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# Editorial

*Shelagh Wilkinson*

Before leaving Canada to teach and travel in India I was anticipating culture shock. I thought I would be meeting women whose lives were very different from my own and that the social differences would be the important experiences to attempt to understand. But as I settled in to live with a group of women in a hostel near the docks, it was the similarities in our lives that surfaced daily in our conversations.

Women in India have the same responsibility for relationships as Canadian women – no matter if they are wife, mother, daughter or sister. While the extended family structure that is common in India offers some women a support system, for others it also adds burdens. And in becoming a wage-earner or a student, Indian women – like their Canadian counterparts – just add extra work to their 'caregiving' obligation. Another shared experience is the way in which Indian women, especially the younger ones, respond to perceived norms of beauty in their culture. The effort that goes into conforming is enormous. One young woman told me that, at eighteen, she thought she still had three years in which to grow taller – and she was visiting a guru who had assured her she could achieve this. "Why taller?" I asked. "Because Indian men prefer their women taller these days." And I thought back to the week before I left Canada, back to the anorexic student sitting in my office who wanted the name of a doctor, to these rites of perfection that de-form us as women.

Some Indian women are now working together in small collectives to help eradicate oppressive practices against women. And such feminist publications as *Manushi: A Journal about Women in Society* provide a voice for them. But Suma Chitnis writes in this issue of the difficulties Indian women have with the words 'feminism' and 'patriarchy.' She feels that the cumulative anger of Western women is alien in her country because of a different "consciousness of self."

From a feminist perspective, India is no different from Canada in some significant aspects. Women at all levels of society are male-dominated. As Carole Yawney points out in her article, "we need to understand the manifestations of patriarchy cross-culturally in order to develop a trans-cultural strategy for confronting it."

The experiences of last year brought into sharp focus for me the need for cross-cultural co-operation and exchange if we are to effect change that will help women globally. "Ngwatio: A Story of Co-operative Research on African women" by Patricia Stamp and Rebecca Njeri Chege points towards this. And the World Conference to Review and Appraise the United Nations Decade for Women (July 15-26, 1985) in Nairobi will give women an opportunity to share our experiences and determine our priorities.

Since I came back from India a paragraph written by Adrienne Rich which I carried around in my notebook has taken on a new meaning. She believes that "feminism must imply an imaginative identification with all women (and with the ghostly woman in all men) and that the feminist must, because she can, extend the act of the imagination as far as possible."

The women whose articles appear in this issue began their writing by an extended, inclusive, act of the imagination. We dedicate this issue to all of us who believe that – collectively – we can.