

Besides the priorities to review language training and the Canadian Job Strategy, the urgent and unresolved need to formulate a long-term co-ordinated approach to immigrant and visible minority women's issues is still outstanding. Such an approach must be co-ordinated on the federal/provincial level since education, health and social services, all delivered under provincial jurisdictions, are the areas with the most direct impact on the everyday lives of immigrant and visible minority women.

After frustrated attempts to obtain action, immigrant and visible minority women groups requested federal assistance for a national conference in Winnipeg in November 1986. Over 250 delegates from across the country participated. The conference was attended by David Crombie, Minister of Secretary of State and Multiculturalism, and Barbara MacDougall, Minister responsible for Status of Women, together with other senior government officials.

The gathering provided a forum for the delegates to gain a deeper understanding of the commonality of experiences which oppress both immigrant and visible minority women. Being immigrant, visible minority and women in a predominantly white society, they are confronted with daily practical problems of racism, sexism and various forms of discrimination. The discussion also underscored the unique situation of the immigrant and refugee women, whose life and work conditions are compounded by transitory compensation such as the lack of language and job skills and the loss of traditional support systems. These conditions are reinforced by the systemic barriers in immigration policies that classify most women as "sponsored" immigrants, rendering them ineligible for language and skills training assistance, and further enforcing their economic dependence and social isolation.

What has emerged in the Winnipeg Conference is a powerful coalition of immigrant and visible minority women. An interim board was elected to form a constitution and to continue the lobbying work of the Action Committee. This historic development marks the beginning of an important era in the immigrant and visible minority women's movement and in their collective struggle for social change, so that they can participate in Canadian society more fully, productively and meaningfully.

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Book Review

Tania Das Gupta
*Learning from Our History:
Community Development by
Immigrant Women in Ontario
1958-1986 - A Tool for
Action*

Toronto: Cross Cultural
Communication Centre, 1987

by *Christina Lee*

This is a resource book written specifically for those working directly with immigrant women in community development, education, health and social services. The approach is primarily participatory research. Originally from India, the author has spent the last seven years working with immigrant and visible minority organizations. The information is drawn directly from the real life experiences of Southern European and Third World immigrant women in their efforts to develop services for their constituents.

The book focuses on the process of community mobilization and development, a crucial component in the collective efforts of these immigrant women to better their lives, and to effect changes in services and programmes. Beginning with a schematic analysis of the history of community development of immigrant women in Ontario for the last twenty years, and interspersed with reflections, specific examples are used to illustrate the process and outcomes. Examples include networking, community health, employment orientation, co-operative enterprises, skills training, battered women shelters, elderly immigrant women services, and special programmes in large formal organizations. The individual case studies give a poignant portrait of the struggles and initiatives of these immigrant women, as well as the lessons learned from the development of these programmes. The adaptability of such projects in different contexts and locations is also noted. A resource list of

significant programmes in Ontario and a selected biography of references are included.

In addition to the information on community development of immigrant women, the book raises important issues for mainstream and ethnic service providers. As revealed from past experiences, employment has been an issue around which immigrant women have developed community programmes, and there is a strong need to obtain secure and acceptable working conditions. The development of collective structures as an approach to community mobilization is also described, particularly in a non-hierarchical way by which immigrant women have equal access to decision making. Since insufficient and unstable funding has always been identified as a major obstacle, concerns are raised regarding the increasing privatization of immigrant women's programmes. Such a move would tend to be counterproductive to the community development spirit and would eliminate the supportive, developmental and empowering process inherent in these programmes. The author argues for the need to allocate funding so that it is reflective of the best interest of the people being served.

The book provides a comprehensive review of the history of community development of immigrant women in Ontario and offers valuable insights regarding the planning and implementation of these programmes. Moreover, significant questions are raised to develop awareness and understanding of immigrant women's issues. The answers to these pressing questions are critical in assisting immigrant women to organize to bring about change to their lives.

Tania Das Gupta, Community Coordinator at Cross Cultural Communication Centre, has recently completed her doctoral thesis at OISE on the deskilling of garment workers.