

A voluminous effort

Aalochana, an organisation formed by five women, document every bit of material pertaining to women, thus providing a storehouse of valuable reading matter on various topics

Ten years ago, in 1989, a core group of five women academicians decided to get together and participate in the movement for the emancipation of women in their own unique way.

During various research projects which they had undertaken earlier, they had always come upon one major stumbling block - a paucity of documented research material on which to base their studies. This, they decided, was to be their contribution towards the women's movement. They would document every bit of material which pertained to women, be it in relationship to politics, family, aesthetics,

health, education, legal or any other socio-economic matter.

They decided to name their organisation Aalochana which means a critical review. And the five women of the core group were Medha Kotwal Lele, Simrita Gopal Singh, Vandana Sonalkar, Hemanti Banerjee and Umile Mohite. In course of time Hemanti left and her place was taken by Nir-mala Sathe. Two rented rooms at a building apartment, in Kanchan Galli, Erandwane, form their office, but it seems rather inadequate given the huge volume of data collected in the ten years of its existence.

The main objective of Aalochana is to collect any material concerning any activity



The Aalochana library: A storehouse of information

related to women and file them under various headings. The work is tedious. Every morn-

ing, they scrutinise the various regional and national newspapers and magazines to which

they subscribe. Even the tiniest woman-related news is grist for their mill. They snip it out, first taking care to scan the reverse side to see if no other important news is being destroyed in

the process. A photostat copy of this item is then made and filed along with the original in

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a duplicate file. The filing is meticulous. They have 62 topics listed in their range of activities at the moment. Every aspect of a woman's life, every facet and situation faced by them, in rural as well as urban areas, finds representation here.

One of their primary interests is in the area of politics and especially the role of women in Panchayati Raj. Towards this end, they are currently working in the creation of a multi-media kit as resource material for empowering women in Panchayati Raj. They hope to have it ready by October this year. This re-

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source centre is a boon not only for research students but also for many activists and journalists who are interested in women's issues.

Besides this, Aalochana disseminates the results of their research through pamphlets, booklets, posters, slides, audio and video cassettes, films, lectures, seminars and camps. They have two films to their credit 'Gangutai' is a documen-

tary on the noted educationist Gangutai Patwardhan from Pune. The other film is 'On The Threshold' which was produced for the Beijing Confer-

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ence, where one of their members, Nirmala, represented them. The film deals with the political empowerment of women. Both films are in English.

Aalochana has contributed articles which documents the Stree Mukti Sampak Samiti in Maharashtra, as well as all women panchayats in Maharashtra. The latter is being published as a book "And who will make the *chappatis*?" by Stree

Publications of Calcutta.

Aalochana also undertakes translation work from English and other regional languages to Marathi and vice versa.

Aalochana has also begun to network with other research centres at the regional, national and even international levels. They participated in the 1995 Beijing Conference and another at Costa Rica in 1993, and many others on a national level.

Their centre houses a library with a collection of over 2000 books, as well as 25 video films on various topics. While all these resources are available to activists, the library facility is open to all on payment of a nominal fee.

Aalochana has already earned a name for itself as a major resource centre in and around Pune. A dream of five dedicated women seems to be finally taking shape through sheer hard work. As they put it, "Our journey has been a mixed one. There have been moments of elation as we successfully completed our first project and moments of despair and dejection as some did not even take shape. Nevertheless, we have grown with confidence..."

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