CHAPTER-2

A BRIEF HISTORY & ACTIVITIES OF WOMEN ORGANIZATIONS
The fact that women have been undergoing deprivations in terms of status, role importance, equal rights, equal participation in decision-making and in public affairs, is well understood, but is a disturbing feature of all under developed countries. In India, as well, the concept of dependency of women on men in social, economic and public affairs is deeply implanted and its links with the old feudal-sanskriti and patriarchal structure led to a more rigid observance of customs and norms. As a result, women are treated as the "trust" of fathers and "property" of their husbands.

Women were made powerless and their subordination to man was encouraged by the Indian orthodoxy, while the British imperialism has caused great damage by neglecting women's education. Since women are deprived of inheritance, a male descendant became important, and for this, birth of a son became essential. With this the gender bias has started and got internalized in our system. Assertions about faithfulness of women and protection of them by men followed logically from these practices. Consequently women were deprived of leadership roles and economic participation rendering them dependent and powerless.

Although, several progressive thinking social reformers in India have adopted a positive approach and championed the cause of women, the women's issues got overshadowed in the independence movement, unlike in socialist countries where liberation of country and emancipation of women went hand-in-hand. Women in India did not threaten the patriarchal structures and never voiced for economic independence and changes in the relationships between the sexes. The only issues where considerable work was done are in the area of social life such as, widow remarriage, age of marriage, civil code, purdah, polygamy, prohibition of dowry etc.

Public awareness of women's real issues such as gender equality, economic and public participation and equal rights in terms of land and
property etc., increased tremendously in the last two decades, especially during the U.N. Women’s Decade (1976-85). Several activities, programmes towards women’s emancipation have been attempted by individual workers, governmental and non-governmental agencies and universities as well. But the outcome of these efforts is limited to a few pockets and issues, leaving enormous scope for further work.

In the 1970s, social organization studies attained an academic stature whereby the main focus has been on the pattern of interaction, inter-relationship between various members, their pattern of recruitment, rate of participation, process of mobilization, etc.

Social organizations are now perceived as a complex or formal organizations and identify themselves with the preferences of a social movement or a counter movement and attempt to implement those goals (Snow et. al., 1980). On the macro level, the study of social movements was a dominant tradition both in the history and the ethnography of India in which social organization was taken as the subsumed form of the social movement, for instance the pioneering accounts on the Bhumij revolts and the Kol insurrection in Chotanagpur (Jha, 1964), Kalikarakar Datta’s work on the Santhal insurrection, Blue mutiny study, the indigo disturbances (1859-62) in Bengal or the Deccan riots (1975). All these, started a tradition whereby organizations were studied in its dynamic form in which the main emphasis was to study the process through which they were able to achieve the targets (Kling, 1966; Kumar, 1968; Datta, 1984).

Although in the decade of the 1970s marked a significant innovation in both the theoretical and the substantive concerns of Indian Sociology, yet the focus of most of the studies during this period began to shift from the analysis of social organization in terms of the principles of its formation in the context of tradition as such, to its analysis as social processes (Singh, 1987).
There are three approaches to the analysis of any social/economic organization/interest group—(a) static; (b) comparative static, and (c) dynamic. A static analysis gives only a still picture of the present structure and functioning of the organization whereas a comparative static analysis gives scope for a comparison of the present situation with similar situations in the past. The dynamic approach considers present structure as the result of a continuous process of interaction of social forces which have operated behind it. Since our study includes a variety of women’s organizations having diverging ideologies, qualitative levels and socio-political and economic linkages, the development of each is being influenced both the social context in which they operate and also in interaction with similar organizations. Since the effect of such an interaction can be captured only in a dynamic approach, such an approach has been attempted here.

Class formation is a dynamic process. An organization being a specimen of the wider society, a dynamic analysis of it should logically take care of two aspects—

a) the dominant class interest behind the organization; and

b) the relative position of this dominant class interests with conflicting interest within the organization.

Women’s organizations are broadly of two types—

a) mass organizations having political goals; and

b) apolitical organizations, which are engaged in the welfare of women, both economic and extra-economic. Since the history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles and women’s organizations being a model of the wider society, they cannot be free from class configuration and contradictions. The only difference between political and apolitical organizations in this regard is that in the case of the former class conflicts are limited or nil but clear, but in the latter case, it will be higher and mostly subdued.
Two organizations have been selected for the present study. Their brief history is as under—

2.1 ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE

The first stirrings of the organization for reform of women's status can be seen in the twentieth century. The general impact of the socio-religious reform movements, notably the Brahm Samaj, the Arya-Samaj, the Muslim reform movement and other has been most pronounced on the urban middle class. Some of the ideas projected by them, namely, disapproval of child marriage, ensuring them a position of greater dignity, have become a part of the general cultural heritage of this sector of India's society. Being elitist in character and limited in approach, the organization never tied a proper investigation into the problems that weighed on women out side the middle class during the British period (Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, 1974).

The participation of poor women into the organization first began to be drawn with the advent of Gandhiji and the nationalist movement. As the nationalist movement expanded to draw in both women as well as the poor masses in general, the issue of poor women began to be addressed for the first time when country attained independence in 1947. The largest and most influential organization, the All India Women's Conference focused its attention on the passing and implementation of laws concerning child marriage, widow marriage, equal rights within marriage, and the right of women to inherit property.

In order to mobilize more women participation which started declining during the 1950s the Mahila Samitis, Mahila Mandal and Mahila Samajs were formed all over the country. There local women's groups remained as ongoing organizations but the participation of poor women in them declined, as did the militancy of the group itself (Madhu Kishwar, 1983).
Table 1.23
Percentage Distribution of Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries according to their Father/Husband’s Occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Type of Respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>Non-beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt./Semi-Govt. service</td>
<td>75.2 (76)</td>
<td>24.8 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private service</td>
<td>22.1 (17)</td>
<td>77.9 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own business</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>100.0 (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>26.5 (9)</td>
<td>73.5 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage industry</td>
<td>100.0 (34)</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.3 (136)</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.7 (119)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Actual figures are shown in parentheses)
Chi-Square = 198.83929***; D. F. = 4;
Contingency Coefficient = .52964

Table 1.24
Percentage Distribution of Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries according to their Community Background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Background</th>
<th>Type of Respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiaries</td>
<td>Non-beneficiaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>57.1 (68)</td>
<td>42.9 (51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>44.2 (34)</td>
<td>55.8 (43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>57.6 (34)</td>
<td>42.4 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>53.3 (136)</strong></td>
<td><strong>46.7 (119)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Actual figures are shown in parentheses)
Chi-Square = 6.93878*; D. F. = 2;
Contingency Coefficient = .11586
The constitution further stated that 'All India Women's Conference' would demonstrate/achieve the success regarding the above stated problems of women by certain measures—

1) Organizing and unionizing women to enhance their confidence and solidarity among themselves, to face challenges and overcome impediments that confront their progress.

2) To become pressure groups, to create impact on other agencies such as government, policy makers and planners; asking them to strengthen the measures to guarantee the social legislations and other programmes of development.

3) Create visibility and recognition to increase the value of women's work. Increase greater acceptance of sexual equality in the matter of economic, social and political development, and increase 'women power'.

Thus, the All India Women's Conference had a beginning in 1926, when Mrs. Margaret Cousins, an Irish lady who had made India her home, wanted to awaken Indian women for their betterment. The response of the Indian women to her call was so over-whelming that it paved the way for the establishment of All India Women's Conference in 1927. Many eminent women came in the fold of AIWC. The Conference had the services of women like Sarojini Naidu, Lady Rama Rao, Kamla Devi, Madam Cama, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, Muthulakshmi Reddy, Lakshmi Menon, Lakshmi Raghuramaiah and other distinguished women.

Today AIWC has over 1,00,000 members in 500 branches all over the country. It has a Standing Committee with 130 members. The Annual Session is hosted by different branches every year and a number of decisions are taken in these sessions besides taking stock of various activities of AIWC.
2.1.1 Objectives of AIWC

The objectives of AIWC are as under—

1) To work for a society based on the principles of social justice, integrity, equal rights and opportunities for all.

2) To secure recognition for the inherent rights of every human being, to work and to the essentials of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education, social amenities and security, in the belief that these should not be determined by accident of birth or sex but by planned social distribution.

3) To support the claim of every citizen to the right to enjoy basic civil rights and liberties.

4) To stand against all separatist tendencies and unity and to promote greater national integration and unity.

5) To work actively for the general progress and welfare of women and children and to help women to utilise to the fullest the fundamental rights conferred on them by the Constitution of India.

6) To co-operate with people and organizations of the world for the implementation of these principles which alone can assure permanent international amity and world peace.

2.1.2 Institutions Founded By AIWC

Many pioneering institutions founded by AIWC over the years now function as autonomous apex bodies in their respective fields—

1) Lady Irwin College for Home Science, established in 1932 is now an Institution of Higher Education of national repute offering graduate and post-graduate courses.

2) Family Planning Centre, established in 1937 is now functioning as the Family Planning Association of India.
3) Save the Children Committee, established in 1943 is now functioning as the Indian Council for Child Welfare.

4) Cancer Research Institute, established in 1952 is now functioning as the Cancer Institute, WIA, Madras.


2.1.3 Legislative Reforms

Though child marriage has been restrained by legislation in 1929, the other reforms AIWC pressed for took decades-long and success came only when India became independent, series of enactments were passed during 1954–55.

1) Monogamy was enforced on men;

2) Inter-community marriage was validated;

3) Women acquired the right to—
   - Divorce and re-marriage,
   - Maintenance from separated husband or son,
   - Adoption of a child (if single),
   - Acquire and inherit property and hold it absolutely, and

4) Prostitution was curbed (1958);

5) Maternity benefits provided;

6) Equal pay for equal work on par with men were secured for working women (1958, 1976);

7) The giving and taking of dowry on a daughter’s marriage was prohibited (1961); and
8) PITA in place of SITA (Suppression of Immoral Traffic on Women) came as an act.

2.1.4 Activities of AIWC

Programmes of the branches encompass a wide range of activities with special emphasis on schemes to help members of weak and vulnerable groups towards self-reliance, i.e.

1) Creches and Nursery Schools (Balwadis);
2) Mobile Health Units;
3) Family Planning Centres;
4) Old Age Homes;
5) Small Savings Schemes;
6) Fair Price Shops;
7) Blood Banks; and
8) Short Stay Homes for women in social & marital distress.

AIWC has the distinction of being the nodal agency for NPIC. This Programme is through the Department of Non-Conventional Energy, Government of India. The Conference has implemented the programme in several parts of the country through their branches.

In the year of Shelter for Homeless, AIWC has been made a nodal agency for providing shelter for widows and destitute whose income is less than Rs. 700/- to Rs. 1,000/-p.m.

AIWC is also made the nodal agency by the DDA Slum Wing, to co-ordinate dwellers for slum. Shelter for homeless project.

At the Central Office at Delhi, AIWC has—

— Working Women Hostels that houses 300 girls, Mahila Press that
helps to provide training and self-employment to needy women and handicapped, Textile Printing and M. C. M. Library (Reference & Research).

- The New Delhi branch of AIWC has also undertaken Counselling and Rehabilitation of drug addicts known as ABHAY.

2.1.5 Representation of AIWC

As a leading NGO, AIWC is represented on various committees and commissions on social welfare set up by the Government, like Status of Women's Committee (1975), National Vocational Training for Women, the implementation of Legal Aid Schemes (1982), National Integration Committee etc. It is among the voluntary organizations whose comments are sought by Parliament on proposed legislation affecting women.

At the International level, AIWC is affiliated to the International Alliance of Women and has consultative status with – ECOSOC, UNICEF, FAWA, PAN PACIFIC and SEA WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION, ESCAP, and THE UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION, DELHI.

2.1.6 Seminars and Conferences organized by AIWC

The Central Office organises local and national level seminars and workshops on Women's issues several times a year to promote its objectives, it also hosts international meets such as –

- The Asian Women's Congress (1931);
- The 22nd Triennial Congress of the International Alliance of Women (1973).

2.1.7 Publications of AIWC

The Central Office brings out a bi-monthly journal ROSHNI in English. It also publishes books and reports on subjects like law and education.
Commemoration volumes are brought out on important occasions.

1987 marked the completion of 60 years of the All India Women’s Conference. As part of the celebrations the following activities were organised—

- At the Gwalior Annual Session held in January, 87. AIWC honoured women of eminence & also those pioneer members of the AIWC.

- An exhibition on Atrocities against Women was prepared and put on permanent display at the Central Office.

- A Centenary volume entitled "The Pathfinder" was released. It is a biography of Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy, past President, AIWC.

- A Diamond Jubilee Souvenir containing the history of AIWC was also released.

- Mahila Press has provided training and gainful employment to about 100 women.

AIWC has been identified as one of the major voluntary organization to implement at the National level since August 1984. This is an instance of the Government of India collaboration with a NGO a women’s organization to successfully implement the improved chulha programme. AIWC as a nodal agency funded by the DNES Ministry of Energy and receives technical assistance and guidance from the IIT Delhi and other Technical back up units.

2.1.8 The Improved Chulha launched by AIWC

The improved chulha, an introduction of simple technology to rural women is a boon to the women as—

- It provides smokeless kitchen;

- Maximum efficiency with minimum fuel;

- Considerable reduction in cooking time;
- Reduction in fire hazards;
- Reduction in blackening of utensils;
- Can cook two or more dishes at a time depending upon the model of the chulha; and
- Better kitchen environment due to less smoke and therefore better health to the user.

There are numerous models of the improved chulha and depending on the area and needs of the beneficiaries the appropriate model can be chosen.

2.1.9 Implementation of the Policies and Programmes of AIWC

The AIWC has a team of mastercrafts persons who have been trained by the IIT Delhi. These mastercrafts persons in turn train rural women in different parts of the country during the 10 days training programme. Thus more than 2000 women have been trained since August 1984. These women are trained in construction of different models approved by DNES depending on the suitability of a model to the area. The trained women continue to construct chulha during the extension programme.

Many rural women have thus acquired self employment and are continuing the construction of improved chulhas. The self-employed workers get Rs 15/- per chulha she constructs. Thus many rural women have been released from the drudgery of smoky kitchen.

2.1.10 Achievements of AIWC

The AIWC has implemented more than 1000 training programmes during the period August 84 till date. The AIWC has been able to construct more than 40,000 chulhas during this period. The Programme has been implemented in remote and hilly areas of Kalarayan Hills (tribal area 200 kms of Salem) in Nauhatta, Rohtas District of Bihar (a tribal area where people
are below poverty line) in the North Eastern states of Manipur, Tripura, Assam, in Andamans and Nicobar Island, in Chamoli (U.P.) and in states of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh.

AIWC has created a large number of trained women mastercrafts persons. In 1984 August the AIWC held a successful chulha demonstration and participated in the Technical and Tool Exhibition put up to coincide with the UN world conference for women to mark the end of women decade at Nairobi, Kenya.

The technical expertise is provided by various technical backup units of the country. To mention a few are IIT Delhi; Bihar Engineering College; College of Technology and Agricultural Engineering, Udaipur; and Energy Research Centre, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

2.2 NATIONAL FEDERATION OF INDIAN WOMEN

National Federation of Indian Women was founded at Calcutta in 1954. This union is an important organ of the Communist Party of India. It came into existence as a belated decision after the communists were expelled from the All India Women’s Conference.

2.2.1 objectives of NFIW

Its aims and objectives of NFIW are as follows—

1) The Federation stands for a sovereign democratic and prosperous India, a peaceful world where freedom is guaranteed to all nations and there is an end of all discrimination on the basis of colour, sex, religious faith and political belief. This Federation stands for friendship, unity and solidarity of women throughout the world.

2) The Federation shall work for complete emancipation of Indian
women-social, economic, cultural and political, based on equality of rights between men and women and full social justice for physical, intellectual, moral, artistic and educational well being. Security of children and protection of the rights of mothers and assurance of a happy motherhood for all women.

3) The NFIW is a new type of organization and is different from most other women’s organizations in many respects. Its base is not confined to middle-class women in the cities but the big majority of its seven lakh members are from the poor, toiling sections of the society. Rural women form the bulk of the membership. The NFIW believes that for women to win a status of real equality it is necessary to struggle for bringing about a new socio-economic order where exploitation would end.

4) Any woman above the age of eighteen can become a member who believes in working for—
   - Equal rights for women in all spheres of life;
   - Children’s welfare;
   - World Peace;
   - Communal harmony and national integration; and
   - Socialism.

2.2.2 Structure of NFIW

Structure of National Federation of Indian Women is as under—
   - Congress;
   - Council;
   - Executive Committee; and
   - State or Regional Committee.
For becoming the member of National Federation of Indian Women one has to pay an individual membership fees of Rs. 5/- per annum. For affiliation fees are Rs. 5/- upto first one thousand members and Rs 3/- for every additional thousand.

2.2.3 Publications

NFIW also publishes NFIW Bulletin, which was earlier bi-monthly, priced Rs. 6 per annum, but now it is published every month.

2.2.4 Congresses

Congress of National Federation of Indian Women are held from time to time. Congresses held at Calcutta (1954), Vijayawada (1957), Varanasi (1959), Delhi (1962), Delhi (1965), Lucknow (1967), Salem (1970) Calcutta (1973) Jalandhar (1976), Trivandrum (1980), Guntur (1984), Delhi (1986), Kurukshetra (1995) and Hyderabad (1999) have taken a number of steps to fulfil its aims and objectives, as also to draw attention to various issues concerning women from time to time.

2.2.5 Activities of NFIW

Activities of National Federation of Indian Women include the followings—

1) Relief work for the victims of famines, floods, earthquakes and other natural calamities, and for:

2) Victims of communal riots and terrorist action;

3) Campaign for Hindu Code bill;

4) Adult Literacy Classes for women (UNESCO Award 1973);

5) Legal Aid and Counselling;

6) Campaignism, rallies, dharnas, picketing against Price Rise, Rape, Dowry, Dowry deaths, Communal Riots etc; and
7) Campaigns, Seminars, Meeting for—
   - One Maternity Centre for every 10,000 population,
   - One trained mid-wife for every village with proper medical equipment;
   - Creches for working women;
   - Girls vocational training institute for every district;
   - Potable water within easy distance;
   - Radicall and Reforms. Equal wages for women in agriculture.
   - Reforms in Family Laws; and
   - Training-cum-production centres Handicrafts, 20% reservation jobs for women in Government and Semi-Government jobs.

8) Some of the major International Conferences and Seminars with NFIW initiative include the following—
   i) Asian Regional Seminar for Training of Cadres to eliminate illiteracy (along with UNESCO and WIDF);
   ii) Preparatory work for World Congress for women (Berlin 1975). All India Committee for International Women’s year, and organising the delegation to the Berlin Congress;
   iii) Asian Seminar on the situation of Child in Asia in 1978; and
   iv) Committee for Women’s Decade before the Nairobi Conference in 1985.

2.2.6 International Conference and Seminars

International Conference and Seminars attended by NFIW at—
Copenhagen, Mexico, Berlin, Peking, Prague, U. S. A., Japan, Nepal.
Hungary, Moscow, Ulan, Bator, UNESCO, Sri Lanka, Dhaka, Hanoi Laos, Kampuchea, Australia, Nairobi and Moscow.

2.2.7 Peace and Solidarity

NFIW is the first organization in India to celebrate 8th March International Women’s Day, Meetings and Rallies for South Africa, Vietnam, P. L. O. and Bangla Desh.

Affiliated to Women’s International Democratic Federation. NFIW has a Vice-President and also a Member of the Secretariat in Berlin, besides being in the Bureau and Council of WIDF.

2.2.8 Achievements of NFIW

NFIW has also done commendable job in the fields of literacy, family planning, income generating programmes and training-cum-production centres, socio-economic upliftment and small savings schemes for the poor, etc. It has also taken serious view on child labour and child abuse. NFIW has successfully raised the voice on growing atrocities against women in different states, particularly Punjab, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamilnadu, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa. Its efforts in the fields of solving the problems (like unemployment, poverty, property rights, wage differentials, etc.) of tribal and rural women; employment and training for women, improvement in their working conditions and child labour; fight against anti-women and communal bias in education and culture etc. are also gaining ground and the organisation, along with other organizations, has done appreciable work in this direction.

Besides, NFIW is also active in following fields—

1) National Alliance for Food Rights—NFIW centre participates actively in the national campaign on food rights as per its prior commitments.

For example, two-day convention on 22 and 23 February, 2000
came out with a charter of demands submitted to the government and follow up activities planned. There are several women organisations, other NGO's and research groups in the national alliance. The NFIW also associated itself with Beeja-Satyagrah launched by several farmers, trade unions and women organisations and other NGO's challenging the policy of the government on patents and asking the farmers to defy any control on their rights to have reproduction and preservation of seeds.

2) International Women's Day—The slogan for International Women's Day-March 8 (for the year 1999) was adopted in the Congress as stated below—

- Pass the Bill on 33% reservation of seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies in the ongoing session of parliament. Stop atrocities on women in different shapes and different forms.
- Stop atrocities on minorities particularly on Christians by Bajrang Dal and other Sangh Parivar activists.
- Resist price-rise, particularly the hike of price of wheat, rice, sugar through public distribution system, hike of price of urea and LPG cylinders before the presentation of budget, no more hike of prices in the budget.
- NFIW made it clear in joint meetings about use of its slogan in the campaigns and to participate in the united programme agreed to focus the main demand of presenting and passing of bill on 33% reservation in Assemblies and Parliament. The NFIW central leaders, along with very large mobilisation by Delhi Committee participated in the March from Mandi House to Jantar Mantar. There were encouraging reports from other states also about observance of the day and pressing the demands.
March 15 call of 'March to Parliament' by CPI on the burning questions and problems faced by the workers, farmers, students—youth and women was responded by several NFIW units and activists who joined in large numbers with their agenda. Before that, 'All India Protest Day' on price-rise by the left parties on 15 February was also responded well by women in many states.

3) **Legal Literacy Camps**— Many legal literacy camps with participation of 50 to 100 women were organised by the Family Counselling Centre, NFIW with main assistance from Delhi-unit of NFIW and Balliga Memorial Trust. The camps had resource persons like Magistrate Mrs. Manju Sehgal, police officials, education officials from DIET and advocates apart from the NFIW leaders.

4) **Environment Awareness Camp**— This camp was organised with more than 100 women taking part in Yamuna Pushta area (fire hazard victims slum—colony). With participation of elected corporator and MLA from the area, MCD officials, a paediatrician and NFIW leaders as resource persons, it was a successful exercise, as well as their interaction with elected representatives for follow-up activities for redressal of their grievances.

‘Environment Day’ was observed on 13th August along with Navdanya and RESTE jointly against poly-packs with a dharna at Jantar Mantar.

5) **Activities for Secularism and Against Communal Division**— NFIW associated itself with the citizens committee formed to ally the feelings among the minorities and to expose and fight the forces of communalism.

The members from Centre and Delhi unit associated with all the actions, programmes, meetings, peaceful sitings in processions and
cultural activities conducted in pursuance of these goals.

The National Convention on 20 February, 1999 called by the prominent citizens was very well participated by NFIW. The convention by the citizen's committee on March 13 was also attended by some central and state office bearers and members.

The meetings organised by other organisations such as Insani Ekta Muhim, YWCA, JWP, Churches Associations were also attended by representatives from central office.

During elections period father Arul Das was murdered again allegedly by Dara Singh. There was joint action programme of dharna at India Gate which was also participated by NFIW activists.

6) **US-NATO Aggression Against Yugoslavia**—NFIW in a joint statement with other organisations condemned the attack on Yugoslavia. It associated with other women organisations in a protest meeting against the attacks and expressing solidarity with suffering women and children of Yugoslavia and Iraq. A meeting organised by AIPSO on the issue was also participated by NFIW.

7) **Activities for Peace**—NFIW associated itself with other groups who joined together for a March from Pokhran to Sarnath on May 11, 1999. In Delhi, symbolic march was organised at ITO-crossing which was participated by some of the members of NFIW demanding for end to nuclear arms race.

**Citizens March**—Initiative for Peace was participated by the federation members on August 6, the Hiroshima day. A procession was taken from Raighat to Ferozeshah Kotla ground which was also participated by students and teachers from about 15 schools.

On August 6, 1999 itself NFIW also participated in another initiative
of women for peace, it was a candlelight peace meeting at Gandhi Smriti on 30th January Marg.

In all these activities NFIW participated from the process of preparation itself and the idea was to put forth the citizens opinion against nuclear armament and zingoist philosophy of the BJP—led Central Government.

On 9th August the Pokhran to Sarnath march group reached Delhi and had experience sharing with citizens of Delhi which was also attended by NFIW activists.

8) National Commission for Women (NCW) and NFIW—During the month of February, the media was reporting negatively on the NCW vis-a-vis its status. In a meeting by NCW attended by seven organisations. NFIW, AIDWA, JWP, YWCA, AIWC, CWDS and MDS, a joint note was prepared on the subject and submitted to the Commission.

The points raised and suggestions given still did not bring understanding among new chairperson and other members. It, unfortunately resulted into confusion and conflicting comments by the Commission members publically.

So the seven organisations decided together to submit their serious concern and submitted another letter jointly. Nevertheless, the Commission was requested to take its activities further from where they were left when Mrs. Mohini Giri chaired it.

In the meanwhile, the Commission's law expert member called a meeting for debate on dowry and other laws relating to crimes against women. Apart from giving NFIW's independent opinions as individual organisations, a unitedly agreed approach to the whole
issue was submitted by six organisations. A committee on the subject includes NFIW. Two of its members are in the sub-committee.

In another initiative by NCW on the question of occupational, health and safety questions for women, NFIW is again part of the consultation and member of the subcommittee for that.

NCW organised another workshop on the issue of jail reforms, the plight of women and alternatives for justice. The workshop brought out very important aspects of sufferings of women under trials and convicts of minor-crimes in prisons. It was attended by NFIW members and their understanding and suggestions were placed.

NCW also organised an interaction with the government officials and women organisations on Report to UN on CEDAW. It was attended by the members of NFIW.

After announcement of elections, the NCW’s political core committee called meeting of women organisations and other NGO’s for discussing strategies to be adopted to address political parties, Elections Commission, and the voters, which was participated by NFIW alongwith other organisations. A delegation later met Chief Election Commissioner. All other activities were attended to in connection with elections along with NCW.

9) JNU Cases of Sexual Harassment – NFIW took initiative to express its concern on the reported case of sexual harassment of Hungarian student and before that an incident with other girl students. It was decided to proceed jointly with other organisations and so a joint deputation of all India organisations and some Delhi level women groups met the Vice-Chancellor urging him to punish the guilty and also to check the harassment to the girl who helped the complainant who had been associated with AISF activities. Letters were also sent to the Visitor of the University, the Hon’ble President of India,
to the Vice-President of India—who happens to be Chancellor, to all the Central Universities urging for intervention in the concerned issue and for ensuring and setting up of Complaints Cells as per Supreme Court guidelines.

JNU gender study forum played very good role in the whole issue and ultimately with all pressures including students union’s intervention the matter ended with positive results.

10) **Insurance Scheme Issues**—The GIC had come out with a scheme named Raj Rajeshwari for women on accident claims and compensations in which in one of the clause, the rape was equated with general accidents. This was strongly protested by women organisations. A joint memorandum and letters were sent to the Chairman GIC and to the Prime Minister who had launched the scheme to withdraw the objectionable clause immediately.

The objectionable clause was removed later on.

11) **Private Person’s Population Control Bill in Delhi Assembly**—On noticing the introduction of private persons’ bill on population control containing punitive measures against the families of more than two children proposing to debar them from different government incentive schemes and programmes etc., NFIW took initiative and in consultation with other organisations submitted a strong memorandum to the Chief Minister. Later on Delhi Unit of NFIW on its initiative organised joint meetings and a very successful joint massive convention and a delegation met the Chief Minister.

An important development worth mentioning here is the growing co-operation between NFIW, AIWC, ASHI, BGMS, CWC, WWA, HWS, ICSW, ICWG and many other NGOs so far as the problems of women are concerned. For example, a Global March 2000 was undertaken in different states by
Women's Committees. The major demands put forward by Women's Committee, Chandigarh were—

1) We demand complete rehauling of Public Distribution System to make it effective. All essential commodities at cheap prices must be made available to the people in Fair Price Shops. Corruption must be eliminated for their proper functioning.

2) Punjab Government has started review inquiry of pensioners. In the name review inquiry, all pensions have been stopped. We demand old age, widow and pension to the handicapped to be resumed. We also demand enhancement of rate from Rs. 200/- to Rs. 500/- and end to corruption in Social Welfare Offices.

3) Government must carry out and implement “Shagam Scheme” giving Rs. 5,100/- on the occasion of marriage of daughters of poor Harijan and Christian families. We want this scheme to be extended to all poor families. It should be extended to those marriages already performed, but not applied for at that time, but claims made latter.

4) We demand implementation of “Kanya Jyoti” Scheme under which Rs. 500/- is given to mothers who give birth to daughters. Rs. 4,500/- should be deposited as F. D. in the name of the daughter for her education. This scheme has not been implemented even though passed by the United Front Government in 1997.

5) We demand grants and loans to needy women for gainful self-employment.

6) We demand renewal and issuing of yellow cards to the poor.

7) We demand 33% representation for women in State Assemblies and Parliament and 33% reservation in jobs.
8) We demand free education for girls upto 10 + 2 and greater avenues of employment for women.

9) We demand that Commission on Women be given statutory powers to make it effective.

10) We are opposed to hurriedly pushing through Acts of Parliament for globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation and giving concessions to Multinational Corporations, without giving consideration to the long term detrimental effects on the majority of our people.

A pledge was also taken to fight for the following—

- A Life of Equality, Dignity and Identity.
- A Democratic and Equitable Society.
- Free from Family Violence, Dowry Demands and Dowry Deaths.
- Free from Rape, Molestation and Sexual Harassment.
- Free from Trafficking in Women and Child Abuse.
- Free from Communal and Caste Violence.
- A Society free from Corruption, Hunger and Poverty.
- Free from Disease, Unemployment, Illiteracy and Superstition.
- Free from Riots, Terrorism, Armament Race and Fear of War.
- Free from Pollutions causing Environmental Hazards.
- To build a Just Society where everyone can live in peace, and our children play and study and not be subjected to child labour exploitation.

Similar demands were made in many other states by Women's Committees comprising NFIW, AIWC and other NGOs.

At regional level also AIWC and NFIW are doing a lot for women's cause. For example, the All India Women's Conference, Chandigarh was born
In the year 1956. It is a voluntary Welfare Organisation, registered under the Societies Registration Act, of 1860 with its headquarters at Chandigarh. It has constituent branches at Ropar, Ludhiana, Sangrur and Bhatinda. All the sub-branches are effectively engaged in creative development programmes for the welfare of surrounding villages. It provides training centres for self employment and handicraft centres, where girls manufacture lac bangles, durries, clay articles and learn sewing, stitching and embroidery work etc. The Bhatinda sub-branch is doing extremely well. It has its own building where it is housed. Besides the aforesaid activities, a school for illiterate children of Harijans is also functioning.

The All India Women's Conference, Chandigarh functions through a bi-annually elected managing body. The organisation is non-political and not-for-profit. Membership is open to all women above 18 years of age, irrespective of any barriers against caste, creed, religion or social status. It conducts seminars and meetings on various aspects of women's activities for their development to achieve self esteem in the field of public life and create consciousness about their individual identity. The organisation celebrates the days, specified by U. N. O. such as World Health Day, Human Rights Day etc. The All India Women's Conference provides short stay shelter for the women who are thrown out of houses of their husbands and in-laws suddenly.

The first milestone in the chain of achievements of Chandigarh Unit was its successful efforts to prevent the Punjab Government from amending the Hindu Succession Act so as to deprive the daughter of her share in her father's Agricultural Property, even though the Central Act made her an equal partner in that property. An unsuccessful attempt was made by the feudal lords of agriculture economy to bring forth a measure of amendment in the legislature but deputation of AIWC led by General Secretary met the President of India, Prime Minister, the Chief Minister of Punjab and on raising hue and
cry through the press, the Chief Minister of Punjab referred the matter to a Joint Select Committee of both the Houses of which our General Secretary, then being a legislator, was a member. She boldly struck a dissenting note in the face of an overwhelming majority of the landed peasantry in the Committee.

The second important achievement of the All India Women’s Conference, Chandigarh was to have the Punjab Municipal Act amended in 1973, whereby a provision was made for having at least two women members in every Municipal Committee. Here-to-fore, the women representatives in the administration of Local Government were far and few between. It was in a rare case that a woman, however highly qualified or dedicated to public service she might be, could find her way to a local body in this male dominated society.

It was this background that the All India Women’s Conference stressed upon the state government to co-opt at least two women in every Municipal Committee in Punjab. Now, at the present moment, there are almost hundreds of women Municipal Commissioners in the Municipal Committees of Punjab State.

Again, when a proposal was mooted to club the incomes of husband and wife for the purposes of Income Tax, AIWC was in the forefront to oppose the move, which was successfully stalled.

AIWC, Chandigarh has been running a number of institutions to promote welfare of needy women and children. The purpose of these centres is to train illiterate, needy women from rural surroundings, who may be deserted by their husbands and had no one to support them as also young orphan girls. They are given training in stitching, sewing clothes of ordinary wear, embroidery and machine knitting.

These centres have been training a batch of 40 girls each year, i.e.,
20 girls in a session of 6 months. These resident trainees are provided with free boarding and lodging and raw materials for training. Those who have infants, are looked after by an Aaya and are provided free food and clothing and also medical aid.

At the end of training session, each girl is presented a sewing machine so that she might immediately begin to earn a living in the village or town from where she came.

The Children's Creche at Chandigarh was established in 1970. The creche is primarily meant to provide the facility of day care to the children of the working women of the city. There is a trained teacher and two Aayas, who look after the children between the age group of 6 months and 5 years. The creche has one unit of 25 children. Since the last two years, the creche has started receiving a grant-in-aid from the Central Welfare Advisory Board. It has all the necessary equipment needed for the creche. The children are received from 8.30 A. M. and kept in creche with full safety and care till 5.30 P. M. Sometimes, the Aaya has to stay late in the evening till the parents of the last child collect the child from the creche.

The Hostel Project of AIWC, Chandigarh is the most outstanding achievement. The six Kanal plot for the Hostel was purchased from the Chandigarh Administration as far back as in 1970. At that time the Organisation had no funds to construct the building.

It was made possible only when the Government of India launched a scheme for the construction of working women's hostels all over the country. The organisation out-lined a plan for the building to accommodate 60 residents. The estimate prepared for the construction of the hostel was Rs. 31 lacs but the organisation with its extraordinary careful supervision and economy completed the building with about 24 lacs with aid from Government of India.

The accommodation to 60 women is provided on 2nd and 3rd floors.
It has 8 dormitories to accommodate 4 women each, and 14 two seater rooms with attached bathrooms for accommodating 2 women in each room with a recreational lobby and big open terrace on the top for sleeping out in summer.

The first floor constitutes Administrative block with the office of the organisation, guest room, committee room, library room, warden's room, clerk's office and the children's creche all with attached bathrooms. On the groundfloor is a Seminar Hall with attached bathrooms and coffee counter having a capacity of about 150 persons. There is a separate room for visitors of the residents. The mess for the residents is located in a separate wing with Dinning Hall, pantry and kitchen with modern equipment. The Hostel is fully equipped with an adequate staff, a whole time warden, a chowkidar, a gardner, peons and sweepers. The administration of the Hostel is run by an Hostel Committee.

The organisation with funds made available by Sewedish International Development Authority (SIDA), furnished the hostel rooms. The Conference is now keen to extend its activities more in the interior of rural areas. Plans are already under way and will be put into execution soon.

The support services provided by AIWC through its 500 branches working throughout the country, directly as well as indirectly through other NGO's include vocational training and income-generation activities with training in Typewriting and Shorthand, Tailoring, Textile and Block Printing, Candle-making, Family-Counseling, Old-age Homes, Working Women's Hostels, Creches for children and Computer-training. It is also a Nodal Agency for Non-conventional energy sources, such as smokeless stoves, biogas units, and solar cookers and lanterns. AIWC also maintains the 'Margaret Cousins Memorial Library and Documentation Centre' and has a national network of centres for non-formal education at various levels. Women don't have their
right place in the society and the aim of AIWC is to bring women in the mainstream, including decision-making and capacity-building and resource-control. Women's participation in the political process does not mean only the right to vote, but includes the ability to influence policies and decision-making. With the recent amendments to relevant clauses in India's Constitution, one-third of the total number of seats in Local Bodies have been reserved for women, this is yet to be filled in Parliament. This is a historical achievement towards the political empowerment of women who are now looking forward to assume responsibilities.

There is much co-operation between AIWC and NFIW at regional level in Chandigarh as also in other states.