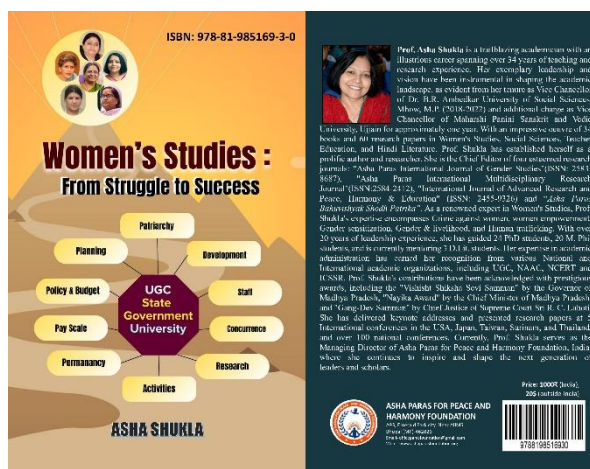


Book Review



Asha Shukla, 2025, Women's Studies: From Struggle to Success, ASHA PARAS FOR PEACE AND HARMONY FOUNDATION, Price- 1000/-

The book "Women's Studies: from Struggle to Success" traces the success stories as well as the hardships faced by different Women's Studies Centres and is a testament of the status of Women's Studies as a discipline in India today. The editor of the book has covered geographical locations, regional experiences of Women's Studies Centres across the length and breadth of India. Sharing their passion for Women's Studies, the contributors range from the University of Kashmir in the North, to Bharathidasan and Allagappa Universities in the South; from Tezpur University in the North East to four Universities of Maharashtra in Western India. Jamia Millia Islamia University, Aligarh Muslim University, Barkatullah University, Bhopal and Dr. B.R Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Mhow, M.P, all add regional ethos by faithfully and candidly recording the successes as well as the trials and tribulations of each centre, many a time through a rigorous SWOT Analysis.

The editor Prof Asha Shukla is a trailblazing academician, with a mission and vision dedicated to the cause of Women's Studies. Being the Former Vice Chancellor of Dr. BR Ambedkar University of Social Sciences, Mhow, M.P and also the founder Director of Women's Studies Centre at Barkatullah University, Bhopal, she offers her expertise to encompass many issues about Women's Studies to inspire and shape future generations of leaders and scholars in the subject.

The book is a definite contribution to understand the current status of Women's Studies Centres, but it also puts on record a very valuable account of the genesis and the historical progression of the Women's Movement in India and across the world. This book is an example of a rare document to acknowledge the pioneering efforts of women leaders like Vina Mujumdar, Neera Desai, Madhuriben Shah, Armaity Desai, and others who worked very hard to improve the living conditions of Indian women through education. These leaders

were deeply influenced by feminist theories and stressed the women's studies perspective in policy decisions to establish gender justice, to negotiate patriarchy, with an emphasis on national development. The book is a celebration of women's empowerment, acknowledging the transformative power of Women's Studies as a method of questioning as well as helping to build tools for collaboration across all disciplines. The cover page succinctly and graphically sketches the various aspects which are involved in the development of Women's Studies as a discipline and points out the stakeholders, like the UGC, State Government, and the University, for the present defining status of Women's Studies Centres.

In her scholarly and detailed editorial Prof Asha Shukla graphically traces the growth of Women's Studies Centres in universities and colleges through the decades of the 1970s and 1980's due to various events taking place at the time. These were the declaration of the UN Decade of Women, the publication of "Towards Equality" Report, and the major role played by the UGC in providing guidelines and formally establishing and supporting Women's Studies Centres. These centres were provided financial aid to build infrastructure, make appointments for library and research facilities from the Seventh Five Year Plan and sustained till the XII Five Year Plan. The objective was to promote teaching interdisciplinary research and to integrate the gender perspective into curricular, extension and co-curricular activities. These centres designed certificate, graduate, postgraduate, M.Phil and Ph. D. programs to correlate academics with activism, to bring about awareness, sensitization, through teaching, research, knowledge production, and knowledge transmission to bring about gender justice into all knowledge systems as well as social and political practices.

The book is a record of many positive initiatives and outcomes of UGC Women's Studies Centres, many of which later became full-fledged Departments with university support as well as linkages with government, non-government agencies, and even with agencies like UNICEF, UNDP, Ford Foundation, and British Council. Besides academic programs, these Centres provided self-employment training, skill training, sensitization programs, conferences, seminars, workshops on capacity building, health, hygiene, sanitation drives, digitization, YouTube channels, gender blogs, and journals. This was possible due to committed leadership and supporting faculty rooted in feminist values.

As the various writers of the chapters have highlighted, the challenges which these Women's Studies Centres face in the present times which far outweigh the success stories of the past. With the dissolution of the Planning Commission, the dwindling finances and power of the UGC, many centres are troubled with financial crunches, difficulties of continuation, and even the issue of survival. No extension orders, irregularity in UGC orders, non-payment of salaries, blocking of grants, termination of services, and no permanency in jobs are just some of the problems highlighted by the centres. Faculty members have encountered systemic barriers to career advancement, including denial of promotion and even pension after retirement. Many senior faculty who devoted their lives and careers to building up the Women's Studies Centres are running from pillar to post, from High Courts to the Supreme

Court, seeking justice. These real-life struggles recorded in the chapters would wrench the heart of any reader. The academic programs run so effectively by the Centres for many years, now in the present, suffer from diminished credibility uncertainty, prejudices, poor student response, inadequate employment opportunities and uncertain future prospects.

The book calls for action as well as introspection over this state of affairs due to the apathy of bureaucracy, UGC, and concerned university authorities, and the states. The contributors call for accountability and responsibility towards Women's Studies as a discipline and suggest collective efforts to negotiate through dialogue, policy decisions to make Women's Studies a vibrant academic space once again.

I congratulate Prof Asha Shukla for highlighting this existential crisis of the Women's Studies Centres through this valuable book. I hope the book becomes a bridge to offer solutions and contributes to the wider discourse of gender equity

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