeling and Bangalore.

Her arrival in Goa:

In 1983, Shanti came to Goa and joined work with the Jesuits at their Provincial at Panjim – Goa. On an invitation from their District Superior, she joined their Centre for Education Development and Studies (CEDS). An Organisation, run by them in the Goa-Pune-Province. She worked there for five years. Her work consisted of training persons on the social justice front as regards approach and strategies. She also started and maintained a documentation on issues
relating to the Goan society in particular. For Example, Tourism, mining, etc. and general issues such as women, children, environment, forests etc.

From 1983 to 1988, she was a Columnist for “The Navhind Times” and “Herald” on a retainership basis. Subsequently she got married and skilled herself in the field of teaching. She taught Sociology and Accounts at the People’s Higher Secondary-Panjim, also part time lecturer in Business Law at St. Xavier’s College, Mapusa. (She was a regular paper setter for Sociology at Goa Board and an examiner for Accounts.)

She shifted from her early job to teaching as it suited her family life. Except for her few hours of teaching she was totally dedicated to both her children as they say teach all you want to children before they complete their fifth year in life. She seems to see the results in her children today who are so sober, affectionate, creative and independent.

In 1997, Shanti realized that she had the necessary skill, personality, power expression to become a lawyer. Thus, gave up the teaching job and came into the legal profession full time as Criminal Lawyer and worked independently from the start. In 2000, she was appointed as the member of the District Forum – North Goa.

Which was the most challenging job?

Shanti recalled her father’s words to her “When you are comfortable in a place, give yourself a kick and move on, because this is a state of deterioration.” She has
worked in many places and shifted to different fields of works. When she is questioned which was the most challenging job? Her answer is that every job is challenging. As a Journalist, she could unmask the truth, since the power of the pen is mightier than the sword. As a teacher she had the children in her hands and she could mould them for a bright future and as a lawyer she can give justice to those who are oppressed and poor.

People Who Have Influenced Her Life:

MY MOTHER: By her simplicity, faith in God and being a dedicated mother

MY FATHER: His endurance, patience, wisdom, humor and trust in God

MY HUSBAND: His trust, freedom, guidance, respect, unfailing encouragement, concrete assistance in my professional pursuits and duties at home. Most of all his faith in God as a provider.

Human lives are made up and determined by the kind of people they meet during their early years of life. Shanti has been fortunate to come in contact with good people during her early childhood. They trusted her, gave her opportunity and believed in her potential. She has attended various training programmes at different places conducted by different professionals and institutions. She is indebted to all those who gave sponsorship to her for all these programmes all over the country for various periods of
time. She remembers professor Rajkumar Verma (visiting professor at Punjab University) in particular who told her often “Shanti never loose the child in you, no matter how big are your achievements. You will grow in grace and wisdom”. She has followed his advice and has grown both in grace and wisdom”. She remembers some other teachers who referred to her as a “phenomenon” i.e. always changing, always growing. She continues to change and grow even today.  

Over a period of time the restlessness in her grew and she felt her call in life was no longer sitting on a corporate table. She resigned from her well paid job as Assistant to Director.

Manpower and Planning at Shah and Sanghi Bombay, with a resignation letter that stated that Knowledge is the only factor of production that does not face diminishing returns and she would like to relieve herself of all duties to pursue the same. Her studies in Law with Human Rights, at the V.M. Salgaocar College of Law- Panjim. She has upgraded herself with certain programmes on the Internet. Learning new things, reading certain history and meeting people who have a creative intellect is something that excites her and makes her very joyous. The vast knowledge available on the Internet has hardly helped to build people of strong character and outstanding personalities.

Initially she started on her journey both spiritual and otherwise with two goals in mind. Firstly to sharpen her knowledge on various aspects of life and secondly to have more clarity about how and why do some people have so much power and others are
left helpless minus any dignity and status in life. Her pursuit made her travel all over the country meeting people at organizational and individual levels. During her tour she also visited a number of social organizations both governmental and non-governmental and made it a point to meet religious persons from different denomination, from all religions. She would then have a check to find out her progress in this search. She has come across many people who are engaged in activities of social work at different levels. Most of them she do not know what their own work is all about. They visited the office, perform certain function and receive a salary at the end of the month. She looks upon most people in social work today as social delinquents who are being rehabilitated in a job as they are not qualified or are not successful in attaining a job in the Corporate Sector. She distinguished for herself three areas in which people worked in:

**Immediate Aid (Charity- Giving bread to the hungry)**

Here the social service organization and people connected with it always remain dependent on the donor agency for some local/foreign funding that is given to people in the form of Goods or Services. The receiver in this case always comes back to the giver in a state of helplessness like beggars for bread crumbs. There is no dignity given to the receiver. The receiver remains dependent permanently.
Self help Groups: Teaching people how to make their own bread

People targeted here are taught a skill by some individual or organization and are assigned a job over a period of time with some individual or institution. They are by and large given some placement to earn a livelihood and sustain themselves. Dignity to the receiver is generally restored by the helper as the receiver became independent over a period of time. She/he begins to decide on her/his own. A lot of families have been nursed to life due to the functioning of such groups.

Politically motivated groups: (People ask where has their bread gone?)

These are people who dare to ask the question as to WHY so much disparity when resources are plenty and often wasted. In simple language the question they pose why is there scarcity of bread when there is enough being produced, for everyone? The old adage saying “We have enough for each man’s need but not enough for each man’s greed.” The receiver here is empowered to fight her/his own battle and have a strong sense of dignity despite her/his poverty. She/he knows that poverty is the direct outcome of excess belonging to another. She/he discards the theory of fate and starts determining her/his own destiny.
During this time of search and discovery, she also made another observation. Until the late 60's and early 70's the word NGO (Non-Governmental Organisation) was practically unheard of. There have been people in the corporate world and people who worked for voluntary organizations. The voluntary organizations of today have come under the classification of NGO's because nobody works as a volunteer but all services are paid for. The commitment, dedication and consistency that once existed among social workers does not exist anymore. People change jobs in the NGO sector depending on the salary and perks offered. They feel comfortable when they are referred to as professionals and most uncomfortable if they are called as social workers.

Having made these observations and conclusions for herself she decided that she should settle down and translate her own commitment into concrete work. Being a Goan, she decided to come down to Goa and get herself embedded into the life of people here. She took up an assignment with the Jesuits in their Centre for Education Development and Studies. As it is mentioned in the earlier part of the chapter her work involved making documentaries on social issues and training people on the aspect of social concerns. She made two documentaries for them 1. TOURISM IN GOA (This brought out the impact of tourism both present and future on the social and cultural life of people in Goa).

2. THE FISHING COMMUNITY OF GOA (showing their struggle with life for a daily existence which stands threatened because of mechanized fishing).
Simultaneously she was also a columnist for the two English dailies—THE NAVHIND TIMES and HERALD. Her writings were well accepted and in 1986 she was one of Goa’s first accredited journalist. Later she joined the GOMANTAK TIMES full time as its first reporter when it started publication in March, 1987.

**Women’s liberation:**

According to Shanti the question of women’s liberation is to be answered by women who lead regular normal lives and especially by those who run a home successfully and bring up their children as proud citizens of a State. It is only they who can understand “Liberation” vis-à-vis the knot that one ties at the marriage ceremony. Homes where the woman insulates the sanctity of the house stands like a house on rock. It is sad to look around and see that most women who talk of liberation are hardly liberated themselves. While they preach liberation they hold on to the most conservative ideologies of life themselves. Many are not married and those married have not taken on the responsibilities of parenthood. Liberation is not some capsule to be swallowed. It is for each person to determine what liberation would be in a given context, situation and environment.
About her work with children:

During her years of interaction relating with various groups and working on issues of social justice and human rights, she has come to conclusion that if one worked with children i.e. both the privileged and under privileged it would be the best foundation for any society or nation to stand on. For it is often whispered in the corridors of power that the strength of a nation lies not in how powerful an army, navy or air force a country has but in the hands and feet of its children. If this be the case then why people do not take up the responsibilities of strengthening the hands and feet of their children for in doing so the hands of our nation would be strengthened.

Her work with children i.e both the privileged and under privileged has been at different levels – schools children, street children, juveniles, neglected children. She has filed various cases on behalf of children in the High Court and lower courts and seen them through successfully. 

At present she is the Convenor for the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) in Goa and also the Child Rights Cell of the All India Trade Union Congress (CRC-AITUC). The philosophy upheld by (CRC-AITUC) is not in the regulation of Child Labour but in its elimination. They do not support the theory of “Earn and Learn”. Such theories are fallacies propagated by persons/people who have much to benefit from the existence of Child labour. In the face of the acute unemployment that people
face today, why cannot an unemployed adult replace every working child? She considers human beings the lowest of all creation. Looking around the bird and animal, one will never see the parents (of bird or animal) eating from the hands of a young one. But among human beings, the parents live on the earnings of their children many offer their children employment, prostitution, for sale etc.

**Her future goals:**

Nothing happens in one’s life by accident, if it is not in the plan of God. Shanti is not satisfied with her contribution to mother earth for all the protection she has received from the day of her birth till today. She has miles to go and much to do for the upliftment of her less fortunate brothers and sisters. She is conscious of the fact and has always firmly believed that the eternal destiny is conditioned by the present attitude towards others. In simpler terms her salvation depends on her service to her neighbour. She can be happy only if she seeks the good of another.

In Latin there is a saying “Nemo Dat Quod Non Habit” (She gives nothing who has nothing). From this, one can safely conclude that it is essential for all to be at peace with ourselves, our families and neighbours, if one has to contribute to this world and creation in anyway.
Smt. AUDA VIEGAS – CRUDASER FOR WOMEN’S RIGHTS

Smt. Auda Viegas (FIG. 37) is a woman, who prefers to lean back and let her works speak for her. A teacher, a beautician, an environmental activist, a child welfare worker and more importantly a crusader for women’s rights, this vivacious woman manages to pursue her work with a fierce passion and dedication. She was honoured by the State Government conferring on her Yashodamini award on Women’s Day (8th March, 2003). \(^{26}\) She is the founder/president of Bailancho Ekvott, (FIG. 38) an organisation committed to women’s rights, child rights and environment.

The urgent need to take up the women’s cause:

At the very start Auda felt that women needed space to come forward, relate their problems and get relief. Later she realized that they needed more than just that, the help to take up their issues with the authorities. There was need of counselling, in order to make them aware of their rights, above all they needed to be independent. All this promoted Auda to work towards the empowerment of Women.
37 Smt. Auda Viegas (Leader of NGO)
The problems women have to face in Goa and how they are tackled:

In Goa, women mostly suffered due to domestic violence which is related to alcoholism so also dowry related to problems and child abuse in the family. According to Auda’s views, the problem has to be visualized from all fronts. Those women who are aware of their rights should exercise them. Woman cannot constantly grouse that they are ill-treated but come out in the open and voice out the problem. It is also important for woman to get rid of the “dependence syndrome” and assert their rights.

The response from the state government towards women’s issues:

The State budget showed that the government had considered women’s difficulties. For the first time the budget gave allowances for women and they appreciated the welfare schemes. Auda still feels a lot more needs to be done and some more proposals should be introduced towards women’s welfare in any form, wherever necessary. The allocation should be sufficient. The State Government should make women issues the main thing on their agenda and help in speeding up justice.
The hardships faced while championing advocating the cause of women:

The lack of adequate relief, rehabilitation and compensation measures. The failure of the legal system, especially the police and the political system to ensure justice to the victims. Auda has also noticed that the perpetrators are protected as they are informed before hand. The lower ranks of the police are to be blamed for this, they should be oriented to women issues. Secondly "ouster injunction" towards women is against the law. Many a times it happens and absolutely no action is taken. The organization, that is Bailancho Ekvott, always asked to approach the court whose procedures are very long and the women cannot stay out of the house for a long period of time, till the court settles the case. Another great difficulty is lack of witness which is mainly because the people are afraid. People lack the initiative to render justice to the innocent. The long legal procedures dissuade people from testifying in court. Also due to the harassment they have to face. If confidentiality is maintained, then lot of people who have come forward to be the witnesses in the court. People are afraid of being enemies with the guilty- this psyche/mind has to be changed.
The efforts made by the organization, to rehabilitate the commercial sex workers:

Most of the sex workers are from outside Goa and have pathetic stories to relate. They have been lured with promises of jobs as domestic help or in beauty parlours and sold here, some in connivance with the family. The organization had been doing a lot to rehabilitate them at the protective Home, Merces, Goa. (FIG. 39) At present it has been shifted to Nachinola, and Sisters Adorers are administering it. (FIGS. 40(a), 40(b) They are taught various skills like tailoring, handicraft etc. However, Most of them desired to return Home. A great problem that the organization/members have to face here is that the home is not well equipped to rehabilitate this type of women and there is a need of co-operation/assistance from the State Government regarding the necessary infrastructure of the home.

Does the High literacy in Goa lessens the problems of women?

Smt. Auda opines that education and literacy are two entirely different aspects. Women become qualified but not sufficiently educated to assert their rights and it is essential to bridge this gap.
Protective Home for Women at Merces - Ilhas
40(a) Obra de Protecção at Nachinola, Bardez

40(b) Convent of the Sisters Incharge of the Protective Home for Women
Future Plans of the organization:

The President of the organization Smt. Auda Viegas- has a great desire to see that woman begin asserting their rights and learn to live a self dependent and dignified life.

For this, the organization is going about particularly in rural areas, where the women do not understand the meaning of human rights. In these areas they teach them skills especially those that they are good at. Also an outlet have been started for women-made local handicraft items.

The reward/payment for such selfless service, she says – is the fulfillment and joy to see the women happy in life.

Enthusiastically and with great zeal Smt. Auda works towards the welfare and upliftment of women in the society.

Goa State Commission For Women

Seven years have passed from the time the Goa State Commission for Women made its debut. Advocate Swati Kerkar, the newly appointed chair-person of the Commission finds that people are still not aware of the exact role played by the Commission. In an interview Advocate Kerkar spoke of the plans to create awareness about the Commission as well as the facilitate its working including the setting up of
four sub-committees in the State. One is Quepem, Canacona, Sanguem, the second for Salcete, Marmugao and Ponda, the third for Bardez and Pernem. The fourth for Bicholim, Satteri and Tiswadi cases will be tended to in the main office. This would do away with the necessity of having people from distant locations come only to Panjim with their woes.

The Objectives of the Commission

The objective is to achieve upliftment of women in Goa. The Goa State Commission for Women At 1996, provides for the constitution of the State Commission and lays down the powers and procedures to be followed by it. The functions are basically to deal with all matters concerning women in Goa so that their status is improves.

The Commission makes recommendations to the Government vis-à-vis implementation of laws and making policies relating to women.

The type of cases the Commission settles:

The cases which are taken up on a priority basis are those where the women are badly beaten up by the husband and where they have been abandoned by their
husbands. Other destitute women including old women who are abandoned are also seen on priority.

Cases of newly-weds where the husband has gone abroad leaving the wife here with the in-laws, are also piling up every day.

The Commission also has cases of retrieval of goods of women who live separately from the spouse, either by the order of the court or otherwise. In this connection the Commission networks with the police machinery.

The Commission sees one or two new cases per day on an average. Since its inception in 1997, the Commission has received 781 cases. The present Commission has seen 72 new cases till date since it was appointed on October 16, 2003.

The present Commission has settled and tentatively closed 30 cases till now, but with an option for further observation if required. The Commission network with other organizations like the Family Counselling Centre and coordinates of all like minded NGOs.

Besides the Goa State Commission for Women, there are NGOs- Non Governmental Organisations i.e. Bailancho Ekvott, (already mentioned earlier in this chapter), Bailancho Saad- President is Albertina Almeida and Bailancho Manch- its leader is Caroline Collasso, these organizations work for the welfare of the women and trying to solve the problem that women face in various spheres of life. These organizations work simultaneously for the emancipation and empowerment of the women folk.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Article 21, of the UDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948).


6. Navhind Times, 14/9/02 p.II


11. Navhind Times 14/9/02 (on zest) p.II


13. Interview with Smt. Victoria Fernandes on 26 May, 2000


15. Interview with Smt. Victoria Fernandes on 28 May, 2000


    award was instituted by Madhav Bir in memory of his wife Mitra Bir in 1997.
17. Interview with Smt. Suman Pednekar on 10 October, 2001

18. Interview with Smt. Suman Pednekar on 15 October, 2001


21. Interview with Dr. Maya Ghanekar on 12 July 2002

22. Interview with Adv. Shanti Fonseca on 10 March, 2003

23. Goa Children’s Act, 2002, Order for the Child Rights Cell from the High Court directing the authorities of GMC to hand over the dead body of a baby for burial that it had kept for 9 months in the morgue.


   For the achievements and dynamic work, towards women’s welfare the State Government honoured Smt. Auda Viegas by conferring Yashodamini award on Women’s Day.

26. In 1998 the budget was passed and introduced welfare schemes for women.

27. Interview with Smt. Auda Viegas on 31 December, 2003