

Publisher's Preface

Our Bodies, Ourselves, first published in a newsprint version by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective in 1970, has become the definitive health resource for women, used as much by individual women looking for health information as by health rights activists and feminists. The book published in 1984 evolved from the work of this group of women whose own experience led them to realize the extent to which the misinformation and disinformation purveyed by the medical establishment was eroding women's right to health and undermining their control over their bodies. The 2005 edition was one of many major revisions of Our Bodies, Ourselves and the eighth edition of the book, and included several rewritten sections to reflect current realities. Despite the impressive work done by the women's health movement in South Asia and the volume of learning and training materials on women's health, there is a serious dearth of material for the educated and aware woman who is looking for accurate information on health and sexuality. Non-technical materials are focused almost completely on pregnancy and parenthood or on specific medical conditions, while materials on broader issues almost always tend to discourage the non-technical reader. Self-help materials on the other hand, while engagingly written, are open to criticism for the scientific accuracy of the information provided.

The women's health movement has also been struggling with the challenge of taking women's health issues to a broader audience, to inspire and empower women across classes and backgrounds to become engaged in the political aspects of sustaining good health for themselves and their communities.

Our Bodies, Ourselves has filled this niche for two generations of South Asian feminists, providing basic information on the body and its workings, a political analysis of the health-care system and practical and usable information on self-care and self-help. This South Asian edition of Our Bodies, Ourselves, while not departing from the basic structure and content of the original, contains updated and contextual information relevant to women in this region. Specific sections of the text have been amended, keeping in mind the Indian and South Asian contexts, as well as campaigns carried out by the women's movement on local issues such as invasive contraception; AIDS; domestic violence; etc. Additions and replacements have been compiled by an editor with experience and credibility on the issue of women's health, and reviewed by key members of the women's health movement.

This edition consequently, seeks to introduce some key ideas into the public discourse on women's health. Women comprise the largest segment of health workers, health consumers, and health decision-makers for their families and communities, but are under-represented in positions of influence and policy-making. The current pathology and disease-oriented approach to normal life events (birthing, menopause, aging, death) is not an effective way to consider health or structure a health system. Women have a right to know about controversies surrounding medical practices and issues on which there is consensus among medical experts and they can become their own health experts. By making our women readers and users of this book into well-informed health consumers, we hope that they can become catalysts for social change.