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NEWSLETTER

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Editor's Note

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As IAWS moves towards its XIV NATIONAL CONFERENCE, the theme 'Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement' and the venue, Guwahati (Assam) in North East, point to the challenges of the time- challenges to pluralism- not only to civil society practice but also in the realm of social theory development. While the trajectory of India's development post Independence may have brought new skills, social mobility, work, it also created new vulnerabilities for varied sections of the people as also a decline at some levels, highlighted by the Report of the Committee On Status of Women (CSWI, 1975). These setbacks were part of processes that not only loosened key pluralist concepts underlying the constitution- justice, equality, work, livelihood, positive discrimination, public interest- but, at the same time, created possibilities of rethinking the scope of these concepts, the responses to the Mathura rape case judgement, a precursor to this redefinition.

Major shifts in the development trajectory since 1980s also saw a redefining of meanings- constitutional justice, secularism, religious pluralism, cultural identities including caste, ethnic, regional identities. The varied amendments to laws on rape, dowry, the debates around what is known as the Muslim Women's Bill, the Deorala 'sati' the anti-Mandal agitations, the demolition of Babri Masjid, can be considered as key moments in this process. The 1990s also saw a shift from the use of broad categories on women, as in CSWI Report, to new concepts of patriarchy, sexuality, representation and to studies on new forms of hierarchies, power and gendered identities. Focus on the experiential, brought to the fore, the link between power and knowledge, new sources of knowledge, on how power is conceptualized and on how to undertake research on women as subjects who relate to diverse experiences. Studies also pointed to the positionality of women in varied power relations and multiple masculinities relating to patriarchies. The Beijing UN Conference (1995) marked the shift towards theorizing differences, the concept of intersectionality- intersectionality of identity categories (such as gender, caste, race, class, nationality) and how these carry theoretical and political consequences. Labour market studies, for example, which highlighted the intersections of class and gender, began to look at the intersections of caste, class, gender. Structures, social location, identity, women's experience were seen as mutually constituting and shaping each other.

This issue of the IAWS newsletter which has pluralism as its focus, is dedicated to three inspiring women - Vina Mazumdar, Lotika Sarkar, Sharmila Rege whose lives and work mark key moments in the formulation of new concepts and redefinition of categories and provided a sense of continuity to the different conversations and dialogues that take place at varied institutional sites.

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AMU REPORT

Recovering Pasts: Interrogating the Present

Centre for Women's Studies, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) successfully organized a one day workshop in collaboration with the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) on May 11, 2013 at Aligarh. 89 participants attended the workshop.

Prof. Nighat Ahmad, Director of the Centre said that the workshop was an attempt to build an archive by documenting experiences of women alumni, AMU to capture the process of social change and record the challenges faced through personal narratives. Prof. Zakia A. Siddiqui, Founder Director of the Centre for Women's Studies said that it was during the tenure of Mr. Mohd. Hamid Ansari as Vice Chancellor that the Centre was established and the then Chairman of University Grants Commission, Prof. Hari Gautam played a very positive role in the establishment of this Centre. Dr. Indu Agnihotri, General Secretary, IAWS said that AMU occupied a special place among the institutions propagating education among masses.

AMU Vice Chancellor, Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Zameer Uddin Shah in his presidential address expressed his concern about the availability of hostel facilities for girl students of the university. He informed that the university will construct a new hall of residence to accommodate 1500 girls. The hall will be handed over to Women's College for accommodating undergraduate girls. To improve library facilities, the university would provide a grant of Rs. 5 lakhs for purchase of books for the Women's College library. He asked the girls of Women's College to identify books available in the Maulana Azad Library which would be delivered to them next day. He warned that any financial irregularity in the University or any act that lowers the dignity of women will not be tolerated.

Mrs Salma Ansari, the chief guest at the workshop, said, "Gender equality could only be attained if women of the country cutting across the political, religious and linguistic barriers join hands and it will pave the way for their political, economic and social empowerment." She also added that the political dispensations are hardly sensitive to the aspirations of women. She wishfully recalled her student days at Aligarh Muslim University and said that Aligarh has always welcomed new ideas and provided equal opportunities to girl students. The inaugural session ended with Prof. N. A. K. Durrani, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences proposing a vote of thanks.

Alumni Presentations

The first session of the workshop was dedicated to the women alumni of the A.M.U with an intention to document their experiences and archiving it. Following were the alumni who presented their experiences of being in A.M.U.:

- Mrs. Aziza Hanafi
- Professor Bilquees Musavi
- Professor Saira Habib
- Professor Sajida Nabi
- Mrs. Naseem Iqtidar Ali
- Professor Jameela Ahmad
- Prof. Hameeda Ahmad

These alumni mainly studied in the Girls College at Aligarh during 1940's to 1960's. Many of them later on served as faculty in the college and became symbols of encouragement for the next generation. They recalled that during those days there was a section in the Muslim community who vehemently opposed female modern education but for the pro changers, this campus was a symbol of new learning and a tool of social restructuring of the Muslim community with modern values. In this tussle for change, the efforts for female education grew in this campus and women from Muslim elite families found a destination where their dreams could be realized and they could get an opportunity to enter into the process of modern learning.

They remembered that the campus of the Girls' College was not much affected by the forces of communalism. Many of the female teachers were of different religions and they celebrated festivals like Holi, Basant, Christmas, Eid with equal enthusiasm. There was a great respect towards the multiplicity of cultures. Despite the presence of conservatism, there was a progressive and liberal trend in the university campus. At higher levels where co-education persisted, there were arrangements for segregation of both genders in classrooms but it was not strictly imposed upon the girl students and it was received with liberality in the campus. Alumni expressed their deep gratitude towards the teachers who always encouraged the cause of female education. They motivated their distant friends and relatives to send their daughters to Girls' College for acquiring modern education. Female teachers in the Girls' College actively worked for the promotion of female education among the women from the deprived section of the society. They also ran vocational training programmes for their emancipation. Many of them took inspiration and became instrumental to promote the women's issues and mobilize people, particularly women at their native places for this cause. They opened up schools and training centres for the girls at their native places.

After acquiring university education, many of them were appointed as teachers in the college and university. They recalled that it catered to the need of the Girls' College. At the same time they did not face any discrimination on the basis of gender in their appointment at university level. They usually found their male colleagues supportive towards them. Male students sensed uneasiness while being taught by female teachers.

However, these women were socially conscious and raised their voices against forces that were inimical to modern education of females. They played a significant role in redefining community identity, while at the same time, reconstituted ideals of womanhood for Muslim women.

In the session devoted to research, three research scholars shared their findings and surveys...

Following were the researches discussed:

Priya Salomi Lartius: Her topic of research is 'Women in Agricultural Work in Uttar Pradesh'. There were biases in society against women's work in agriculture. . Women farmers in Uttar Pradesh suffer from problems of invisibility and the full range of their work was not accounted. They faced, landlessness, displacement due to the intervention of technology, failure of governmental policies and programmes, and lacuna in state laws. Also highlighted were the various tenancy laws, inheritance laws and wage laws that are discriminatory and ineffective. She suggested development of agricultural technologies for women, generation of new employment opportunities, unionization of agricultural workers, and provision of government loans, subsidies, equipments etc.

Saman Eram Maroof Ahmad: Her research 'Women in the Unorganized Sector: Study of Women Embroiders in Aligarh' is based on the primary survey of 200 embroiders in Aligarh, engaged in patti ka kam. They are predominantly low caste Muslim home based workers who suffer marginalization and whose employment opportunities are adversely affected by purdah restrictions. She further classified patti workers in Skilled and Unskilled category, leading to the differentials in wages. The greater share of women in the earnings of the family does have some positive reflections in decision making. Few women feel empowered and are aware about their exploitation. However, this consciousness of some women was not reflected in any attempts at organizing or improving their conditions. They clearly lack the initiative, and in fact showed reluctance to take up the matter fearing hostility of the middlemen.

Sana Khan: Her research 'State and Women in Pakistan' critically analyzed various provisions of Family Laws Ordinance 1961; specific laws affecting women's rights under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973; Hudood Ordinance 1980 etc. Based on a rigid interpretation of the Sharia Laws, the Hudood Ordinance makes no distinction as to whether a sexual act has been committed willfully or forcibly and makes no distinction between consensual sex and rape. The Hudood Ordinance has often been invoked to intimidate and subjugate women. Her study further focused on various leading women's organizations of Pakistan. She wishes to undertake a field trip to Pakistan and utilize the trip to enrich her work.

Faculty Presentation

Dr Juhi Gupta focussed on "Achievements, Challenges & Future Possibilities of Women's Studies at the Centre for Women's Studies AMU". She highlighted the history of inception of CWS. A brief introduction was given about the Teaching Programmes; Availability of Infrastructure and Library; Seminars, Refreshers Courses, Workshops and other Sensitization/ Awareness programmes conducted so far and social welfare commitments like Remedial Teaching, Medical Camps in the city.

At present, the centre is engaged in a full time three years Under Graduate program (Six semesters from the coming session), Post Graduate program (Four Semesters), M.Phil and Ph.D courses. Centre also has its own library which is equipped with more than 3000 books, reports and subscription of several renowned journals and periodicals.

Misconception and lack of awareness of people about Women's Studies was identified by Dr Gupta as the main challenge for the discipline. Non availability of the text books, broad syllabi, limited career options and lack of awareness among students were seen among the other concerns. Lack of permanent staff at the Centre, both teaching and non-teaching, was a hindrance in materialising future projects of the Centre.

There is no provision for legal advocacy in the city for women. Therefore, the Centre intends to work with local women's groups and Law department at AMU in near future on cases in Mahila Thanas (police cell for women) to help the women in distress. However, all this can only be materialised once centre overcomes the problems of infrastructure and permanent staff.

She also emphasized that the Centre looks forward to act as a link between academicians, activists, government functionaries, NGOs and media persons so as to mainstream women's and gender issues in the society. Building a systematic data base on the status of women working in local establishments such as Lock industry and Patti work through surveys is what the centre is working towards.

The former director of the Centre, Professor Shireen Moosvi said that Women's Studies is an academic discipline where theory and application has to go hand in hand. One cannot become an activist without knowing about the theoretical nuances of the discipline. She said that she was given the responsibility of the Centre for Women's Studies in 2004 as Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

The Centre started off its activities with a two weeks workshop each year starting from 2004 to 2007. These workshops were well attended and generated tremendous response among the students. The academic expedition of the Centre started with a part time P. G. Diploma in Women's Studies in 2005 followed by an UG programme. PG programme started in 2011. Apart from having pure academic courses at Undergraduate and Post Graduate levels, the centre regularly organizes Health Camps, Workshops, Conferences, and Awareness Programmes etc.

She put on record the cooperation of colleagues from different departments which made possible initiation and continuation of the academic programmes at the Centre. She also drew attention towards the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies which got reflected in the diversity of carefully chosen research topics.

The workshop ended with Professor Nighat Ahmad thanking the participants for their active involvement. She expressed the hope that workshops like this will help in having a fruitful exchange of ideas and such ongoing dialogues will help in building linkages between academics and activism.

CWDS WORKSHOP

Issues before the Women's Movement

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The Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) with financial support from the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) organized a one day workshop in order to take stock of some of the issues facing the women's movement today. It made no claims of tackling all or even the most significant challenges or debates before the women's movement at this time, given their range and depth. Rather, this workshop was envisaged as an opportunity to offer space for discussion and dialogue on just a few of the issues before us. None of them are new, indeed they are as old as the movement itself, even though they may take on fresh forms in the present time. The workshop brought together a range of speakers who have been active on various fronts, and an audience of about 100 people, many of them students. All the sessions were brought alive as much by what the speakers had to say as by the discussions that ensued. Needless to add that even the discussions brought home how much more attention we need to be paying to the questions before us, while there was also good reason to feel energized and renewed by the ongoing struggles and insights in evidence on that day. Very brief summaries which unfortunately cannot do justice to the richness of the presentations are offered below.

Following a short introduction to the workshop, the sessions of the morning offered diverse glimpses into the long standing issue of 'women' and the gendering of movements. In the past it has been possible to make a simple distinction between 'social movements' in which women may be active, and a 'women's movement' in which issues can be taken up in their own right in the name of women as such. However, it is not clear whether such a distinction is particularly useful today. It is also questionable to think in terms of stages or phases, such that women in 'other' movements then require further politicization by developing their autonomy. One of the most obvious problems with this way of proceeding has to do with which 'women' are being represented or considered in the first place. How then might the gendering of movements be understood today and where are the struggles most visible? The morning sessions sought to address these kinds of questions from four vantage points – the emergence of a disability movement; contemporary student politics; Muslim identity and anti-communal struggles; and the political movement identified with Naxalbari.

The first session was chaired by Anita Ghai with Renu Addlakha (CWDS) and Samia Vasa (English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad) as speakers. Renu Addlakha began with the question as to whether it would be accurate to speak of a disability movement or rather of disability advocacy in the contemporary Indian context. She then chose to develop her own understanding by looking at the new emergence of disability related issues in relation to prior modes of welfarism towards different categories of the disabled and their degrees of gender-blindness, on the one hand, and the capacity of women's groups and organizations to become more sensitized to disability, on the other. She explained how the disability movement in India (if that is the right name for it) did not simply fit the western paradigm, given the multiple sites from which it has developed in our context, including international influences. Many schisms between mental and physical, as well as hierarchies of impairment bedevil efforts on the ground, and issues of language are a major challenge especially beyond the English speaking world. Even so, our laws have broadened to include issues of reservations and affirmative action for 'people with disabilities', the insights of interdependency thrown up by disability theorists are providing new perspectives for movement politics, and questions of care from a disability perspective are critiquing feminist paradigms. While there is a very real question of not just bringing gender but a more intersectional approach into disability, the current forms of politics, ngoisation and styles of leadership need feminist attention as well. In the women's movement she

pointed out that it was still mainly feminists with disabilities who brought up disability related issues.

Samia Vasa then took up the theme of student politics and the question of gender from the perspective of her experiences as a student in the recently expanded EFLU in the city of Hyderabad. Whether it be reducing new student initiatives towards engendering student elections to having a single women's representative, or effectively preventing women from speaking out in situations of protest, especially those from marginal locations, student organizations were well able to see the extent to which the administration suppresses or contains student voices, including those of women. However, she felt that student groups who were active on issues relating to caste and community, were less able to recognize that problems are not only 'out there' in the power structures of a university, which became evident in the kinds of opposition encountered from such organizations when a gender forum was started on campus. Student organizations lacked the reflectiveness to see gender as a structuring force beyond that of acts of inclusion. This required thinking about subject formation within cultures of violence, not just through acts of sexual violence, as in the aftermath of the Delhi gang rape. She concluded her presentation with the tragic case of a student suicide on the campus who was a Kashmiri Muslim and possibly a homosexual. It was not just the extreme lack of responsibility on the part of the administration but also homophobic erasures among student protestors that failed to provide sufficient space for dealing with his conflicts. Focussing on cultures of violence as well as histories of institutional injustice were therefore the tasks for a feminist politics on campuses such as theirs. Both in the remarks of the chair and the ensuing discussion questions of identity and tokenism, the changing face of politics, and forms of democracy within and across groups were heavily debated.

The next session was chaired by G. Arunima with Mallarika Singha Roy (JNU) and Hasina Khan (Forum/Awaaz-e-Niswan, Bombay) as speakers. Mallarika Roy brought a historical perspective to the discussions with her focus on the Naxalbari movement (1969-75) in Bengal. She began by pointing out the severe limitations of a compensatory approach to understanding women's participation in Naxalbari whereby the dominant male narrative remains intact and the women on the margins. Her efforts at gendering the movement take off from memories of its 'magical' quality for women – perceiving this magic both in terms of extreme suffering and unimaginable hope. Through a series of analytical frames beginning with life histories and accounts of women, she questions the idealized notions of womanhood that course through Naxalbari accounts in relation to 'real' women's involvements, situating Naxalbari women within the multiple axes of exploitation, subordination and oppression, all of which consolidated patriarchy in their lives and politics. Here she is particularly interested in undoing the marginalization of rural women in comparison to their more visible urban counterparts. Her final entry point is around contradictory aspects of violence – the violence experienced by women including torture at the hands of the police, but also their desire to be part of revolutionary violence, and the movement's changing response to Naxalbari women in this regard. Mallarika also reflected on her current re-engagements with this area of research, within the emergence of the interdisciplinary domain of women's studies in the Indian context as well as in relation to contemporary forms of militancy and notions of 'virangana women'.

Hasina Khan brought to the discussion the history of Bombay after the riots of 1992 which transformed the lives of its Muslim populations, almost entirely for the worse. Nor could she see an end in sight, whether in terms of justice to the victims in spite of the court judgements passed, or of realising feminist ideals for Muslim women in particular. The effect of the riots, whose wounds have yet to heal, has been the ghettoisation of Muslims, and increased powers to religious organizations and leaders, who have played the most visible role in restoring people's lives, certainly not the state or its schemes. Muslim women have largely come to identify with this new religious identity and to see their futures as being shaped by religious sanctions and protections. Organisations such as Forum and Awaaz-e-Niswan have been active over the last two decades, addressing the nature of communalism for both Hindus and Muslims especially among marginal groups and in slum locations, trying to make for positive change. But it would appear that spaces are shrinking rather than expanding, and that more recent experiences such as the fast tracking of the Bombay Blasts case has only deepened the communal divide. Education is the only sphere where women's participation has seen some increase. She concluded with some remarks about the efforts they made last December to commemorate the anti-communal struggles following the riots through a month long campaign *Bombay ki kahani Mumbai ki Zubani*. Both presentations by Mallarika and Hasina led to very extensive and lively discussions. Arunima began by remarking on the contrasts in the two presentations, the one dominated by problems of agency among Naxalbari women and the other the growing victimization of Muslim women in Mumbai. And yet, as other questions also brought out, this session demonstrated that notions of victimhood or agency would not do justice to challenges before engendering anti-communal politics or the new face of Maoist insurgency.

The first afternoon session took the form of a panel discussion concerning questions of caste and feminism. How has the women's movement addressed the question of caste and its exclusions? What have been the forms that Dalit and Bahujan women's organizing and concerns have taken? Where are the lines of conflict and what might be the sites for better dialogue? This session was chaired by Meera Velayudhan with Asha Kowtal (National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, New Delhi), Anita Bharti (Hindi writer and activist), Rekha Raj (researcher and activist, Kerala) and Meena Gopal (TISS and Forum/Labia, Mumbai) as speakers, and Prof. Gopal Guru as discussant. Meera Velayudhan opened the session with remarks about her current research on her own mother, the first Dalit woman graduate in South India and member of the Constituent Assembly, to give a sense of the long and varied history that Dalit women have traversed. Rekha Raj began by presenting sections from her paper on 'Dalit women as Political Agents: A Kerala Experience'. She emphasized the specific context of Kerala with its much vaunted levels of social development and

long history of communist struggle and rule, saying that the nature and relatively late emergence of Dalit women as visible actors can only be understood in this context. It is not that Dalit women were not active but were rather 'present in absence', invisibly active, both in mass struggles and in civil society movements. Mainstream feminists, though they came to acknowledge caste in their action and writing, did so in a 'passive' mode where caste does not have to do any real analytical or political work. The first Dalit women's organisations emerges in Christian welfare oriented contexts. Subsequently it is only towards the end of the 1990s that Dalit women's voices are heard in a new way not unlike what was happening elsewhere in the country. Such writing has been complex and hard to categorize, including conflicts among them. Many times they are given false choices between women's and Dalit struggles, or stigmatized for not conforming to stereotypes of the woman activist. She gave the example of C K Janu. But there is no denying the newness of these voices, strong and making clear claims, and it is in their writings that the search for enabling self-definitions is most apparent.

Anita Bharti was the next speaker, who drew upon her own poetry in Hindi in order to depict how Dalit women's situation has been repeatedly marginalised. The descendants of Savitribai Phule have had to deal with discrimination, and the creation through Ambedkar of the category of Scheduled Castes did not bring this to an end. She also remarked that though the role of Ambedkar and his ultimate disappointment in the Hindu Code Bill has not received sufficient attention, yet it is also unclear as to how the situation and problems of Scheduled Caste women were to be adequately addressed through this Bill. There is no question that Dalit women have been completely sidelined in histories of the women's movement – Radha Kumar's History of Doing that covers the 19th and 20th centuries has absolutely nothing to say on the subject. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that Dalit struggles have been patriarchal. She was of the opinion that there is considerable imitation of patriarchal brahminical norms in many Scheduled Caste families and this needs to be questioned too.

Asha Kowtal picked up on what had been said already by the previous speakers. Asha described the multiple oppressions suffered by Dalit women across caste, gender and economic deprivation. The women's movement had yet to appreciate the extent to which we are a caste ridden society, which affects everyone, but specially those who have to encounter its discrimination daily, be it the newly elected representative in the panchayat or the fact that it is dalit women who are the most frequent targets of rape and violence. She believed that two issues in particular needed wide spread attention – manual scavenging and the forced dedication of dalit women as joginis or devadasis. But she also called for greater support to dalit women's independent organisations including those women who are representatives within reserved categories.

Meena Gopal spoke about the difficulties that caste issues have posed to the women's movement and the frequent failures to respond adequately. One of the less focussed on aspects of caste and gender discrimination concerns the stigmatization of lower caste women's labour. She referred specifically to the bar dancers ban in Mumbai a few years ago, in a situation where many of the dancers came from a particular dalit community. While a number of feminist groups demanded a lifting of the ban and supported the bar dancers' right to employment and livelihood, several dalit organisations actively opposed this form of employment as degraded sexual labour. She felt the need to oppose hereditary caste based forms of sexual labour while nonetheless seeing the need for more dialogue on issues involving sexuality and sex work. In this regard she referred very positively to a recent gathering of dalit and adivasi women in large numbers at TISS earlier in the year, where non-Dalit feminists were welcome as listeners only. She felt this was an extremely important experience and event and one from which feminists like her had a lot to learn.

Gopal Guru, as discussant, responded briefly to many of the points raised agreeing broadly with the feeling that the concerns and voices of Dalit women have yet to receive their due. At the same time he cautioned against what he called the 'marathon' approach to claiming space and voice, when indeed we are not engaged in a race in the first place. Meera Velayudhan opened up the discussion which brought out many different ways of looking at the present conjuncture regarding caste. One participant felt that it should no longer be necessary to have separate sessions as was done here, while others disagreed, saying that the caste question has yet to be adequately tackled by non-Dalit feminists and others, including the fact that certain issues have not even figured on the agendas of the women's movement. By way of a response speakers emphasized that we continue to live in a caste ridden society while at the same time Dalit women are not pleading with anyone but looking for constructive conversations.

Finally, given the new visibility that issues related to violence have received in the public domain in recent months, the concluding session focussed on rethinking violence and rape. Intensive struggles and discussions around this very old theme have taken place in this period, certainly when compared to the recent past, and in ways that one would hardly have anticipated. This panel discussion was chaired by Uma Chakravarti with Jagmati Sangwan (AIDWA Rohtak), Shuddhabrata Sengupta (CSDS New Delhi) and V. Geetha (independent researcher with Tara publishing, Chennai) as speakers, and Farah Naqvi, Delhi based activist as discussant. Jagmati Sangwan spoke passionately drawing from her recent experiences in leading struggles against sexual violence and rape in Haryana. Just in the last year numerous rapes have taken place and they have been engaged in fighting for justice for these victims in ways that require more reflection from the women's movement. First of all, there are certain patterns that they see in the social location of the victims compared to that of the perpetrators. While those who were assaulted were two-thirds Dalit and the rest OBC, the perpetrators came from families that enjoyed social and economic power to the point of feeling immune. Such was their impunity that even lodging an FIR was proving insurmountable. In October 2012 the AIDWA decided to launch a protest to bring these issues and struggles to national attention, and they had got all the necessary permissions to do so. But the protest march was

lathi charged by the police and national leaders openly harassed. Dharnas, meetings with the Chief Minister produced no effect. Nor did their efforts to try and provide relief to the rape survivors with the help of the very government rehabilitation schemes at the state and national levels that are available on paper yield anything – they visited every possible government dept and person, but to no avail. Jagmati posed some interesting questions about the social and aspirational background of these women. She believed these were young women who were keen to combat traditional patriarchal attitudes, who liked to dress well and look good, who entered public spaces for study or work, aspiring for a better life. They were raped, she said quite plainly, as a retaliatory measure by men in positions that were economically and socially superior, to show them their place. The open screening of porn movies she felt only aggravated the situation. It was clear therefore that women's rights to occupy more space, along with all the other battles, against honour killings, for 33% reservations and so on, must be supported, whatever the odds.

Shuddhabrata Sengupta spoke next, identifying himself as a chronicler and listener. He began by pointing out that the protests that followed the gang rape on December 16 2012 were not all that unique. In 2005 and 2010 the rape of women students also brought thousands of students onto the streets in protest, but since they were not covered by the media almost no one remembers them now. Yet he feels that these histories of spontaneous protest by young people, claiming rather than seeking justice from the State, have entered popular consciousness and were taken forward in 2012. What was new in the current protests was the shift from justice (and capital punishment to the perpetrators) to that of freedom, such that freedom became a resounding cry indistinguishable from the cry for freedom in Kashmir. Moreover, the chanting against 'perpetrators' ranged far and wide to include family, khaaps. the police, and it was not just the death of this victim in all her aspirational desire but those of many other cases – Shopian, Khairlanji, Soni Sori -- that were taken up. The presence of large numbers of men who joined, were, in his view, a sign of the success of the women's movement in that the battle had now touched everyone.

The final speaker was V. Geetha who began by reminding the audience of the long history of fighting rape within the women's movement beginning in the 1980s. In the South, especially, this has expanded to include acts of sexual violence under the Prevention of Atrocities Act against SCs/STs, and came to a crisis after the Gujarat riots of 2002 which saw an eroticisation of rape against Muslim women. She therefore felt the need to counter the view of rape as random, rather it is highly structured. Moreover it is messy and blurs any simple distinctions between happy sex and violent rape. It thrives on the everyday impunity of sexual harassment in public spaces and its twisted logic of the acceptable and the forbidden. She believed that the lack of any sense of accountability in Hindu culture only aids this twisted process whereby what is forbidden is allowed. Finally feminists need to confront the upper caste Hindu majoritarian structure of the state today which effectively grants non-citizen status to large numbers of people, especially women, who simply by virtue of their identity are fair game for the police and the army.

Farah Naqvi responded by noting her own personal entry into identity politics as a Muslim post Gujarat but then went on to say that it is necessary to carve out spaces of alliance, common platforms that do not set up particular identities. Thus it is necessary today to fight on both Dalit and Muslim issues together. Moreover there have been gains within the losses, as in the recently passed Criminal Amendment Act 2013 where, even if caste atrocities have not been included under aggravated sexual assault, disrobing has been included for the first time. In the ensuing wider discussion many questions were raised and the differences in evidence among the panelists also carried forward. What exactly made the Delhi protests so unique? Is randomness the default position in urbanising India or could it be anonymity? How bring this into relationship with the sheer everydayness of sexual violence that Dalit women know too well? Issues of citizenship and the state, the role of law, regional contexts all came up for discussion.

As on that day itself, it would be impossible to sum up and provide a conclusion to the array of issues that filled the workshop. Suffice it to say, that for those who wonder whether there is a women's movement in India, the evidence, testimonies, and issues raised so vividly and from such diverse locations laid that question to rest.

IAWS WORKSHOP (GUJARAT)

Gender, Alternate Media and Feminist Organizing

A two day workshop was organized by Indian Association For Women's Studies (IAWS) in collaboration with Dept of Journalism (Gujarat. University), NAVSARJAN and ANANDI on 12-13th August 2013 at Ahmedabad. The workshop which was jointly coordinated by Meera Velayudhan (EC member and Editor, IAWS) and Manjula Pradip (Director, Navsarjan) was hosted by the Dept of Journalism (Gujaratj. University) and drew over 88 participants, mainly media students and young professionals, writers, artists. Mallika Sarabhai, well known theatre artist, dancer and activist, gave the inaugural address including a DVD presentation which gave a fantastic momentum as she combined her discussion on the vast avenues of alternate media with an interactive

dialogue with the students on their notions of feminism.

The first thematic Session on Social Movements and Forms of Media was chaired by: Dr. Kalpana Shah, a political scientist, and included visual presentations by Kutch Mahila Vikas Sanathan (KMVS) by Priti and Lata on the two forms of interventions- community radio and mobile .The community radio had held over 600 episodes relating to women's issues, which is particularly important because the area it operates in is very under-developed. Rapid industrialization brought more technology, i.e. mobile phones, and the organization set up a help line so women facing harassment/violence/etc. can call the Helpline. The helpline has also helped to create stronger linkages with the police. Kailash representing UMANG, community media unit linked with ANANDI and comprising Adivasi women from Panchmahal narrated how they emerged as videographers, filming live issues and in the process also gaining more insights into issues such as food security, violence against women, as well as gaining skills. SEWA Video members Manjula Rawal and Daksha Mehta, former informal sector workers-headload and saree beeding/embroidery workers, spoke about their experiences in the process of film making and how they had taken back to the villages what they had learnt.. Daksha focused on photography and videography with the help and training from SEWA including learning how to use the internet. She met with a lot of resistance from her family while going through the training since they believe that such work and skills are a man's job and her space was within the home. These interventions led to raising awareness and building women's leadership to face the new challenges.

In the thematic session -: Performative Forms –chaired By Dr. Sonal Pandya, Director, Dept of Journalism (Gujarat. University), the Devgarh Baria Sangathan Natak Tukdi, a street theatre group of 20 Adivasi women (daily wage workers and small farmers) performed their well known, lively and thought provoking play” Koi Ben Dakan Na Thi “ (no woman is a witch).while Kabir , architect and theatre person spoke about the plays performed in different places focusing on social issues, in particular those focusing on varied gender issues.. Aditi Desai, prominent theatre personality, spoke about her personal struggles and developing social concerns which found expression in arts/performance Her performance in a play Stree, .the first of its kind held in Ahmedabad made her realize the power of this medium and such plays were performed at different places, often combined with a focus on local issues. Many a time, she sang to collect a crowd. She drew inspiration from Augusto Boal's, ‘ Theatre of The Oppressed , and performed plays among varied marginalized sections such as Adivasis, dalits. It was an interactive process, a two way communication where issues are taken forward while audience dialogue to seek solutions. Workshops have been conducted among police, caste organizations, NGOs, etc. Aditi read and enacted from narratives on Kasturba Gandhi and Savitribai Phule while Abhinay Banker read from Manto and Siraj. Kaushambi Bhatt, a media student presented a moving mono act on the Delhi rape case, mass rape of Muslim women in the 2002 communal violence in Gujarat. The media students also prepared two documentaries, one on Iron Sharmila and domestic violence. It was noted that in performative forms, there is the ability to change patriarchal norms and to restructure the discussion of issues through performance. .

Speaking in the thematic session “: Institutional and Professional Challenges”, Dr. Sonal Pandya said: “ Gender is not just a small part of the curriculum, but a big part of everyone's lives. For local issues and the way the media frames things, if you're poor you work on the farms and such and you don't have time to worry about anything else and if you're a professional, you're consumed in your work, so the media focuses on the middle class to direct issues to. TV has been used as a form of education but it's moving toward just entertainment and it's heavily (negatively) influencing the rural people. So when there are rural theater groups, people want to see soaps instead of educational presentations. Mainstream TV is promoting the “superwoman”- thin, fair, pretty, devoted, organizes meetings, does her prayers, cooks, cleans, essentially does everything. Her life and her role revolve around the marriage in the soaps and it is an unrealistic and unattainable image the shows are portraying. The lines between entertainment and news have also become blurred”.

Student Presentations included:

Video #1: Domestic Violence. A girl is shown watching TV and hears her neighbor beating his wife. Instead of calling for help, she calls her friend to gossip about them. Then it shows the woman who was beat looking in the mirror trying to cover her wounds before going out.

Poem #1: presented by a female student on the girl child (while in the uterus) talking about how she wants to be born and have a full life.

Poem #2: (presented by the same female student) on dowry death

Video #2.: Created by a student group on the AFSPA's use in Manipur and the situation there. A large part of the video focused on Iron Sharmila, the “Iron Lady of Manipur” and her 11-year fast. There was a lively debate following the showing of the film regarding the situation and media coverage in Manipur as opposed to Kashmir.

The workshop concluded with a Panel discussion: the Women's Movement, Diversity and Democratization by prominent women, activists, writers, academicians . Chandraben Shrimal, a dalit woman writer spoke about the hardships of being a Dalit woman and how she made the conscious decision to become a writer and get educated. In the 9th grade, she was forced to get married and had a difficult life with a lot of suffering, especially when it came to her in-laws. Her husband loved her and she loved him, so she stayed with him despite these hardships. She said, “I had to cover my face; I couldn't see the sky.” She attended college and then became a

drawing teacher before becoming a writer. Another hardship befell her when she had a miscarriage after slipping and falling. After two of her poems were published and she won a storytelling competition, she decided that she was in fact a good writer and wanted to pursue that path. Later, she set up the Gujarat Dalit Women's Writers Association. After her husband died, she told her children she still wanted to stay on her own and just focus on her writing.

Jahvni (ANANDI) said, " Intersectionality includes the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination. There are many shades of feminism but an overarching theme is that the personal is political. There is an immediate need to recognize agency and the ability to fight and analyze what is happening and how to positively change things. The role of media and academic institutions should be in part, to expose students to the subaltern (marginalized, subordinated communities). This gives space to a variety of groups and voices. Further, gender equality is a personal need as well as a global goal that we should all work towards."

Saroopben , writer, activist began by acknowledging that she was privileged because she was born in a dominant caste and came from what is known as a good family and had the chance to be the head of the literature department at a well known university. She didn't know or identify as a feminist initially. She realized that you have to look outside of yourself and see how others' views are; that's when she realized she was a feminist. She also started questioning why her community was oppressing other communities and then wrote a poem about it.

Self-reflection is key, especially when it comes to your own privileges. It was not until later that she understood the truth behind "the personal is political" and how that played into the women's movement. "If I'm not a Dalit, can I be part of the Dalit movement? If I'm not a white woman, can I be part of the women's movement?" The answer is yes. The more people who come together, the better and stronger the movement will be.

There needs to be a stronger women's movement in Gujarat and women, including tribal and Dalit women, need to join together instead of focusing on other boundaries. People must focus on the over-arching concept of equality. Responsible citizens will use whatever skills they have and you must start a journey to challenge yourself. Communication is a powerful tool.

Manjula Pradeep (Navsarjan) noted that she had a difficult upbringing from the start because she was a girl and she was also sexually abused when she was a child, but there was no support for her. Later she began her work on caste discrimination. She has faced both gender and caste discrimination and has spent her whole adult life helping others to fight that discrimination. Religion, sub-caste and class: you must examine the intersectionality and mobility of those issue areas. When you work within a community, it is what you can do for them, with them. It's important not to place yourself above the community you're working with. It's a mutual process. Like the white women leading the women's movement in the US and then the black women getting space within the movement, a similar thing may be happening here. There has to be space for women from the different communities. Recently there has been a shift in the identity of the Dalit; now instead of it being someone who is oppressed, it is someone who strives for and practices equality. Now Dalit is more of a political term. Identity politics are important to understand in movements, especially in this women's movement that has so many identities within it. The movement will be successful when there are multiple groups of men, women, children, adivasis and Dalits coming together.

Dr. Sonal Pandya held that in dominant communities, if the woman is educated, the man does not want to marry her. It's not just an issue of feminism it is an issue of humanism. Meaningful engagement and real education are key for responsible members of society and students. When she married a Dalit man, her father supported her. Change starts in the home and spreads outward. There has to be a certain level of self-awareness present to begin with before movements can really gain momentum.

Meera Velayudhan (IAWS) spoke about the sites from where she drew a sense of justice- her agrarian slave family background, the varied points of history and identities that shaped them and they in turn shaped and her own journey in gender studies and the women's movement, the feminist and dalit feminist movement in particular.

The workshop concluded with an open discussion and feedback from students in particular who stressed on the need for more such interactive and thought provoking workshops and spaces for dialogues.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY WORKSHOP (KERALA)

GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY AND TRANSVERSAL POLITICS

Inter University Centre for Social Science Research and Extension (IUCSSRE), Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala in collaboration with Indian Association of Women Studies (IAWS) and Council for Social Development (CSD), Hyderabad, organized a six day (2 to 6 September 2013) Feminist Research Methodology workshop 'Gender, Intersectionality and Transversal Politics' at Kottayam. Twenty five participants- M.phil/Ph.D students from different parts of India and research students from IUCSSRE participated in the workshop. The workshop which began with a keynote – a tribute to Dr. Sharmila Rege-by Prof. Kancha Ilaiah, interrogated the concept of intersectionality from a multidisciplinary perspective. The concept has radically changed the way diversity and difference among women was conceived, and also in developing new approaches in understanding inequality and complex dynamics of oppression and privilege, in theorizing identity, and individual experiences. The resource persons included Dr. Sanal Mohan, Dr.S..Anandhi, Dr. Anita Ghai, Dr. U.Kalpagam, Ms. Sreerexha, Dr. Shamshad, Dr. Sheeba KM, Dr. Meera Velayudhan.

The term 'intersectionality' was introduced by Kimberley Crenshaw (1989) when she discussed African American women's employment and later presented the same at the World Conference Against Racism (Durban, 2001), a term also adopted by the UN Commission on Human Rights in 2002 in the resolution on the human rights of women. It was argued that each social division had a different ontological basis which was irreducible to other social divisions. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms and this affects the way we theorize them as well as the way we theorize the connections between the different levels. They are expressed in specific institutions and organizations-state laws, state agencies, trade unions, voluntary organizations, family etc.

Intersectionality is a methodological and theoretical approach to inequality. A growing feminist scholarship investigating caste, class, ethnicity and gender as being inter-linked, argue that these forms of stratification need to be studied in relationship with each other. This approach of looking at social inequality and in particular, analyzing institutions, power relations, culture, inter-personal relations etc has been termed intersectionality. The elements that go into theorizing intersectionality are as follows: inclusion of perspectives of multiply marginalized sections, in particular, women from dalit, adivasi, fishing, pastoral communities, looking at varied institutions that co-determine inequalities, i.e. how inequalities are multiply determined and inter-linked. This approach also gives voice to the particularity of perspectives and the needs of specific categories of women and locating distinctive standpoints that suggest complex and contested configurations of power.

THE HISTORICAL MATERIALISM CONFERENCE

■ ■ ■ Excerpts drawn from a report prepared by Rohini Hensman, writer, independent scholar, activist based in Mumbai

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Historical Materialism (HM), a Marxist journal founded in 1997 in London held the Delhi HM conference in April 2013, the first to be held in South Asia, on the theme, 'New Cultures of the Left'. A total of 1579 participants registered at the conference, and of these, 912 were students. While there were slightly more male than female presenters, women constituted at least half the participants. A recurring theme in several panels was authoritarianism, communalism and fascism in South Asia. There was a panel on the lessons of the Gujarat genocide, at the end of which the book 'Pursuing Elusive Justice: Mass Crimes in India and International Standards, edited by Vahida Nainar and Saumya Uma, was released.

A very interesting session on love, marriage and gender oppression raised questions about how socialist feminists should view male-female sexual relationships. Given the widespread occurrence of violence against choice marriages and so-called honour killings of young people who are involved in liaisons which their families oppose, would it be incumbent on socialist feminists to support such marriages, despite feminist critiques of marriage? What would a socialist feminist position be on love, fidelity and sexual assault between comrades in a revolutionary organisation? Gender issues figured in many other sessions, including the panel on militarism and the plenary on democracy and human rights, where the use of the law to fight for human rights was taken up, with an emphasis on the law on sexual assault. A presentation on sex workers in the session on capitalism and marginalised forms of labour sparked off a lively debate. A panel on the Arab uprisings included a vivid presentation on new forms of feminist struggle in Egypt and Tunisia. One of the panels on the Left included a discussion of the theory and practice of Left parties in India with respect to women's liberation. Two presentations examined alternative sexualities and 'family' relationships of 'hijras'.

DISCUSSION (STUDENT SPECIAL)

Feminism, Spirituality and Secularism

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‘Things which equal the same thing also equal one another’. This is one of the Five Euclidian notions, and is most suited to the concepts of feminism and spirituality. There is a certain confluence between the two, which is oft unrecognised and lies buried beneath the overburden that shrouds society today. One may attribute this to inequality which when probed further naturally questions the very basis of patriarchy, whose foundations are rooted deep in the fabric of societal (dis)harmony.

Feminism at its very core is prescriptive of the need for the establishment of a balance in society, one that requires the growth and propagation of a sense of equality between individuals of different sexes. It talks about the need for emancipation and reform-the latter often stressing the importance of ceasing to view women as objects of sexuality, where all judgement is pervaded by the assessment of bodily endowments, with the consideration of capabilities and acumen obliterated. It also seeks to abolish male tyranny and any miasmatic remnants of what may have seeped in along the way. This is definitely not unnatural, as most humans desire to be treated as equals, save for the few consigned to genuflection.

On a convergent tack, spirituality is ingrained in the minds of people and manifests in many forms. Hope and faith, as square and simple as these may seem, are the guiding principles of spirituality. These serve as pillars to almost everyone, where spirituality presents in the form of an unnamed feeling, a concept that one cannot ordinarily put a finger to but yet exists, providing the tranquility and luminosity individuals often seek on days of introspective solitude.

Where then do feminism and spirituality coalesce and how do these create and sustain a secular atmosphere? Women, like men and other human beings do come with their own set of spiritual needs, the need for a sense of direction and a parallel dimension that throws up a space for reflection and meditation. The achievement of this is a product of rationale and cannot be dismissed as Utopian. Emphasis should be laid on peeling away the many layers of oppression in order to set adrift a new anti-thesis with the objective of striking a balance.

The significance of women to religion and spirituality has been overlooked to a very large extent, where they do not so much as enter the realm of consideration. The examples of this are numerous, and the provenance is unquestionably ancient. As misogynistic views and opinions continue to tighten their stranglehold, it is time one stopped to interpret religion differently.

Religion since its inception has tilted in the favour of men right from the time the human race was able to gain an understanding of its subtleties and many shades. This has been the basis of religious interpretation, where all talk of gender is restricted to the male sex, and the concept of equality is far fetched. This often sets in a debilitating flow to the natural order of things, where the downward slide of womankind takes on the form of normalcy. Patriarchal regimes function to the detriment of women, and religious spaces are among the first to be permeated by these.

The objective here isn't the assertion of the superiority of womankind, but is about effecting a change in the everyday workings of the world, by introducing gender equality and the importance of this in the context of religion and spirituality. There is absolutely no need for pedestals of any kind, but a sense of consociation that places women on par with men, granting them the freedom to practice their religion(s), in a manner they deem fit, conducive to their spiritual growth.

The recent Declaration of Women's Rights by the United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women that sought to discuss issues of marital rape and domestic violence, met with much opposition from the majority of the Muslim Brotherhood (in Egypt). This brought to light the general aversion to any mention of gender equality, let alone its association with spirituality and religious environments. This aversion leaves no room for open discourse. The problem here isn't solely limited to men but also relates to women, who are often stranded in that they are accepting of either a spiritual environment or feminism but not the two and certainly not together. Cocooned, the only opening they see brings to mind a cul-de-sac situation, where the choice they have to make is mutually exclusive.

Religion within spirituality is representative of a fluid situation- one that has an ever-changing form, yet refuses to look beyond the horizon of the male race. It is capricious in a certain sense. This is not to say that there is no mention of women in any of the major religions or religious texts, but this is to approach the matter critically and question the subordination of women, which today is commonplace. The fact that only a handful of individuals the world-over, see something fundamentally wrong with the denial of

spiritual freedom to women is truly saddening and is rather atavistic.

Philosophers over the years have sought to delve into the subject of the enlightenment world-view, where human reasoning is said to lie at the very crux of development and progress. This was often unjustly extended to support justifications of anthropocentrism, which in this case can be used to talk about the enervating impact of patriarchy, aided by a male-centric approach to social interactions and behaviour, which ultimately determines equal-ness. It can be said to take into account the ever-increasing need for a show of superiority and gender supremacy, which then dictates all else.

Secularism can be viewed as a natural consequence of gender equality in the spiritual realm. This would serve as a constructive force, providing a definite skeleton, which at present lies on tenuous foundations. The underlying principle here is the growth of religious tolerance, one that allows individuals to respect the many spiritual wanderings of others, however different these may be from their own.

Equality lies at the fulcrum of existence, constantly engaged in the search for equilibrium between spirituality and secularism. Stagnant systems continue to mar religious landscapes, where an outlet for liberation is a near impossibility. The situation on hand doesn't actually require prefatory remarks, yet the universal failure to effect all-round involvement is indicative of the absence of an inclusive groundwork.

Shulamith Firestone once wrote, "love is essentially a much simpler phenomenon-it becomes complicated, corrupted or obstructed by an unequal balance of power." This can be modified, replacing love with spirituality, serving to retain the original essence of the statement, where a balance of power would throw open the innermost sanctums of worship that have for so long remained closed and inaccessible to women.

The restructuring of theological doctrines has emerged a necessity, given the fact that the very concept of objectivity has been corroded to represent biased sentiments. 'Things which equal the same thing also equal one another.' This is most appropriate to the tenet of equality before the eyes of God, where men and women shall be treated as equals, with this equality of gender providing the footing for equality in the eyes of God (and religious pursuits). It encourages the creation of an atmosphere of collective worship, freed from the rule of segregating forces. It is important to extract from the rubble of prejudiced thinking, that which grants freedom and an equal platform, in keeping with realism, and encourages the development of the individual conscience in the direction of spiritualism.

A premonition of better days to come has loomed large over the optimistic, so hope is not lost on humankind- the hope that spirituality and secularism shall co-exist, aided by the enforcement of a sublime and elegant form of equality.

DISCUSSION

Student Politics at EFLU and the Question of Gender

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This essay was written with the objective of analyzing and understanding the place of gender and sexuality in the political landscape of the EFL University campus in Hyderabad. Student organizations have in the campus have raised questions about the absence of most women in the political spaces and movements of the campus. Even as we grapple with the question of absence, I want to focus on the meanings and uses of the some women who are able to participate in the political life of the campus. I also want to analyse the structure of political spaces in EFLU that can engage with gendered subjects on only certain terms. How are questions of gender articulated? Why are women's voices not central to the students' movements' discourses of emancipation? How are issues related to gender and sexuality simply relegated to a list of oppressions that must be undone and criticised, one after the other? How is the rhetoric about a feudal university administration completely oblivious to the fact that fields of power are gendered? I will attempt to address these questions by drawing on the recent histories of student politics in EFLU. Though this essay will focus on the EFLU campus in Hyderabad, I hope that these questions will also be productive for us at a larger level of higher education in Indian universities and at the level of the feminist movements in India.

Section I: Absences and the Location of Patriarchies

Student organizations on the EFLU campus have often critiqued the ways in which the hostel and the university administration have systematically prevented women from participating in political processes. Since EFLU became a central university in 2006, only two elections have been successfully conducted. Last semester, elections were announced after a gap of three years. However, the election notification made no mention of 33% reservations for women, with internal reservations for SC/ST/OBC women, that had already been fought for and won by the students three years ago. Once this was brought to the student community's notice, a number of student organizations and some individual students made demands for the reservations to be reinstated. Within the student community, different positions were taken. One leftist organization claimed that reservations should not be asked for in a way that would lead to the cancellation of elections; instead, student organizations should just nominate women candidates. Some students held the typical anti-reservations view that such measures only divide the student community and do not let the 'deserving candidate' win. One upper caste male member of a rightwing organization claimed that we should ask for reservations for women, but without the internal reservations, because Dalit, tribal and OBC women still need time to come out in the public as active political members of the student community. However, most organizations agreed with the demands because it turned out to be a litmus test for progressiveness. The next few days saw organizations falling over themselves to claim how significant this moment was in the history of the university and the history of the country. In response to our agitations, the Election Commission announced a post called 'Women's Representative'. This decision was seen as a tokenistic gesture by the agitating students because this was a post that only allowed women to talk about women's issues. In spite of detailed discussions with the administration, the Election Commission simply cancelled the elections.

In February 2010, at least a hundred women from the two women's hostels on campus came out on the streets to protest against a casteist, authoritative, conservative, sexist Provost and ask for her resignation. So many women had never protested against anything publicly in the campus before. The Provost resigned the same week and disciplinary action was taken against four women students who were part of the agitation. Very few students, men and women, supported the four women who had been 'punished' by the administration for overstepping their bounds. That summer, the administration also sent letters to the parents of at least thirty BA girls who had been part of the protests. The letters were 'warnings' and asked the parents to keep stricter tabs on their wards. Might we be surprised to know that until then, no disciplinary action had been taken on students who had been part of a non-violent protest that had gone on for only two days. After this, the numbers of women in protests and political activities have dwindled even further.

As outlined in the above instances, the university administration is deeply invested in ensuring that women do not take on political roles on campus. This is done in a variety of ways apart from not having reservations for women and intimidating and disciplining women protesters. Often, when women students approach the administration with a set of concerns, they are dismissed with strong sexist comments. For example, when some women participants met the Dean of Hostels regarding some accommodation issues, she advised the students to learn and adjust. "What will you do when you get married?", the students were asked. When it was pointed out to her that the students had come to the university to study, not to get groomed for marriage, the Dean of Hostels failed to grasp the difference. In yet another instance, women participants submitted a representation to the Proctor regarding stones being pelted at one of the women's hostels from the rooms of the men's hostel. One senior official remarked that girls must have provoked the boys to do this, what with the crazy rate of heartbreak and rejection that women regularly inflict on men. This disapproval of women's sexual freedom plays out in a number of ways through the custodial authority of the women's hostel administration, and constant anxieties about prostitution on the campus. Thus, apart from everyday instances of putting women in their place, such instances also serve to highlight that women are deemed as incapable of having political agency, incapable of recognising and naming their problems, and undeserving of any procedural response. Feminist politics are consistently dismissed through an aggressive foregrounding of the ideal female student who is meek, studious and hardworking, who is "not interested in politics". Even as this configuration of femininity is upheld, Dalit and other marginalised women, who find it difficult to speak out publicly or in class, are rendered backward and weak. When an OBC student, who has not been given her BA degree in German since the past one year because of caste discrimination, broke down in the VC's office, the VC told her that women should be strong.

It seems to be clear to the student organizations that the administration is preventing women from speaking out or raising concerns or participating in political activities. However, students have addressed issues of gender only through making demands on the administration. In December 2011, an upper caste guest faculty member molested his research student in his room in the university guesthouse. Next day, a number of student organizations rallied across the campus, and pasted very sexist posters about the then Vice-Chancellor. The posters said that she had taught this professor how to rape, because she used to teach him when he was a student. This is not to say that there are simply contradictions in the feminism that is espoused by certain organizations. When our politics does not allow us to interrogate our own practices and structures, we are bound to replicate the hierarchies that we claim to critique. In the practices of EFLU student politics, 'patriarchy' seems to be located out there. It doesn't seem to be located in the very nature of student politics or social practices of the campus, or in the structuring of the university spaces. As a result, the absence of women in political spaces is very quickly attributed to institutional injustices. However, political organizations across the board, engage with gender in very limited ways. And this is also one of the crucial factors for women not being able to enter these collectives.

Section II: Presences and Incommensurabilities

The few women who do participate in politics are assigned tasks like singing, making posters, giving media bytes. They are asked to mobilise more women and speak about women's issues. There is a clear division of labour in the student movements. Women are expected to intervene and speak for only 'women's issues'; men do not see themselves as gendered subjects who can address only men's issues. The voices of these women are sought to make the agitations more legitimate and representative, rather than enabling them to take decisions pertaining to the entire student community. Whenever negotiations are required with the administration, women are encouraged to talk, to show that the students are "non-violent". What does this tell us about the role that women are expected to play in student movements in EFLU? What does this tell us about the politics of these movements? If the absence of women is criticized, the presence of these few women in politics is not engaged with. When some of us decided to start a gender forum on campus, a leftist organization advised us not to do any such thing; we were told that as a gender forum, we won't be able to oppose regressive Muslim practices like wearing veils. The leftist organization offered to start a women's wing that we should all join, except that the group who wanted to start the gender forum also had two men in it. A Telangana organization also asked us to create and join a women's wing.

The women who have been able to participate in political activities have largely been upper caste women, mostly urban and middle-class. Some Dalit and Muslim women have also been able to join student politics but that has been done through their 'own' parties, either Dalit-Bahujan student organizations or Muslim organizations. I raise the issue of caste, not only for these particular women, but as a structural question for our politics, and for this paper. Not only is caste crucial for determining the opportunities for women to be politically active on the campus, it is also crucial to the ways in which political spaces are constructed. Like other universities, caste and religious communities sanction the men's claim over women's lives within the campus space. Upper caste, urban women are also controlled by their communities, but they are still able to claim some kind of liberal freedom. It is another matter that this 'freedom' is expected to be utilised in the favour of the same norms that feminist politics would generally oppose. Women from close-knit religious and caste communities, who do enter politics, are expected to follow the party line, and challenging one's own community creates huge problems for the women. A Dalit Telangana girl was harassed in a variety of ways by five student leaders of her community when she refused to join their organization on the campus. She had been involved in SFI earlier, and the student leaders here viewed SFI as their staunch enemy. This political enmity was played out on the body of this woman who was claimed as one of their own, and therefore subject to their judgements. She was repeatedly threatened and asked not to start SFI politics on campus. She was sexually harassed by one of the leaders who claimed that he was in 'love' with her and demanded that she must have sex with him. Another leader called her a 'prostitute', spied on her and informed her parents that she was having a love affair. Her parents stopped talking to her, and she was socially boycotted from her village. She went through several months of all this and more before asking for help from faculty members and students. A number of questions of power and ownership converged in this one classic case of multiple kinds of violence perpetrated by different people, all at the same time. When some of us, by then organised as a gender forum, supported this woman, we were dismissed as upper-caste women who were only too happy to villainise Dalit men. This entire staging of anti-caste politics as opposed to and even antithetical to feminist politics, is a recurring feature of student politics at EFLU.

In this particular case, a Dalit woman had filed a complaint, and this was still understood as casteist because it was against Dalit men. There were constant attempts to erase the violence she underwent by calling it a matter between brothers and sisters. If upper caste women file complaints of harassment against Dalit men, they are immediately dismissed as casteist liars by the Dalit-Bahujan student organizations. A history of caste oppression reveals the ways in which upper caste women are complicit in systematic violence against Dalit men and women; often, complaints of harassment against Dalit men by upper-caste women have been the beginning of violent conflicts against Dalit communities. Upper caste women are also notorious for feeling harassed by the mere presence of Dalit men. Stereotypes of the rowdy, lecherous Dalit man have always been powerfully entrenched in cultural representations. However, this is also a country that has consistently and powerfully silenced questions and experiences of sexual violence. Can we then dismiss complaints of sexual harassment from upper caste women without any specific engagement? This is not to say that the experience of harassment is a sacred entity and is outside of relations of caste and class. But is it desirable to dismiss claims of harassment by claiming full knowledge of the meanings of an experience and explain it away without taking into account questions of gendered power? To engage with the conditions that produce an experience of harassment is not to dismiss the experience but to foundationally alter its meanings.

If the experience of 'harassment' is conditioned by caste and it has to be conditioned by caste because no one is outside of it, there is all the more reason to engage with that experience than simply dismiss it as if it comes from a pure place of power. This history cannot delegitimise the history of sexual violence that produces and reaffirms the performances of masculinities and femininities. Histories of caste and histories of sexual violence can only strengthen each other's political claims of oppression and systematic violence. Moreover, by consistently refusing to engage with gender as anything but a secondary or a less pervasive form of relations of power, a rich history of anti-caste movements is being reduced to a very unproductive confrontation between questions of caste and gender, as if they are neatly extricable from each other.

Can relations of caste be adequately understood without engaging with the political economy of gender? If anti-caste movements

have not thought about gender, if feminist movements have been casteist, how may we engage with these histories of exclusion productively? Do we repeat them in our politics, or do we take the critique seriously and think of caste and gender at a much more foundational level? Gender and caste don't come together only with a Dalit woman's issue. Caste and gender are inextricable for us in all issues of upper caste men, Dalit men, upper caste women, tribal men and women, and Dalit women. However, when gender is seen as an additive category rather than a structuring force, gender will be 'found' only in issues pertaining to women or transgendered people.

Section III: Interventions, not Resolutions

The gender forum was also expected to take up only issues of women. "Feminism is for everybody," we kept saying at the launch of the forum, but in the one year that we were able to sustain the organization, we were approached mostly by women in cases of sexual violence. As an organization invested in feminist politics, we wanted our organizational structure to have no hierarchies. This carefully constructed democracy became so difficult to sustain within the group, that some members did not wish to include more students in order to retain the nature of the group. This 'democracy' became another form of a closed, elite group which started falling apart as soon as the faultlines within the group began to be clearer. When we talk about gender issues within student movements, it is also necessary to engage with organizational issues that feminist collectives face, as these issues also raise questions about the contexts in which such collectives are formed. Why do these collectives find it so difficult to sustain themselves? The issue that finally undid this forum was the feeling amongst some members that we can take up only those issues that women want us to fight for. So if women are fighting for infrastructural issues, we should postpone questions of moral policing till they get water and electricity. Some of us continued to feel that there is no right time to talk about moral policing and if most of the women's hostel residents are indifferent to the custodial authority of hostel administrations, we should problematise this indifference. Feminist politics in EFLU is frequently thwarted by this kind of a liberal assumption that everyone makes choices, and those choices are sacred; they must be respected instead of questioned.

In EFLU, questions of gender are mostly articulated as questions of inclusion and development, related to the infrastructure for women students, women staff workers, security guards and faculty members. The persistence of these questions impose crucial limits on feminist politics in the campus. Aspiring to participate in the discussions around sexual violence after December 2012, some of us put up around 100 posters at various places in the campus. These posters were invested in asking questions about our definitions of violence, what we think about and what we refuse to address. The posters carried questions like: "Can only mothers, daughters, sisters, wives be raped?" "Whose safety is "women's safety"?" "Are rapists monsters or are they a product of our societies?" "Why do we refuse to think about Irom Sharmila?" "Who is Soni Sori?" "Are honour killings an other reality in another society?" "When marginalized men and women are raped, do we think of the loss of their honour?" We wanted to raise the question of sexual violence as a structural force that shapes our subject-positions and plays a crucial role in the production of gender and caste relations. How do we think through the violence of rape if we take the theories of power and subject-formation seriously? What is the place of sexual violence in our cultures? Also, we did not want to simply ask for the inclusion of Sharmila and Sori in our discourses about sexual violence. We wanted to think of Sharmila and Sori as sites from which we can critically engage with discourses about sexual violence.

We got very few responses to this poster campaign. One of them came from a senior faculty member, who felt that we had not 'covered' child sexual abuse in our campaign. To begin with, child sexual abuse is not an issue that can simply be 'included' or 'covered' by acknowledging its existence. Child sexuality, consent, coercion, relations of power, questions of pleasure, of violence: various questions come together in the issue of child sexual abuse. However, we are often so focused on making an extensive list of kinds of violence, that we miss out on specificities and questions of why certain kinds of violence are not recognized and what function the invisibility serves. Why is it so difficult for us to make this leap from questions of inclusion to questions of structural formations? Inclusion is not an intervention that can challenge the politics of category-formations. Why do we limit our projects of radical change by stopping at inclusion? This question is crucial also in the contexts of university administrations throughout the country who think that their job is done just because they implement certain kinds of reservations and 'include' students from various caste communities and classes. If we question the claims of social justice that university administrations make on the basis of their projects of inclusion, why should we not interrogate our own radical politics based on just inclusion of different questions of gender and sexuality?

I want to end this essay by saying that the various issues of gender that must be raised in the context of student politics at EFLU or anywhere else, must be raised as questions that challenge the dominant narratives that see the institution or administration as the sole source of violence. After all, university administrations are produced from within our cultures. We must think of the fundamental place of gendered violence in our identity-formations and in our languages. As long as we focus our critique on systemic failures only, we will not be able to work on our roles as individuals, as cultures, as classes that are equally, if not more complicit in the functioning of power relations. It is important for me to end this essay with the questions that the recent protests against the role of the administration in Mudassir Kamran's suicide in EFLU, has left me with. Mudassir had been treated as a deviant, violent homosexual by the administration when a complaint of physical harassment had been filed against him by another student. Severe administrative negligence and irresponsibility had resulted in a decision to hand him over to the police. This decision was taken in

spite of desperate appeals to the Proctor that he was a Kashmiri Muslim, and possibly a homosexual person, and the police will be further violence on a person who is already torn apart by his explosive contexts. After his suicide, student protests only focused on his Kashmiri identity and consistently erased the question of his homosexuality. Even as the administration was being blamed for their blindness and callousness, the student protests were reproducing homophobia as the only way to claim justice for Mudassir. There was a collective denial of our homophobia that had failed to provide any space for Mudassir to resolve his conflicts with himself and his friend. What kind of justice could we have expected when we were as guilty as the administration in refusing to engage with our own responses to Mudassir's life and his death?

Practicing feminist politics is also to develop modes of protest that are based on self-reflection and focused on our cultures of violence as well as institutional histories of injustice. This seems to be the political task at hand for student politics at EFLU.

DISCUSSION

The Big City Life....

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Awestruck and bewildered at the lighted city looking down from up in the air, I still remember the enthusiasm I had that night for the new chapter that was to begin in my life, not in the least aware of what awaited me. It has been six years now and the city has become a familiarity, adapting and changing to get accustomed to the hectic life that had taken over since I stepped out of the airport that night. Coming from smaller places and that too from the north eastern corner of the country, the city itself can be quite overwhelming at times. With looks and habits very much alien to the majority of the people from the plain, standing out has become a habit in itself, whether we want it or not. Hindi, yes Hindi was, is and will always be the first battle that one has to overcome here in Delhi if you are from a place where it is hardly spoken, no matter even if you are a part of India. Not just me, this is a problem faced by majority of us who studied Hindi up to the mandatory standard only because it was part of our study syllabus and nothing more. But nonetheless, the excitement over the fact I was finally going to study in the institution that I had always dreamt of made me confident. There I was, mightily walking out of the airport towards our pre-paid taxi, gulping in as much city air as I could. Overtaken by the excitement to finally make it to the city after all these times, I boldly approach the driver, uttering the little vocabulary known to me. He must have understood because we somehow managed to load our baggage into the car and drove off.

Direction and distances became our next enemy once we boarded the taxi. The address of the guest house that we had in hand was no longer valid as it had been shifted to a new building in a new location. We had heard about the shift before we left for Delhi, but on the assumption that the old address would still provide lodgings, we had not bothered to collect the new address beforehand and set out for the old one. The driver had difficulty in finding the place as it was a bit interior but we managed to reach it and where, upon arrival, we were greeted by a half demolished building. The kind people staying at the old place gave us the new address which we managed to reach by midnight after a frantic search. The new place by the way is much closer to the airport and could have saved us both time and money. Anger was boiling in both parties, the driver at me and my sister for not knowing the proper address of our destination and we at the driver for not knowing such a place that we assumed could be easily located as it was a government guest house. I was not yet aware of the vastness of the city where minute details of places should be known to not get lost. I remember clearly that we were pretty angry at the driver when he charged us extra for the fares but thinking back on it today, I am glad we paid him. Such can be the ignorance of me and many like me who had always enjoyed short distance proximities of small cities and towns where there is not much difficulty in locating places.

Then began the everyday struggles to adapt to the city life. As I have mentioned before, with people like me whose Hindi is limited, it can be quite a daunting task to get work done without the need to run around a little more than others, to wait a little longer than others and at times, to raise a little pitch in the volume of our voices to be given due attention. I shall, however, not dwell more on this. Concerning studies in particular, the biggest problem that I have faced and which I still have more to improve on is on class participation and interaction. At times, people take it for granted that we from the Northeast are mostly the quiet types who hardly participate in class interactions. But truthfully, it is quite the opposite. And it is also not because we cannot converse in English, we can and that too at ease. On the part of Hindi, I can confidently say that majority of us have difficulty in conversing but then again, Hindi is not the medium of instruction in higher studies so this does not bar us either when it comes to participation in the classes. Rather it is because we are not familiar with the habit and thus, we feel less confident when such a situation comes up that we end up being the quiet ones. Growing up in an environment where one hardly asks the teachers questions but rather give answers only when asked, at times only after several repetitions of questions by the teachers, it therefore becomes a very difficult task to talk at ease in front of several people and that too in a language which has been acquired only after schooling. Vocabularies can hence become

quite limited in such a situation. Back then, those who asked too much were considered as over-smart and none of us wanted to be that. The study environment has definitely changed now as compared to my time which is very welcoming. A very valuable lesson was thus sacrificed during the most important years of character building because of the fear of being the odd one out. And this to me has had a very bad consequence at the higher levels of studies where it has become a norm to have presentations and discussions as a part of our studies. I therefore lack far behind my peers when it comes to presenting papers or in asking questions and giving answers. This however does not imply that one ought to stop and accept the status quo. There is definitely more room to grow and develop, I am glad I'm in the learning process.

Life out here is never a complete bliss for anybody and the struggle for everyday's survival begins the moment we step out of the confines of our respective homes here in the city. There is that constant fights with the autowallahs who so often take their chance of earning extras by charging us a little higher than the usual fare just because of our looks. I have, nonetheless, been lucky in terms of the many struggles to be met because I enjoy the comforts of staying in a safe campus where I do not face discrimination as such. But the minute I am out of my safe haven, the constant need to be vigilant and alert befalls me. Generally, being the fairer sex, it becomes a more daunting task to manoeuvre through this hectic city life. On my first visit to a market place here in the city which is a bit far off from where I stay, my friend insisted we travel on a bus to the place. The mini-bus that we hailed was completely packed and we had got a seat at the back where I sat next to a guy who I felt was brushing his arm on mine. However, I could not raise an alarm because I was not sure whether there was no choice but for our arms to be in contact because of the limit of space or he was taking his chances. Just in case it was the second, I made sure that his pleasure would not be fulfilled by sitting in a very awkward position with my back towards him, though we were sitting side by side, for the longer part of the journey just to avoid the contact.

I have had other experiences which have made me feel uncomfortable at times and though by God's grace I have been safe throughout these years, it makes me often wonder whether my different looks had made me an easy target. In the first few years of my stay here, I never really felt insecure or vulnerable and many times venture on my own to do my tasks so long as it is not late in the night. But because of the brutal rape incident last year, fear is easily aroused when not being accompanied by friends even in broad daylight but the incident also clearly showed that nobody is really safe with or without companions.

Sometimes, the ways of living out here is a complete opposite of the ways back home. It is for this very reason that many people from the Northeast face problems. I have accompanied many friends hunting for accommodations and in many occasions we are met with landlords who firmly insist that there should not be many visitors especially males. Now this system is a complete difference to ours, especially my community where socialising is a norm, where house-visits by friends are welcomed, where men visiting women's homes are not frowned upon but rather has been a traditional practice since our fore-fathers' time and where men and women freely hang out together. Therefore, it becomes quite a task to suddenly break away from one's tradition and experiences that one have grown up with. I do not say that we are all angels and that yes some do go beyond limits at times, but why is it that we are so easily subjected to the stereotyping that we are to have bad characters. The stereotyping that we from the Northeast are so often subjected to, be it good or bad but mostly on the negative is quite an issue which none from the Northeast approve. Normal people will always know the limit. Just because a handful have attracted undesired attention does not make us all like them. And do not all societies in the world have those lively handfuls anyway? We have so often easily attract attention just because our habits are very different apart from our distinguishing looks. There is no denial that there is a limit to everything and that one must also be careful and cautious about the 'when and where' in everything and learn to adapt to the ways and norms practised out of which one can gain maximum good, yet understanding and respecting each others' way of life is also a very important part of life.

As much as we must try to adapt ourselves to the living system out here, there is also much need to sensitise the mainland people that our traditions are completely different from theirs. But being patronised is not welcoming either. I remember an incident where we had gone for a television talk show. There, at the discussion hour, one student started to praise students from the North East going at length on how gentle and sweet we looked and how she felt leaving us to ourselves as we looked so harmless. I am sure she would have said it on a very honest and positive note, but it clearly annoyed me. Maybe my perception had been wrong, but the patronising tone was quite audible. It did not go down well on others as well as it was mentioned amongst us several times after the filming ended. I also want to mention that at times, our different looks also comes as an advantage and make things easier for us.

It is sometimes a funny thing that when we feel completely belonging to a part of something and yet you are treated in a manner quite different. Many times have the security guards in our campus gate demand our identity cards, especially students from the North East, if we enter the campus at night when they so often let others pass. Though it is a part of their job to keep us safe, it is also easy on our part to question why only us? My friend and I were so not happy when the security guard in our hostel asked us to sign in the visitors' register. We grumbled we had stayed here for six years. I do not however condemn them as it would also be difficult to distinguish between those who are students and who are not and besides, there are always those who try to take advantage of situations and dishonestly do things. But if there is already that sense of belonging, it is difficult to not be satisfied with the ways one is being treated just because looks are different. The 'why only us' question is therefore easily awoken.

In these brief lines I have summed up my experiences here in the city and they definitely are not as tough and bad as others.

Apart from the tactics to survive the extremes temperatures, I have also learnt the tactics to survive both as a woman and as a Northeasterner. Each day I am experiencing new things which have contributed richly for my well-being. Though there have been many negative experiences, yet the city has taught me a lot of good things as well. As a woman, it has made me much stronger and confident than before because of the many paths that one has to struggle through. The knowledge that one can gain here is unending. It greatly depends on individual to individual on how much one wants to learn and gain out of the system. I clearly know that had I not had the chance to study here, I would not have been aware of the many national and international issues which are an important part of life. I often think about the many losses that I would have had, had I decided not to pursue my higher studies out here. Once, we had an interactive session with our teacher though not in groups but each of us had to go and meet her individually. When my turn came and I entered her room, she at once asked me from which place I hailed. When upon knowing that I had come from the North East, her first question was whether I had problems adapting to the system out here. My reply was on the negative. I hope it remains that way, that I can always learn to adapt and struggle and survive just as others can and do.

DISCUSSION

A Short Dairy of a North Eastern Girl in Delhi: Recollecting Experiences and Memories

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Delhi, popularly known as the 'land of opportunities' attracted my attention when I was at a crossroad in my life wondering which would be the best place for me to get the finest education for my graduate studies, and eventually for a career. I was no longer a high school girl and was excited for the world ahead of me - a world where I could be independent, explore new and exciting things. It's been several years since I came to Delhi now, but back then, just the thought of moving into a new city brought so much happiness.

I grew up in a lower middle class family. My parents struggled everyday to make ends meet. Growing up, we did not enjoy the many luxuries that other families would have enjoyed but my parents never made me feel insecure or inferior. They gave me beyond the best of what they could afford, but above all, their unending love and trust. Education was always the one area they gave top priority. I was therefore sent to the best school in the state. This I believe was because of their realisation and the deep attachment they had for the value of education although they could not afford it at their time. And this recognition continued, when despite being wary of unexpected circumstances that could come one's way, they mustered up the courage to send their only daughter to an unknown place for the sake of giving me the best education.

The journey

It was a bold decision to come to Delhi as we did not know a single soul! Yet, determined to take that step, my mother and I took the sleeper class train to New Delhi and headed for the unknown mysterious place. I remember enjoying every moment of the train journey, I was not worried about the place or the people, the 'Dilli wallas'. Nor did I wonder as to how I would adjust there. My only worry was whether I would get admission into Delhi University. I now understand why I did not panic about moving to a new place. Apart from the excitement that prevented me from seeing the pitfalls, I realised that I had a notion about India in general and Delhi in particular. And this had come about because Doordharshan had been a part of my growing up. Let me explain why Doordharshan was India (Delhi) for me.

Doordharshan - My India

My father had finally bought a second hand colour TV. It was not technically a colour TV because the images that came on the television screen were half blue and half purple. Yet, from that old worn-out colour TV, we were captivated and I, for one, was totally mesmerised. Sundays especially were a difficult time for us as children. We had to go to Sunday School and other church services whose timings somehow always clashed exactly with our favourite shows. I loved the serials on Tipu Sultan, Chandrakanta, The Jungle Book, Chitrahaar etc. Again, on Republic Day and Independence Day we watched the parades and the floats with a sense of pride at what India had achieved. I also remember watching a number of 'nationalist' and patriotic films and hated the interruptions caused by News Break and notices of 'Lost people,' which seemed to take forever, along with the innumerable advertisements. All that, was Delhi for me - a place of diversity, fun, equality and privileges, where any dream could come true.

Thus, on the one hand, I guess, the limited knowledge along with my endless imagination about India and Delhi through Doordharshan gave me enough of a moral boost and sense of security I needed at that time. And looking back, I do agree that sometimes ignorance is bliss. On the other hand, I also believe that prayers of parents and loved ones sustained me and still does.

Destination Delhi

There are vivid memories of my early days in Delhi. I remember very clearly being swarmed by coolies the moment our train reached New Delh. We had to literally force our way out. Along with them were the auto wallas and taxi drivers who started arguing among each other, over tired passengers who needed rest and above all silence. I sensed, at that time, that they were not trying to help; rather, they saw us as outsiders whom they had nothing to do with except exact as much profit as they could. However, the noise and the crowd was the least of my worries - I was very disappointed with the weather. Coming from a cold place, I felt like I was on fire. The heat and the dust were overwhelming. In spite of that the sun was curiously invisible, and at night, the stars seemed few. It was only later that I learnt what 'dust pollution' could do – a true eye opener. These were my first experiences upon arriving in Delhi.

Rush for Admission

The first few days upon arrival were all about rushing for admissions. We stayed in South Delhi since we did not know where the University was actually located. Travelling everyday from South to North in an auto was miserable. Our budget was so tight and yet we had to spend so much. It was a trying experience. We were exhausted, tired, worried - the list could go on. Every interaction with the administration, bargaining with the auto wallas, and above all, the strange looks we got made me conscious of my difference. Something in the way the people stared not only made us feel very alien, but also unwanted. This situation was new for me and so I had a hard time trying to act normal while still being aware of the fact that people were gawking at you.

Eventually, I got admission into Delhi University, and my college was located in East Delhi, a place that I still find very conservative. I will elaborate on this later. My mother had to leave me with some seniors we met in Delhi. Life slowly turned harder as each day brought in new and different challenges. Yet, I am grateful for all those experiences, because I learnt many lessons and grew as a person.

Bus, Auto, Richshaw

Travelling to college in a bus was always quite an ordeal. The one on which I had to travel always seemed to be more crowded than the others. I, with a smaller frame than most, was literally almost always crushed amongst the many bigger and larger people around me. Summer time was the worst with awful body odour, and hot fumes all around. As a woman, one had an extra task, that of trying to protect one's self, even though one could hardly move, against men who tried to touch, feel and push you in the jam-packed bus. Sometimes, besides being harassed by men, which left you angry and feeling awful about yourself, misery became my lot when I found out that even the last of my pocket money had been stolen by pickpockets.

I remember that there were numerous times when I was forced to replace my bags only because thieves had cut my bags using blades. Once I caught a woman red-handed. This incident made me realise that there was a link between the bus drivers, conductors, and the thieves, especially in the private buses. It surprised me when I found out that my classmates, mostly North Indians and Delhiites too travelled by bus, but during the three years that I was with them, none spoke about being victims of pickpockets. I was always the vulnerable one.

Later, for my Master's degree, I moved to the North Campus of the University of Delhi and there, bargaining with the rickshaw drivers became routine for the ridiculous charges they quoted. One occasionally did come across an honest richshaw driver, but I know, there were many who were victims to over charging. Experiences on rickshaws included times, especially on lonely roads, when guys would come on bikes to try and touch us. On one such occasion, I remember the shock, anger and complete numbness I felt as the perpetrators sped off, leaving me feeling extremely humiliated. The rickshaw walla meanwhile pedalled on, indifferent, not knowing either what could be done.

Interrogation, Identity and Lifestyle

Accommodation was always a major problem for us, especially for those coming from far away North East. Getting hostel accommodation in Delhi University was almost next to impossible. Hostels were awarded on the basis of merit, and in this we were at a disadvantage, because of the relative nature in which marks are awarded. It was quite well-known that, at least in my state, those who marked papers were not generous in their grading. In effect, hostel accommodation in D.U. was out of the grasp of many who sought admissions there. This situation forced me and several others to look for either rented apartments or private hostels. The change in lifestyle and environment that this brought about became a challenge. Food habits often became a contention – it certainly was the reason for many students not being able to stay in private hostels and having to opt for staying in rented rooms. Food is an aspect of culture, which is true for everyone. Diversities in food culture is something we all need to cultivate respect for. Unfortunately food is often used as a medium to degrade certain cultures.

My experience of looking for a room to rent in North Delhi was an eye opener. In this regard, all the people I encountered were very rude. Here, I consciously use the word 'all', as I did not meet any one who did not have pre-conceived and degrading notions about the people from the Northeast. This was very obvious in the kinds of questions they asked such as our food habits, the timings we were asked to keep, the visitors we were allowed and other lists of do's and dont's. Moreover, the rents would shoot up the moment the landlords saw foreigners and these included people from the Northeast. Most annoyingly however, the 'space' that we were now to call 'home' became an area of continuous contest where we were forced to fit in to the demands that were imposed. Even after

all these years I see that the moral policing that the landlords often took upon themselves was not so much for the security reasons that they claimed they were, but, rather, due to the stereotypical ideas they had about the people from the Northeast. It has always been interesting for me to know that a particular kind of knowledge, whether true or false, or even a mere rumour can lead to the construction of an identity that eventually dictates the lives of people, and can lead to their social exclusion.

As years went by, we developed a good relation with the landlord. I even started giving tuition to my landlord's daughter, and eventually we grew close to the entire family and had a pleasant stay. The daughter and I also had the opportunity to exchange many ideas and views about each other's cultures while I tried to explain and answer certain questions she had, besides her studies – questions as to whether Nagaland was a part of India, whether it had trains and aeroplanes, buses and cars. From her questions, her ignorance about the region was quite obvious, the Northeast not in any way being part of the curriculum. While I devoured Doordarshan as a child, the most ridiculous question that was posed to me, I believe, and by a fellow student in college was whether Nagaland had televisions.

Being educated in Delhi

Looking back, it would be unfair to say that I did not have a good time, though it was not exactly how I had imagined college life would be. Particularly hard for me was the fact that every subject, even English was taught in Hindi in my college although the prospectus said otherwise. And so, I had a hard time in class trying to figure out what was being taught.. Yet, there were good times too. I made some good friends and we helped each other through our struggles with getting educated. I taught them English and they would correct my Hindi. The college fest, freshers' party were celebrated with great zeal. This was when I wore my first saree and I just loved it. Besides the happy times, there were sad times too. I was taken aback and saddened when, at a friend's engagement, another friend declined to come as she was an 'upper' caste and said she could not attend 'lower' caste ceremonies. This was my first experience of the caste system. It hit me hard at that time, to know how deeply the caste system is entrenched in many societies and that this was a sad and tragic reality for India.

After a bitter sweet experience of undergraduate years, I enrolled for a Master's degree from Delhi University again. It was a far better experience than the previous years as, I believe, I had learnt to adapt. By then, even our landlord did not have any issues about what we ate, whom we met or when we returned. It had taken time even as I had taken time to help and tutor his daughter. Apart from the lessons, we also soon became like sisters. And slowly, as she shared her teenage struggles, I realised her problems were not very different from what a Naga teenager would go through. I also began to realise that I too had my own prejudices, aggravated no doubt by certain incidents that had occurred to me. However, it also dawned upon me that I should challenge those prejudices and learn to open up to the possibility that beyond narrow prejudices, there is humanity and love that can bind us together, and it does.

Now I am a research student and I still continue to challenge my own prejudices, although circumstances keep challenging it. Recently, I went to pay my internet bill with my roommate who is from Uttar Pradesh. The clerk in the office asked me, why there were so many people from the Northeast in Delhi. Her next question was whether we were eligible for holding government jobs in Delhi. Although such questions are not novel for a person from the Northeast, and I did answer her politely, on second thoughts, the questions startled me. My friend from UP was not asked the same questions. I realised then that our seeking employment in Delhi was not seen as natural, not seen as our right just as it is for other citizens, as no such associations were made for others. Such exclusionary understandings often challenge my own efforts in fighting my prejudices. These are occasions where the values and rights enshrined in our Preamble and the Constitution seem like an old irrelevant concept for some people in India.

As India continues to emerge as a potential power among the developing countries, it also needs to look at its own internal issues at the grass-roots gather problems at the ground level. Unless people from diverse backgrounds, regions and states as common citizens are given equal opportunities to participate and contribute, the nation will never progress. A nation without value and respect for fellow beings will only lead to a hollow civilization. A nation that does not respect women, that fails to protect its minorities, standing only as mute spectator only destroys its own self, as we are all connected. I do not have the solution for all the problems but I am certain of one fact, i.e. we need to change our mindset, we should be open to learn and understand each other and above all to love each other.

I am happy I had the opportunity to share my culture, values and traditions with the people I have met, while also learning a lot from them. For me, the journey starts from where I stay, usually in my hostel; small beginnings can be made by sharing stories in the space we share together, where we sleep missing our home, but recollecting days of mischief and innocent childhood days. After all, we are not that different; we all experience love, hurt and pain. Until we open our lives to others we will always be hollow and narrow and it starts from where we live, our home, our locality, our society, eventually transforming our nation.

In Delhi, daddy's little girls have turned into women - some into bold women, some broken, some weak, some hopeless, some timid, some independent, some bitter. Yet, we need to fight against all odds and, above all, learn to love and care for each other. India is not just one identity, it has multiple identities and this diversity should be celebrated.

DISCUSSION

Recasting Dalit Women in Chengara Land Struggle

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There are 12,500 dalit colonies and 4,083 tribal settlements in Kerala. In August 2007, thousands of dalits, tribals and landless from other communities started the struggle demanding ownership over land under the leadership of Laha Gopalan, President of Sadhujana Vimochana Samyuktha Vedi (SVSV) founded in 2002. The Chengara (Pathanamthitta district, Kerala) land struggle arose in the Harrison Malayalam Ltd. Company, Chengara being one of their 33 estates in Kerala and whose lease had ended in 1996. In 2012, the movement entered its sixth year of struggle. A large number of dalit women joined the movement along with their children..

The occupied area inside the Plantation was divided, each family given 50 cents of land where they can construct permanent houses as well as cultivate. Over a thousand families have built temporary huts, all families work on the land allotted to them, cultivating vegetables and fruits both for their consumption and for sale. At the centre of every counter, group of households, there is a 'Smriti Mandapam'. where the families gather every morning and evening. The photos of their idols Ayyankali, Ambedkar and 'Sree Buddha' are kept inside, in front of which they all sit together, pray, sing songs and discuss daily affairs. They consider them as their deities to whom, they believe, if they pray, will help them to survive the current problem and eventually win the struggle. They have their own prayer hymns and prayer songs in which they have added the name of their god 'kallelivaasan' a mythical lord, king of a large group/clan.

Hands folded.... Ayyankaali deva...

Hand folded... Kallelivaasa..

Hand folded... Sreebudha...

You are the beginning and end...

Your are the only one, only god for us..

We have no other way to live...

You are my parent..

You are the creator and the world.....

Another song

Who is here to guide us blessings..

We have none; you are the only one...

Kallelivaasaa.. you are the kindness..

Guide us protection and blessings kallelivaasa...

Its your hilly areas, that is the birthplace..

Of kalleli father, has no shape.. can't see him but..

He will present in front of us when we call him

(Songs sung by women in Chengara in 27 August 2011).

Each prayer represent the memories of inhuman conditions during the time of slavery and how they were emancipated from the wretchedness by their leaders. After prayer, they discuss the daily affairs of the movement, the problems of the participant's and decide on relevant matters. Yellow colour flags of SVSV with the symbols of arrow and bow in the centre are seen everywhere inside the occupied area. The yellow colour represents 'Sree Buddha's' ideologies of truth and non violence and arrow and bow symbolises the memory of the ancestors of Dalits and tribes. The protestors, including children, observe fast on every Sunday for the success of their struggle.

All the members of the protest in Chengara, including the children have knowledge about the historical background of Dalit oppression. They do not celebrate 'Onam' which is the national festival of Kerala. They critique the myth of Mahaabali, (the Dravidian king) and Vaamana, (the incarnation of Vishnu) which they consider as anti-dalit stereotyping. They celebrate Ayyankali's birthday as their 'Onam'. They have their own perceptions about Aryanisation and about Dravidian emperors of the past. The contributions of Ambedkar and Ayyankali for the empowerment of Dalits are the key elements of their knowledge.

Women in Chengara hold the view that they need land for their children and for their comfortable future life. Ownership of land and its legal aspects have yet to enter their consciousness. To access land, they are willing to fight their entire life. Parukatti Amma, a member of the struggle says

"I don't have any fear to face these problems. I need land for my children. Before coming here, I told my children that if I die here you will get the land" (interview with Parukutti Amma, 25th August 2011 in Chengara.)

All through her life, Parukutti Amma strove to acquire land for her children and now Chengara is her last hope to acquire land.

'Need for land precipitated me to participate in the struggle. My husband died. I have five children. During my daughter's marriage, I sold 4 cents of my land. I applied for land by filing application at government offices. I was working in construction sites. One man came and told me that 10 cents of land was available for sale. I went to that place but that land was not useful for living; it was a useless area. But I brought that land and with my children put up a small hutment.e. When that land was later transformed into a fertile area, that man came back and told us to leave that place. He complained to the police station against us. I didn't have documents to prove that the land was brought by me. Then I heard about this struggle and came here'.

The circumstances and situations of each woman in Chengara land struggle are different but their experiences of landlessness and poverty are common. This brings them together into the Chengara land struggle.

For the people in Chengara struggle, Laha Gopalan is one and the foremost leaders of the struggle. He controls and administers the whole movement. The participants of the struggle consider him as their god. In the first two years of the struggle, two Dalit women were in the leadership of the struggle, namely, Thattel Saraswathi and Seleena Prakkanam. The initial years of the struggle was decisive for the movement and the two women exceptionally marked their leadership through their activities. They both were the General Secretaries of SVSV. For varied reasons they both left the struggle after two years.

Almost all the Dalit spokesmen-and most, in fact, are men- clearly recognize women to be the most oppressed of their group. Dalit women's position in Dalit movements is one of the critiques of the contemporary dalit women's movement and this includes the patriarchal nature of dalit male leaders and marginalization of dalit women in all spheres. A look into Dalit movements shows men almost exclusively in leadership positions. Women are mass, the crowd in these movements. It is even considered 'strategic' to have women in the forefront. The agenda of the movement was to fight for land, but not for entitlements of women, for minimum wage, but not for equal wage . In what ways was this struggle then transformative? Are not struggles part of a transformative process and agenda? Are women just 'part' of the struggle and not integral?

Chengara struggle also created internal issues at the leadership level. Both the women leaders mentioned earlier were the General Secretaries of the SVSV and so they were deputed to take the responsibility of the land struggle. The site of the struggle was more problematic in the early stages of the struggle. Sarojini Amma, a member of the movement ,stated:

'The first phase of the struggle was in Kodumon estate. We entered there in January 2007. During that time, Oommen Chandy was the chief minister. He gave assurance to fulfill our demands. So we called off the struggle temporarily. But he didn't take any action. After six months we entered Kurumbatti division. We spent 27 days there. It felt like 27 years. We stayed, always carrying pebbles because police and trade union workers attacked us with stones. We also threw stones on them. We didn't have food and couldn't sleep during that time. We could only drink water and control our hunger. We escaped from that place on the 28th day night. Police and trade union people failed to identify our move'. (Interview with Sarojini Amma, conducted on 18th August 2011 in Chengara)

Saraswathi added,

'Before starting the struggle, we organized a vehicle rally. The rally was planned to end at Konni. I continued my speech from 7pm to 11.30pm to draw police attention until all members of the movement reached the site. Then I walked to the struggle site with 50 people from Konni. When we reached there, we saw a large fire. Many were scared and some of them pulled back. My husband and I stayed there and we saw that police and trade union people were attacking the members of the struggle with stones and fire. Many of the them were badly hurt in that attack. But no one helped me to take them to hospital' (Interview with Thattel Saraswathi, 3rd February 2011 in Kottayam).

Such situations were very strange to her. She had not participated in any struggles or protests earlier. She did not even get help from other members of SVSV and had to raise money by herself to maintain herself.. She led people to Chengara from Kurumbatti division. She also initiated many of the activities inside the occupied area in Chengara.

'I was able to conduct number of programs and modifications inside the occupied settlement. After the start of the struggle in Chengara, i conducted a "Gothrapooja" (worship of clan) and we dedicated our prayers to Dr. Ambedkar, Ayyankkali and Sree Budha. I organized that ceremony for remembering our ancestors. I could also conduct "akshara kalari" for children. 52 children

participated in the program. Then we divided all the families into six sections, separated as counters and one convener and five other persons took the responsibility of each counter. I didn't allow men to drink alcohol inside the settlement'.

Dalit woman leader, Thattel Saraswathi not only shaped the movement in the initial stages, she also organized the exterior of the settlements that they planned to build.. Now, when an outsider visits the site, the members take them around to show the living conditions, etc. They have forgotten Thattel Saraswathi who contributed to the movement but left it after two years. In an emotional interview , she gave the reasons for leaving the movement:

'I left the struggle movement because I was sure that the leaders of the strugglers will try to kill me because they had the fear that I will take all the credits of the struggle movement'.

The case of Seleena Prakkanam, a dalit Christian woman who was in the leadership of the struggle, is very similar to Thattel Saraswathi. Seleena also quit the movement after two years. She has her own independent views on the leadership of the movement.

'I became the general secretary of SVSV in 2007- 2008. My responsibility was to be in charge of the struggle site and to assure proper functioning under the directions given by Laha Gopalan. Many times I had to disagree with him, but I couldn't react. Leaders of the struggle must take care of the safety of its members. We must be concerned about the security of every family in Chengara. That decides the success of a struggle. But it didn't happen in Chengara. so I had to react many times and had to challenge the irresponsibility of the leaders' (Interview with Seleena Prakkanam, 30th August 2011 in Pathanamthitta)

Every movement has its own agenda and ideologies. Saleena opined that the safety of the members participating in the struggle should be the primary agenda of the movement to ensure success for the movement. In Chengara, where thousands of families resided, it was fundamental to ensure the security of everybody. The leadership in certain instances failed in this matter to which Saleena reacted sharply. She firmly believed that the Dalit women were not much safe inside the occupied area as they were subject of gaze both for upper caste and Dalit men. "Dalit leaders may have their own patriarchal interests in using or suppressing an assault on their own women members. The net result of this situation is that often Dalit women may end up doubly deserted, without support from own kith and kin and also outside the reach of support from the women's movement" (Dietrich, 1992)

The experience of joining and leaving the movement is different for these two Dalit women. Thattel Saraswathi, a post graduate in Malayalam got full support from her husband and their children to participate in the struggle.

'I joined the struggle not because I wanted land for my family. I choose as my destiny to fight for the Dalit community. So I met Laha Gopalan and told him my interest to join the struggle. He give the permission and I was later elected as the General Secretary of SVSV'.

The situation was different, however, for Seleena Prakkanam:

'I belong to a Dalit Christian family. After the completion of my pre- degree course I couldn't continue my study. We were living in very congested area. My family and myself were ardent supporters of the communist party. I went to many political meetings of the communist party. When we heard about the Chengara struggle, me and my husband went there to participate in the struggle'. (Seleena Prakkanam, Chengara oru paraajaya samaramaanu, Maadhyamam, Vol. 13, 2010, p-12)

After the withdrawal of Thattel Saraswathi from the movement, Saleena was the undisputed option because of her dedication and work in the struggle.

'I spent my entire life with inferiority complex. Chengara land struggle helped me to think about the social condition and lives of Dalits. But that struggle never helped me to come out of my inferiority complex. It is important that the Dalits must gain knowledge about their circumstances. There is not much difference in the conditions of Dalit women and men because both are equally discriminated in our society' (Interview with Seleena Prakkanam,30th August 2011, Pathanamthitta)

Activities and approaches of these two women in the struggle were different. Thattel Saraswathi conducted several programs inside the occupied area without the permission of other leaders. She would always maintain a sense of individuality when decisions were to be taken. But Seleena only tried to follow the decisions of the leader. However, when she began to voice her own opinions, she became unwanted for the leader. The journey to selfhood and a life in the public sphere was long and interlinked.

Thattel Saraswathi says:

'Actually I am not the first women leader in this struggle. Ramani Satheeshan was the first women leader who led the four day struggle at Kodumon plantation. But she too had the same experience. She had to leave the struggle forcefully after the allegations made against her by the male leaders'(Interview with Thattel Saraswathi, 3rd February 2012 , Kottayam).

The voices raised by the women against the patriarchal leadership of the movement was ignored by the movement as a whole. Instead, women were forced to move out of the movement. Undoubtedly, the women leaders shaped the movement at its initial stage and were role models which attracted other women towards the movement. They were part of the agenda setting and its ownership by large sections of women. Their organizational capacities sustained the movement. They could manage, formulate new strategies, plan new initiatives. However, the moment they raised their voice against the patriarchal leadership of the movement, they were discarded and isolated. Women occupying political space caused fear in the male leaders. The men felt that their only option was to safe guard their 'power' over women, children and other men by consistently suppressing women's voices, the 'other voices'.

'Women face most struggles in life. These conditions enable them to have a more strong and powerful mind. She could handle any struggles. That's why woman are the first leaders of the struggle'.

'women are more patient, peaceful and also calm by character and they don't differentiate between participants. They can then be conditioned to obey any laws from above'.

The Dalit men are in a social space where they too internalize the patriarchal notions of power. Thus the Dalit women, though they render equal labour as Dalit men, are subjected to domination by Dalit men.

In the study about Dalit women's lives in 'colonies', Marion den Uyl (1995) said,

"In the households where they live, women occupy a central place. Although they say a man is supposed to be the boss, worshiped as the living god, and women ought to obey him, that is not always the case in practice. In some cases, it is because there is no man in the home, then women often have extensive network of female friends and relatives, on whom they rely in times of crisis. Men play a marginalized role in that network."

Many women in the struggle withstood opposition from relatives and independently decided to join the movement along with children.

'I heard about this struggle when I went to work. I then came here and took membership. Only after that I informed my family. Now my daughter and her family are with me' (nterview with Gouri Amma, conducted on 27th August 2011 in Chengara)

The political space is contested and the power relations are more complex as movements are transformatory spaces. The existing relations are challenged and can only change with women's agency, an agency that is integral to the movement. It is thus not surprising that the present patriarchal leadership in the Chengara land struggle now prohibits any separate gathering of women and no women has attempted to attain leadership ever since the withdrawal of the two Dalit women leaders.

'Sir (Laha Gopalan) had told us that separate organization of women will affect the smooth functioning of the struggle. So only after the success of struggle we will think about that. women have interest to come to leadership but men are more eligible for that because women have some limitation to go outside in night. Therefore now women's names are not considered for leadership levels'

The Chengara land struggle faced both mental and physical violence, women being the worst victims as in all conflict situations. Four women in Chengara were kidnapped and were brutally raped by unidentified people who are not yet arrested by the police. Both the president of SVSV and other leaders were questioned by the members of the movement on their irresponsibility. That case was dissolved for unknown reasons. People of Chengara were not ready to reveal the information on that case. Some said that it was a rumor and others explained that revealing the girls identity will affect their future. The aftermath of the violence left a few dead and others injured. Many of them live with the memories of those violence. These sufferings may yet again lead to greater display of courage and towards more gains, but for women, their struggle continues, as the experiential aspects and a re-reading of the struggle, suggest.

ATTENTION ALL IAWS MEMBERS

IAWS GENERAL BODY MEETING

VENUE:

X1V NATIONAL CONFERENCE VENUE
PLENARY HALL/ PANDAL, GAUHATI UNIVERSITY, GUWAHATI

DATE: 6TH FEBRUARY 2014 • TIME: 4 P.M.

IAWS MEMBERS MAY PLEASE NOTE AND MAKE IT CONVENIENT TO ATTEND

DISCUSSION

The Richness of Our Plurality

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This essay was supposed to deal with the topic 'Plurality and Conflict'. But I find myself instead speaking of the richness and strength of being a part of a plural culture!

Does plurality necessarily have to be seen as a cause for conflict? When did such thinking even take root? Or is plurality the most natural and healthy state of any society? Is it only now that in our increasingly unidimensional, unipolar, and homogenised world that plurality becomes something to be seen as a problem?

For someone like myself who comes to the understanding of life and the world through the experience of music and cultural forms it seems strange, even bizarre, to juxtapose the words 'pluralism' and 'conflict'. For, to me, as a singer, it is this very pluralism that is the source of my greatest strength and even rootedness. The problem, if any, begins when we attempt to homogenise, to define cultures and peoples in exclusionary terms, and to declare identities as distinct and permanently fixed for all time. Like our cultural forms, we Indians (I should actually say, 'we south Asians') have shifting, fluid identities that can absorb and reflect so many streams, yet without surrendering a certain quality of steadfastness.

Let us just look at north Indian 'classical' music. In its composition it is almost impossible to separate out the strands of what we call the 'classical' from the 'folk', or even from the modern 'popular' forms. The one runs into the other. The same composition can be rendered in a hundred styles, all of them genuine, authentic—merely by shifting the context of performance, by introducing differences of vocal inflections, by differences in reception. Authenticity would seem to be here a function of the singers' and listeners' own convictions rather than coming from any external standard of what is the 'right' composition or rendering or style. What is required of the singer and the listener would be an honesty, a certain transparency and complete commitment, rather than any external standard.

I write this soon after my return from a research institute in a small town in France where I had been fortunate to have received an artist-in residence fellowship for one academic year. So those experiences, insights are just now fresh and uppermost in my mind as I ponder this title of 'plurality and conflict'. Nantes, where the Institute for Advanced Study is located, is a lovely town—not so big as to be intimidating and overwhelming, not so small as to be provincial and dreary. The Institute and my colleagues were more than I could I have ever hoped for—intelligent, good human beings, thoughtful and generous with their sharing of thoughts and ideas. It has proved to be a wonderful year—of frequent and interesting discussions, of uninterrupted time for riaz (music practice), of quiet study, above all, of peace and a return to myself. It has also proved to be both challenging, and reaffirming.

Perhaps it is the experience of living and working for nearly a year in another culture that does this—that both challenges and reaffirms my understanding of my own culture, something that I perhaps take so much for granted under the normal scheme of things. Living in India confronted every day with the horror stories of riots, violence, corruption... one could forget the strength of this culture. At the same time, living life as a singer, I could lose myself in the comfort and romance of this truly syncretic tradition, and close my eyes to that other world of violence.

The truth lies somewhere in-between.

It is that in-between space that needs to be nourished—the ability of this truly plural culture to survive (and survive it does) and flourish in our crazy modern world. It is the strength of this plural culture—its ability to be meaningful and relevant in changing times, the way it speaks to us of who we are, and what is our relationship with our fellow human beings—that moreover needs to be nurtured and cherished.

What was perhaps most astonishing for me, living in France, was realising the way in which we south Asians are probably quite unique, as compared to the rest of the world. It seemed to me that, endangered though it may be, our society is truly plural, truly a melange of cultures, religions, philosophies, all mixed up—and when left to themselves—quite happily co-existing in a way that seems now almost impossible anywhere else in the world. In France, as in Britain, I see other patterns—call them mosaics, multi-cultural societies, or simply rational, secular societies that have enunciated certain principles of equality and attempt to live up to these. These societies seem to me to display the pattern of populations of different ethnic and social groups, all considered to be 'equal' under the law of the land, living together, having their culture recognized and expressed in varying degrees, yet somehow distinct as cultures. A multicultural society perhaps?

But the pattern in India is different. Things are more jumbled up—recognisable as distinct and yet so mixed as to be almost impossible to disentangle.

Whether it is that other societies have had to deal with positivism for longer than India has (or whatever other reason), we seem more able to live with porous boundaries, fluid identities. We-- certainly I-- have tended to take this for granted—‘This is my world, this is how people are, this is how cultures are’. Living and working in the very different cultural environment of France helped me see both how much I take for granted, and also how very precious is this syncretism that is our birthright.

At a seminar I gave in France, several of the questions that I received brought this home to me. Just an example. I was speaking about forms of music that have tended to be practiced by Muslim communities in India. One of the questions I was asked was--- ‘But Islam forbids music, so how come these forms?’

Where could I begin? First by saying that I believed no society/community could ever be without music (and dance), that the sound of the mainstream Islamic azaan is one of the most exquisite musical sounds, that such a large percentage of traditional musicians in India have been/are Muslim,. But, and even more importantly, that culturally the lines are not so sharply drawn anyway. ‘Folk songs’, sung by women in the household, even when these are supposedly ‘religious’ songs, draw so wonderfully from the imagery of the region rather than that of a supposed religious imaginary. Spaces like the dargah are open to all communities. Similarly, the descriptions of Hazrat Ali in some of the manqabat, are most interesting. Thus in one such verse, not only does Hazrat Ali-- in very un-Islamic style—have something sounding a bit like ‘past lives’, but also, these ‘past lives’ see him holding, once a bow, once a flute (no prizes for guessing what this signifies!). The manqabat ends with the words ‘naam niralo tiharo Ali ji’-- what wonderful names you have Ali ji! (Manqabat are verses in praise of the imaams).

Equally, we could look at the poetry of the eighteenth century poet Rasleen. This poet, who is best known for his contribution to the study of aesthetics and the detailed description of the different kinds of nayikas (female protagonists of poetry and theatre, dance and music), has also composed a verse where he describes the twelve imaams but using quite Vaishnavi imagery. He exhorts us to ‘dharo dhyaan’ for ‘aath yaam’ and to remember the ‘dvadas’ imaams. I would suggest here that, interestingly, these are all words, phrases and concepts that are actually typical of Vaishnavi traditions and descriptions. Thus, for example, the phrase ‘dharo dhyaan’ for contemplation/meditation rather than ‘zikh’, the phrases ‘aath yam’ or eight auspicious times, rather than the five times stipulated for namaaz, and the mention of ‘dvadas’ names of the imaams, are phrases that are typical of Vaishnav traditions and descriptions.

This is perhaps a very small point, merely a tiny matter of linguistic register. Yet, it is significant. Rasleen does not ask us to remember the imaams five times a day (the prescribed number of namaaz prayers) but eight times—a number significant in the Vaishnavi tradition; what is more, he specifically uses the words ‘aath yaam’—again a typically Vaishnavi description. So too, the twelve Imaams are spoken of as ‘dvadas’ – which is a phrase typically used within the Hindu Vaishnavi tradition to describe certain stutis—verses praising the deity-- by enumerating the twelve names and attributes of that deity.

Similarly, traditionally, certain Muslim village performers recite the Mahabharata and Ramayana, beginning with reciting the kalma, without in anyway seeing this as a contradiction. Or consider the sohars sung by householder women, both Muslim and Hindu, that mix up religious metaphors delightfully! A wonderful example of this is Jafar Husain Khan Badayuni singing and celebrating the birth of Mohammad, for all the world as if this were happening in a village in eastern UP.

The eighteenth century saw a large number of Muslim poets composing verses in Brajbhasha in praise of Krishna. The best known among them are Raskhan, and Raheem, but there were many others too. In many cases, these verses use idiomatic expressions and descriptions typical of Farsi and Urdu poetry and aesthetics to describe the beauty of Krishna or the poet’s own adoration and bhakti. Raskhan’s very moving verse is something that every schoolchild knows and which has become in many ways the epitome of the expression of Krishna bhakti:

Were I to be reborn human, let this lover of beauty (Raskhan) be born as a gopi of Gokul.
As an animal? What choice would I have? Yet I ask to be a cow in the grazing herd of Nand.
Or if reborn a stone, may I be a pebble on that hill that was raised by the sudarshan chakra wielder.
And if as a bird may my resting place be on the branches of the Kadamba growing on Yamuna’s bank.

This period also saw the extraordinary poetry of Nazir Akbarabadi. Often called ‘the people’s poet’ Nazir was perhaps one of the first, if not the first poet, to write about ordinary things, to use an unromanticised voice to write about markets and vegetable vendors, swimmers in the Jamuna, equally social comments on the state of being human, and the fraud of social status. Nazir is also celebrated for his charming long poems—one, about the childhood of Krishna, and the other, in praise of Guru Nanak.

Further, such Krishna bhakti is also found in the poetry of Hasrat Mohani—in this context, I urge readers to refer to C M Naim’s brilliant essay in Hasrat Mohani’s poetry in a recent (end June-early July) issue of Economic and Political Weekly. Even the great

Ghalib's poetry, includes a verse in praise of Ganga.

In our own times, poets like Faiz—a resident of Pakistan-- have become the icon and symbol of the struggle for a just society for all south Asians. For all south Asians. Faiz's is that critical voice that questioned the meaning of that 'pock.marked dawn' of freedom that left so much violence in its trail, and continues to leave so many suffering. Faiz's best known verse, a rallying call for all people to unite, to have hope of and struggle for that true freedom which will surely come—'We will surely see that day!'—is couched in the metaphor of the day of judgement (qayamat) as described in Islam. It holds meaning for us all, everywhere in south Asia—the divine becomes here true democracy, true freedom, and qayamat is but a metaphor for the ending of all injustice and inequality.

So then, what of Pakistan? There too, the syncretic, plural culture—even more endangered than that of India-- is equally still alive. I am thinking especially of the Pakistani singer Farid Ayyaz, singing about Kanhaiya, mixing up and using interchangeably the names Kanhaiya and Nijaam (Nizamuddin), and introducing into the main body of the song, verses from the Sufi poets of the subcontinent. In such a rendering—and this a style typical of Qawwali (and indeed of Thumri too)--- the one addressed, and therefore the one who sings, the ones who listen, all become fluid, their identities become capable of multiplicity, become vast and all-embracing:

“O Kanhaiya, do you remember anything at all (of your promise)?
Your forgetting—even to that forgetting, I surrender myself.
I fall at your feet, beseech you, even try a little magic –to no avail
O Kanhaiya, O Nijaam, do you remember anything at all? “

Quite possibly, as someone once pointed out when I spoke of this, Farid Ayyaz is doing this deliberately-- that this is a conscious statement, made especially for performances in India—for I have only ever heard him sing in India. Yes, perhaps. But the point is that such a rendering is possible, credible, completely in keeping with the spirit of the musical style—and that there is still a space for this. Endangered, no doubt, but still there. We have our identities, but we also experience these as open-ended, fluid, capable of being both one and many.

In the thumri- ghazal tradition, which I myself sing, languages flow into each other—the earthy tones of Avadhi and Brajbhasha move seamlessly to a verse in the fine filigree of Urdu, and then equally seamlessly, back again. Sufi texts are easily sung as thumris and vice versa, confounding the apparent difference between 'religious' and 'secular' spaces. Here, romantic love and devotion flow into each other; the apparent distinction is blurred, perhaps even lost—and the spiritual is finally accepted and understood to be in the everyday; the everyday, the ordinary, illuminated by the numinosity of what we call the spiritual.

Shifting register in the same song from Avadhi and Brajbhasha to Urdu and vice versa, moreover demolishes that most basic of differences—that of gender. For the narrating voice of Avadhi and Brajbhasha poetry is invariably feminine; that of the Urdu and Farsi ghazal is masculine. Gender collapses in such a rendering, bringing me to the understanding, and experience, if perhaps only briefly, of an androgynous, even genderless selfhood. Would such an understanding encourage men, often brutalized by a cruel society to become so violent, to see women as equal, deserving of respect—but more, as 'their own selves'—that cruelty and violence against women is nothing but cruelty and violence against themselves too.

Even as I write this, I learn something interesting. That the consort of Balaji in the temple at Tirupati is Muslim—a deity called Bibi Naanchari. Bibi Naanchari is considered to be the second wife of the deity; her place is beside him in the temple. She shares in the daily worship offered to Balaji. At the foot of the Tirumala hill is the shrine to Padmavati, Balaji's first wife, who receives the homage of her devotees when Balaji visits her every morning at her shrine. I see this again as an example of a culture's attempt to include other elements, an attempt to create a mixed and accepting tradition of worship, that in turn would create and reflect a mixed, tolerant and plural society that is able to accommodate difference.

We—certainly I-- until this moment have tended to take this ability to accommodate difference for granted--recognising the wonder of this mixed, intertwined culture, but also thinking that this is the way cultures are; this is the way we human beings are; this is normal. A bit like the way we take our mothers for granted until we grow up and become mothers ourselves, or experience other ways of mothering. And so these cultures are. Except that with increasing hardening of identities, increasing sense of identity as singular, as monolithic, this delightfully messy, mixed up-ness that is Indian culture(s) seems almost unimaginable to many today, becoming – understood to become--a source of conflict rather than joyousness.

It is often said that all this cultural mixing must really have been to win converts. To that my response-- surely people just like to talk to each other also, just communicate, using imagery that is understandable to each other? To reduce such (delightful) mixed metaphors simply to the cynical desire to win converts is about as problematic as saying that Muslims came to India as conquerors, and only as conquerors!

Some years ago, the organisation SAHMAT, as part of their 1 January remembrance of Safdar Hashmi, had encouraged Delhi's auto-rickshaw drivers to paint their vehicles with verses that would evoke and celebrate this plurality. I particularly remember one such. The driver of one auto-rickshaw had inscribed these very moving words (roughly translated, and perhaps only partially remembered) on his auto:

'How can anyone call me poor? For I am heir to a hundred languages, a hundred religions, a hundred cultural ways of being.... I am rich beyond measure!'

That man—perhaps not very highly educated, very possibly indeed struggling to eke out a livelihood in an economic scenario which is increasingly globalised, turning a blind eye to the needs and problems of the poor—that man had understood and expressed something so deep, so true!

I echo his thoughts-- I too believe that our plurality is our greatest strength and our richness. It is this plurality that gives us the space to claim as our birthright this shimmering tapestry that is our history and our culture—from the songs of the Qawwals of the dargah of Hazrat Muinuddin Chishti and Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, to the chanting of hymns at Kashi Vishvanath, to the silence of Sarnath. The heat of the rocks on Arunachala Hill, the icy cold of Himalayan snow. The blue of the western sea, the sentinel boulders of the Deccan. Our plural culture gives me the experience of a hundred languages, a thousand ways of worship.

The environment activist Vandana Shiva often exhorts us to remember that monocultures—whether in farming or in society in general-- are problematic. It is a narrow, singular defining of culture that is a problem. Plurality is never the source of conflict. Rather, it is what makes a society vibrant and beautiful. Even more than tolerance, perhaps it brings a loving acceptance of difference, and even a joyousness. In today's increasingly polarised world, how do we rediscover that acceptance, that joyousness? Perhaps by remembering Kabir and his verse about the 'dhai aakhar prem ka' -- the two and a half letters of the alphabet that make up the word 'love':

Reading book after book never made anyone wise.

It is by reading the two and half letters that make up the word 'love', that one becomes wise.

DISCUSSION

Pluralism and Diversity: Syncretic Islamic Traditions of Maharashtra

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An appreciation of the pluralism and diversity of Islamic traditions of Maharashtra was born out of my field study of Behrampada, a predominantly Muslim slum community in Mumbai. Commissioned by the Maharashtra State Commission for Minorities, the study aimed at examining the many layers of deprivation faced by the community in accessing their entitlements to food security, health, education, employment/livelihood and basic amenities of housing, water supply, sanitation.

The reason for this focus was because Behrampada was one of the flashpoints of the riots that swept through Mumbai after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Apart from the loss of life and property that the community experienced during the riots, the people have been subjected to recurring natural and manmade disasters. They have borne the brunt of the destruction that visited Mumbai in July 2005 through the flooding of the Mithi River. The area, because of poor city planning and lack of precautionary measures, is a potential fire hazard. It has experienced sporadic outbreak of fires caused by the short circuiting of illegal electric cables. Therefore, the security concern of the people, especially during communal conflagrations, was one of the important parameters of the study.

The people are migrants to the city from different villages and towns of Maharashtra as well as from the various parts of the country. They came to the city because of its promise of economic security. But the lack of accommodation and living spaces, forced the early inhabitants of the area to appropriate this uninhabitable and worm infested area between the Mithi River and the railway tracts. The inhabitants still remember their early struggles to make the land habitable.

Behrampada has today grown into an overcrowded and congested slum with open gutters criss-crossing along the narrow path and electric haphazardly connected electric wires. It accommodates not only the original inhabitants of the area but also relatives and

non-relatives who come to the city to work in the readymade garment industry, small eating places, zari industry and bakery. The Muslim artisans who work there practice their traditional crafts of block printing, zari and embroidery work, readymade garments, costume jewellery and toys. Garment manufacturing, in particular, is a major industry, employing large section of the people in cutting, tailoring and selling the products. The community also provides a wide range of services as chauffeurs, bus drivers, carpenters, welders domestic workers and khanawalla to the city.

The need to understand the people and their culture grew out of my field visits to the area. It was difficult to get the people to talk on the riots or to discuss its aftermath. It was apparent that a memory of fear remained embedded in their collective psyche. The tension in the community, while awaiting the Allahabad High Court verdict on the Babri Masjid dispute, was palpable. The verdict on 29 September 2010 was a tremendous let down. The real impact of communal conflagrations went beyond the immediate loss of life and property to destroy faith in the country.

Nonetheless, these developments had not succeeded in erasing the prevailing culture of tolerance and accommodation of differences. The Hindu minority living in the slum lived with equanimity with the Muslim majority, accommodating each other's religious/cultural celebrations. To understand this culture, I turned my attention to the Islamic history of Maharashtra. The enquiry, not only brought out the many strands of Islam in Maharashtra, but also the continued resilience of such traditions: For these traditions resonate through the lived religious experiences of people, despite attempts by the power elite to divide people into conflicting religious communities by selectively altering historical memories.

This enquiry does not include in its ambit, the many textured ways by which Islam has enriched indigenous cultures and religions; nor does it delineate the special histories of each Islamic religious sect. The aim is to outline the growth of Islamic culture in Maharashtra, to counter the growing trend of religious polarization and distrust amongst communities. It celebrates the rich syncretism of religious traditions that have evolved in Maharashtra and argues that any attempt to destroy these traditions would only destroy the essence of Maharashtra.

Religious Heterodoxy in Maharashtra

Maharashtra has the distinction of having evolved many eclectic religious strands that have challenged religious orthodoxies and sought to create a climate of religious and cultural tolerance. The contribution of the medieval Bakti poet saints of Maharashtra to promote tolerance and appreciation of differences is well known; but what is not adequately acknowledged in contemporary historiography, is the equally rich contributions made by the Sufi saints of Maharashtra. Their contribution continues in the living traditions of religious syncretism found among the peasants, artisans and various other communities living in almost every village of the state.

Paradoxically, Maharashtra also has the dubious distinction of spawning militant Hindu orthodoxy. The rise of the Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sangh (RSS) since 1925 has sought to create illusions of continued and sustained religious conflict between the Hindus and Muslims. This rising trend of religious fundamentalism and attempts to slot people, their customs and religious beliefs into water tight compartments has not however destroyed the embedded syncretic traditions. These traditions remain an undiminished space and a way of life even in Nagpur that saw the rise of Hindutva.

Spread of Islam in Maharashtra

The growth and development of Islam in Maharashtra have broadly followed two divergent pathways: The first which remains true to the great traditions of Islam and the second that evolved out of its contact with local cultures and socio-religious practices. Contrary to the popular historical fallacy, Islam did not develop with the power of the sword. Its entry into Maharashtra can be traced to the maritime history of the Konkan and its contact with the Middle-East. Apart from planting the seeds of Islam among the local people, the existence of the sea route encouraged many communities such as the Jews, the Parsees and subsequently the Sunni Muslims escaping religious persecution in their homeland find refuge in Maharashtra. The widespread acceptance of Islam by the local communities was because of the message of love and brotherhood preached by the medieval Sufi saints.

The rise of Muslim political power in the Deccan began with the conquest of Deogiri by Allaudin Khilji in 1394. In the initial phase of Muslim rule in the Deccan, there were sporadic instances of forced conversion and the destruction of temples. This use of religion as a method of political intimidation was, however, not the characteristic feature of medieval history. By and large, the Muslim rule in the Deccan was both liberal and tolerant.

Along with the freedom of religion in their realms, many Sultans promoted religious and cultural understanding through court patronage of scholars and encouragement of translations of Hindu sacred texts into Persian. At the same time, they did not feel the need to promote the translation of Islamic texts into local languages in order to facilitate conversions. The Bahamani Kings in the Deccan provided generous grants to Hindu temples and their rule witnessed the growing power of many Maratha families. These families continued to enjoy the right to collect taxes and were able to exercise considerable rule in the domain.

The Sufi saints and poets who came in the wake of Muslim political expansion in the Deccan facilitated the spread of Islam. Among the earliest Sufi saints to arrive in Maharashtra were Momin Arif, Julaluddin, Hayat Kalandar, Muntajibuddin Jarjaribaksh, Nuruddin and others. The main centres of Sufism in Maharashtra were Aurangabad Burhanpur, Jalna, and Paithan. Preaching the message of universal brotherhood and the oneness of God, the Sufi saints and their disciples attracted large following from the lower caste/community groups. The Masjids, Darghas and Kankaks they established attracted both Hindus and Muslim devotees.

Religious Syncretism in Maharashtra

This long history of religious syncretism in Maharashtra indicates the on-going dialogue between the Hinduism and Islam was pragmatic and mature. One of the gathas composed by Eknath (1533-99) entitled Hindu-Turk Sambah, concludes the oneness of God and humanity. Along with the saints of the Bhakti movement, such as Dhyanaswar, Eknath and Janabai, Muslim poet saints between the 14th and 18th centuries enriched Marathi language and literature. The Yoga Samgram (1645) composed by Shaikh Mohammad (1565-1660) begins with an invocation to Ganesha. He writes, "I am born in a lowly Muslim family, yet I talk about the Quran and Puranas. I adore the Sadhus and holy persons." In another poem he added:

*"Babhul tree has grown ripe mangoes
This is the judgement feels Shaikh Mahammad.
By Birth he is a Muslim, His speech is Marathi.
It is heard with deep interest by the Brahmins and the Sudras,
Over the bitter vine, melons have ripened
Yet with fair intentions the devoted consume them
Although born a Muslim, he is born with talent,
and exerts a hold over different castes and creed."*

Shah Muntoji Brahamani (1576-1650) also wrote on spirituality in Marathi. His important books include: Siddhasanket-Prabandha, Amritsar, Advaitprakash, Prakashdeep, Swaroopsmadhi, Amrutanubhav, Guruleela, Vevekopatti and Panchikaran. These efforts, the Sufi and Bhakti saints harmonised the eclectic strands of the great and little traditions of both Hinduism and Islam. The ethics that the saints preached dealt with the lived experiences of the poor and marginalized Hindu and Muslim communities. The use of religion to further the political ambitions of the power-elite did not touch the masses. The artisans, the tillers of the soil, the poets and writers from both communities sought to create a shared spiritual universe.

Continuity and Resilience of Cultural and Religious Traditions

The resilience of these bonds, forged by the shared socio-economic conditions of the poor, is evident by the visits of both Hindus and Muslims to the innumerable dargahs mazars, chillahs and temples found in Maharashtra. Many sacred sites have dual identities--of a dargha and a temple—presided by a saint/deity with Muslim and Hindu names. The shrine of Kanifnath at Madhi village in Pathardi Taluka of Ahmednagar district is an example of this dual identity of the presiding deity/saint. He was earlier called Kanhoba by the Hindus and Shah Ramzan Mahi Sawar by the Muslims. A similar example is found in Nagpur where the temple of Chota Taj Baug also commemorates a dargha within the temple.

The dargha of Hazrat Shah Babu Jamal in of Kolhapur city, where the bodies of the saint Hazrat Shah and his brahmin disciple are interred, has an engraving of Lord Ganesha on its main entrance. In another instance of accommodation and tolerance of difference, the Maruti shrine, near a Muslim hamlet in Girnera village, Aurangabad, is maintained by the Muslims after the migration of the local Hindu community. The donor list of the Maha Kali temple in Popli village and the Lakshmi Temple in Mirjouli village in Ratnagiri district reveal many Muslim names.

Representing the similar spirit of tolerance and accommodation in Mumbai, is the famous Lalbaugcha Raja and the Ganesh of Tejukay Mansion in Ganeshgalli, worshipped during the 10-day Ganesh festival of Maharashtra.

The Ganesh Tujukay idol halts outside the Hindustan Masjid to receive tribute from the Maulana before its immersion in the Arabian Sea in Girgaon Chaupathy. The Raja of Lalbaug, during its 22-hour journey to the sea for immersion receives tribute from devotees of all religious persuasions—an unbroken tradition that continued even after the Hindu-Muslim riots in 1992.

Similarly, when during the annual puja celebrations of Krishnabai (a water deity in Wai in Satara District) the Goddess is carried in a palanquin to visit various homes, she is also carried to the Muslim hamlets to receive her annual offerings.

The Dargah of Panch Pir Sahebe (which represents the fusion of five darghas) located at Panch Pir Chowk in the heart of Ahmednagar City is visited by people of all religions during the annual urs festival. This intermingling of people in shared worship and belief is evident even in the existence of many

Darghas in Paithan the holiest Hindu pilgrim site of Maharashtra. The legend shrouding the 750- year- old dargha called Maulana

Saheb atop a hill in Paithan is interesting. The saint Hazrat Sayed Moidjuddin Chisti Ab Pais is believed to have come to Paithan from Arabia at the age of seven and established a human settlement after defeating a female demon. The dargha is visited by many Hindu sadhus during the annual jatra to Paithan. In deference to the sentiments of the Hindu devotees, no beef is offered in the shrine, although there is such no restriction on other meat offerings.

This trend in cultural amity and co-existence is also evident from the 10-day annual urs festival at the Makhadoom Ali Mahimi Shah Abaz dargh beginning on the thirteenth day of Shwwal as per the Muslim calendar. The procession begins at the Mahim Police Station, believed to be the site of his residence, after a police officer offers chaddar to the saint. The ceremony is observed by two police officers from each of the eighty four police stations of the city. In a room adjacent to the senior police inspector's office is a steel cupboard with the saint's personal belongings and his hand-written Quran which is considered to be a calligraphic masterpiece

Entwining Social Structures

The foundations of these traditions have been built over the centuries. The majority of the converts to Islam were from the peasant and artisan groups who were inspired by the Islamic message of love and universal brotherhood. The decision to convert by an individual or a section of a community came with a huge price. They were alienated from the earlier caste/community support systems and were imperfectly integrated into the new religious group. Unable to change their socio-economic status, converts into Islam from the grassroots communities, continued to practice their traditional occupations, living alongside the Hindu subaltern groups. As a consequence, they were part of the prevailing jajmani/bara-panch system and were part of the hereditary socio-economic village relationships that integrated the 12 artisan groups with the five land-owning castes. Symbolically representing this integration is the annual jatra of the presiding village deity in a palanquin around the village. During the procession, the deity also halts at the doorstep of the Muslim maankari's home. This religious syncretism is also seen in the participation of people of all faith in the revelries of the other religions. At Popli village of Ratnagiri district, the Holi fire is lit at the residence of the Muslim mujawar of the Anushka Baba's daragh first by both Hindus and Muslims. More importantly, many syncretic communities have evolved out of the composite cultures of Maharashtra. Among them may be included the Kabir Panths and the Nagesh Sampradaya communities. Similarly, the Mali community, an intermediary caste, plays an important role in the management of many daraghs of the state and also traditionally prepare the garlands for the various temples for worship.

This overview of the entwining relationship Hindu-Muslim relationship highlights the grassroots Muslim-Hindu syncretism by which the austerity and simplicity of Islamic thought connected with the profusion and mystical traditions of Hindu and tribal religions. There is not a single town or city without a dargh/chillah/mazar visited by people of all faiths. These places of worship provide for the evolution of a composite culture through the celebrations of cultural programmes during the annual urs festivals and the rendition of Qawwalis. Bhajans are also sung in those shrines visited by many Hindus. It is apparent that the impact of this shared cultural identities that have evolved in the various towns/villages where the Muslims co-exist with the lower castes/communities, is also reflected in the gullies of Mumbai and has shaped its cosmopolitan cultures.

DISCUSSION

Understanding Muslim women: Reframing the gaze

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This study has two parts. In the first part I am trying to give a general introduction about the theoretical perspectives of Islamic Feminism. The second part is an attempt to study the Muslim women of Kerala as agents of social change.

Of late, the area of interference of Islamic feminism is many. It questions the way in which women is treated inside the religion and also revisit religious texts and history of religion in a feminist perspective. Sexual sensitive reading of Quran also was prevalent in these days. It also challenges the predominant views in feminism arguing that women are entitled to get equal treatment and justice even within her own religion, caste or class. It also defends anti-Islamic propaganda based on the common misconception regarding Islam and also fights ante-Islamic policies being adopted globally. But theories and practice of Islamic Feminism is not uniform. At the same time it is not possible to discern various schools based on their distinctive theoretical approach. These ideas are interwoven and mutually supporting.

It is a common perception that religion does not permit women to become a priest (imam) nor does it recognize her as a religious scholar. There are instances of women challenging this system by revisiting Quran and other religious texts in the light of feminist theories and also relying on the varied views of religious schools. The books of Laila Ahammed, Fathima Mernessi, Rifath Hassan, Asma Barlas and Saba Mahamood belong to this category.

The idea of treating Islam as monolithic, irrespective of the geographical, cultural and temporal differences, is even now prevalent. In fact religion of Islam and its practices are diverse in different cultures. The critics of Islam do not recognize this diversity for justifying their criticism. It is a fact that, there are different interpretations for Quran. Likewise all Hadidhs (the words and practice of the Prophet is called 'hadidh') are not accepted as authentic. There is great differences in practicing Islam. The two major schools are Sunnis and Shias. Sunnis themselves subdivided in to Sahfei, Hanfei, Hmbali and Maliki Schools. There is great difference in the way each school professes and practice Islam. Apart from this there are diversities based on the geographical factors.

The existence of this diversity might have encouraged Islamic Feminist to read religious texts in accordance with their religious, cultural, and political view. They de-construct the traditional approach of giving privileges and concessions to men as fundamentals of Islamic belief. Their attempt is to liberate Quran from the traditional understanding based on the patriarchy. They were trying to put an end to the exploitation of women in the name of Islam. When Laila Ahammed, Amina Wudood and Asma Barsal are attempting to revisit Quran in this perspective, Fathima Mernissi relies on Hadidhs and Islamic history. Saba Mahmmod studies women organizations and Mosque movement in Egypt.

Amina Wudood has done her study critically analyzing ante-women stances, misconceptions and misinterpretation of Quranic Verses, which are used to reinforce male hegemony. She has dealt with in detail with Verse 4:34 of Quran, which empowers men to punish and admonish women, analyzing its word meaning and the circumstances in which it was revealed. She asserts that it does not sanction oppression of women and misbehavior of men. But this verse is largely misused for oppressing women. She argues that Quran revealed in an age during which marriage was considered as a total subjugation of women to male authority. Generally wives were submissive to the authority of their husbands. In this background Quran asked husbands not to beat their submissive wives. Quran actually call for a change in the attitude of men towards women. She is trying to revisit the Quranic verses in its historical background. She reasserts that Quran nowhere asked women to be submissive to the authority of men and nor has Quran glorified the submissive nature of women as a great virtue. She argues that the male domination tendencies of postmodern era are against the basic tenets and preaching of Islam. She concludes that Quran never treats men and women relation in hegemonic view, treating women as subaltern, but rather treat them as equals and creatures of the God, Almighty. She uproots the traditional concept of male supremacy by reading Quran in feminist perspective. She thoroughly analyses each and every words and grammatical usages of Verse 4:1, in its historical background, in the light of monotheism and other basic tenets of Islam and concludes that according to this verse men and women originated from a single Nafs (body), have common objective in life and ultimately will be returned to the same end.

The distinguishing feature of this study is that it is on the understanding of the age during which Quran is revealed and the attempts made to understand the Quranic teachings in its entirety. By opposing male chauvinistic interpretation of Quran, it also demolishes all the existing notion of women in Islam.

Whereas Amina Wudood attempts to widen the space of women in Islam, Laila Ahammed and Asma Barlas, through their study of Quran, challenges the western dominated feminist theories and world visions.

Asma Barlas claims that her attempt is not merely the revisit of the Quran in women perspective, but to show world that Muslim women could fight traditionalism for equality within the four corners of Quranic teachings.

In fact her attempt is to expose the western notion regarding Muslim women. She criticizes as western the very feminist theories relied own by her. She asserts that her objective behind writing this book highlighting the sexual equality advocated by the authentic verses of Quran is to face the argument of the traditional Muslims and Feminist. In this way she very cautiously approaches the western Feminism and selectively receives and dismisses its views. Even though she uses western feminist theories as a tool for analyzing the male dominated systems and male chauvinism, she is a very strong critic of the same. In this way she problematise the power equations within the feminism.

Politics of Piety of Saba Mahamood raises this criticism with more severity and clarity. She criticize that feminist theories based on the western notion of freedom leads women from one power system to another.

In this book Saba Mahmmod analyses the participation of women in Dawa (i.e. religious preaching) attached Egyptian Mosque. Among the religious functions, women are permitted to do Dawa. She is not entitled to lead prayer or deliver Khutuba (special speech on the occasion of Friday's Jumua or Eid days). As men are ordained as the protector of women, it is not permissible for women to lead a congregation consisting of men as well, it is stated. It is further argued that the female voice will arouse sexual

desire in the minds of men and thereby distract them from prayer. But this argument is not accepted by all the Muslims. But Egyptian Daiyat (women preachers) do not question all these arguments. They are not ready for any confrontation. However the book narrates how their outlooks and activities influence religious institutions and how they secure their space in religious activities without directly attacking women's status in religion, but relying on varied opinions recognized by Islam. She introduces many scholarly women working as Daiyat. The life story of Al Gazani, the pioneer in this realm, shows how women find their place among religious scholars. The institution meant for training women eventually became part of the great Al Azhar University. Subsequently this institution has become the centre for excelling women, especially rural women, in religious affairs. Eventually it strengthened participation of Women in Mosque and movement is called the Mosque Movement. Now a number of women of different ages are participating in Dawa.

The book introduces Hajja Faiza as one of the leading figure among Daiyats. Once one of the participant asked Hajja Faiza about the propriety of her leading the prayer when male Imams (priest) are available because she heard from a well respected Shaikh (Scholar) that such an was bid'a (newly invented and hence disapproved). Hajja Faiza read the question aloud, smiled for a moment and responded- "this is of course opinion of Shaikh Karam: did you hear it from him". Without waiting for an answer, she continued:

I respect his opinion, but it is based on Maliki School. The other three schools- Shafei, Hnafi and Hambali- say that it is permissible for women to lead women prayers, and is in fact better. Three Schools are in agreement on their opinion, the fourth is different. I follow the majority opinion in this case and sheikh Karam follows the minority opinion. He is within his right to do so, just as I am.

Saba Mahmood point-out that the stand taken by Hajja Faiza is distinctive in many respect. First of all, her justification is not on the basis of equality of sexes, but on the divergence of opinion among Muslim Jurist. Apart from that, her recognition of the authenticity and credibility of different schools and freedom to choose one among them, her respect for the minority opinion, etc goes along with the style of approach of modern religious reformers.

Female circumcision (kitan) is prevalent in Egypt in large Scale. So is criticism against it. The reply given by her for a question on this subject is exemplary. Instead of disapproving this practice, she quoted the basic texts and explained that the Hadith (tradition of prophet) quoted in support of it is weak and hence it is neither an obligatory (wajib) act, nor recommended (mustahabb) act, or the custom of prophet and his companions (Sunna). So it falls out of these categories and one has freedom to perform or not to perform it. Its protagonist argues that it is good for mental health of women, and it is prudent to follow even weaker Hadidh, because there must be wisdom in it. It is up to you to choose any opinion. Anyhow consultation of a doctor is advisable before performing it.

Most of the audience appreciated this reply. She simply disseminated correct information and each individual is made responsible for her choice. One of the participant remarked that 'she made people to like their religion'- Saba Mahmood writes.

The book deals with a number of women preachers like Faiza and their opinions on the subject vary. In this book Saba Mahmood explains how age, class, race and traditions influences religious stances and formulate discourses through a number of illustrative examples. According to her they used not only the contextual and historical interpretation method of religious texts, but even folk practices for maintaining their arguments against the traditional opinion of clergy. She observes that their logic and technique deserve serious study.

Fathima Mernissi in her book titled 'The Veil and the Male Elite' discusses the Hadidhs as well the context of Quranic revelations. In fact she re-construct the period of Prophet for the purpose of locating women's space in Islamic society.

The large scale misuse of one Hadidh reported by Aboobekr prompted to the study. In Islamic Jurisprudence Hadidhs are the records of the words, deeds and practices of the holy prophet. The Hadidh attributes to the prophet one statement in the sense that 'those who hand over power to women will not succeed'. It was widely misused for forbidding women's entry in to political and public sphere. Mernissi traces the source and origin of this Hadidh and the circumstances in which it was reported; and after analyzing all the relevant factors she argues that the hadidh and its source is not authentic and reliable. She further explained the circumstances in which such ante-women laws are introduced in to the Islamic jurisprudence.

Mernissi dismisses by analyzing historical factors all arguments in support of expelling women from public sphere. For this she analysis even the structure of prophet's house. She studies all the important women figures such prophet's wives Aysha, Ummu Salma and Hind Binth Uthuba, the sworn enemy of the prophet and critically examines their activities to find out how they carved out their space in Islamic history. She concludes that their life and activities were not confined to the traditional space allotted to women. Mernissi denies the distinction between domestic and public spheres for women and men and concludes that even the prophet has testified the importance of both spaces for women.

It is only in the latter half of the twentieth century that Islamic Feminism showed its presence in various Islamic Countries. Egypt is considered as its place origin. Egyptian Feminist Union was formed by Huda Sheravi in the 1920. It is considered as the first

Islamic feminist organization. They were working in tandem with other feminist organizations across the world. She belong to the upper strata of the society and launched movement by throwing away her Pardhas. But today there are Islamic Feminist activists and theoretical groups who approach the Pardha issue in different angles. It is not that of some of the movements are correct and some others are deviated. So also the development is neither natural nor linear. Now Islamic Feminism is capable of not only questioning the male hegemonic structure of Islamic Society, but to redefine the existing feminist theories. It is the theoretical stance of the Islamic Feminist that placed women as an essential group transcending the limits of time and space, effectively opposed the ante religious attitudes in feminism in the intellectual field by bringing same to the field of discourse. The active ante-imperialist stand adopted by the Islamic feminist has given more clarity in theoretical field. Such intellectual approaches questions or subverts many a firm binary oppositions like modernism/tradition, patriarchy/oppression of women, religious belief/secularism.

II

As far as Kerala is concerned, in neo-liberal, feminist and religious discourses Muslim women are marginalized depicting them as an illiterate, uneducated, unsocialised, group melting down their life within the four walls of kitchen and suffering under the yoke of male domination and priesthood. But, in my opinion it is not possible to evaluate Muslim women without rejecting the prevalent notions (sic feminist notions) regarding knowledge, agency, tradition, and modernity. Let us first consider illiteracy. They are considered as illiterate because of their abstinence from modern knowledge in traditional Muslim society. Here we have to examine the contribution of Arabi- Malayalm language. It is a locally developed language- Malayalam written in Arabic script-invented, nourished and developed by Maapila Muslims. Muslim women were very proficient in this language. It is an immensely rich language with a number of scientific, philosophical, and literary works. It is amazing that even Ashtangahradaya was translated to Arabi-Malayalam script. 'Char Darvesh', an Arabi-Malayalam novel was published six years ahead of 'Indulekha', which is considered as the first Malayalam novel. It shows that Arabi- Malayalam language was capable of even using in modern genre such as novel. There were a number of magazines and weeklies in Arabi-Malyalam script, dealing with contemporary social and political issues, and some of them were even confiscated or banned by the British. Thus the Arabi- Malaylam language has contemporary status and a very rich literary tradition. It is to be noted that some magazines such as Niza-ul-Islam were exclusively for women. Muslim women had profusely contributed to these magazines by writing articles, poetry etc and actively participated in its running by reading and writing critical letters. There was immensely rich music tradition in which women in large numbers participated as makers and singers. P.K.Haleema, Naduthoppil Ayishakutty, C.H.Kunhayisha, T.A. Rabiya and Puthoor Amina were very famous poets, their poems were well performed and considered as master pieces even today. Apart from its popularity, these songs reject many a traditional patriarchic concepts. A very good example is Puthur Amina's Kathupattu. This song, which is believed to have written during 1921, is in the form of a response to the marriage proposal from a person who had under gone imprisonment in Bellari jail.

She writes:

*"The smugness you brought from Bellari
Is not going to work with me
Why are you wasting time? Do you think?
I will ever marry you? (.....)
I am not exposing your ragged sack
Don't try to trap me with your proposal-
I replied to your song in befitting style
This woman has not helped any known criminal. (.....)*

*Don't be feverish on seeing this cot
And don't think that you can devour
Everything you desire.
Being well known in this land
Proposals are coming to me
From all four sides
It is not difficult for me
To, get a man far better than you.
Will be dear and honey
Until he(man) accomplished it
And be dumped in the kitchen
After delivering from him
And will be thrown to sun
On loosing the sheen
He will go in search of
Yet another green pasture
Without any passion*

What nonsense is this”

This poem reveals not only her tenacity to quarrel with an ex-convict but also her views regarding the freedom of woman in choosing her spouse and her attitude about a family structure dominated by men.

Many of the traditional singers were women and they had many occasions for performing it, such as Mailanchi Kallyanam (i.e. mehanty fest in the day before marriage), Kathukuttu Kallyanam (ear piercing ceremony), etc. Nafeesath Mala and Mohyudhenn Mala were traditionally recited by the side of delivery room in the belief that it will ease delivery. There special groups for each occasions. In my considered view many them have contributed even to tunes (Ishals) formulation. Not in the sense that all tunes were formulated by women, but that they have contributed to its development by variation, chiseling and experimentations. Muslim women actively participated in religious teachings also. They were called Usthad or Mollachi. There were Othu Palli (Madrasas) exclusively run by women teachers. All these things indicate that Muslim women found thereon space and utilized it even in the traditional Muslim community. Apart from this, during the period of renaissance also we can see the presence of many famous Muslim women such as Haleema Beevi and Aysha Mayan. It was 1938 that Haleema Beevi started a magazine in the name of Muslim Vanitha. She herself the printer, publisher and editor of the Magazine. Aysha Mayan strenuously argued for the modern education of Muslim women. She was advocating that in Islam men and women are like twin children, with equal rights and obligations. In 1944 she went to Sri Lanka and engaged there in educational activities meant for Muslim women. She participated in politics and became the first Muslim councilor and deputy Mayor in Sri Lanka.

Another interesting work of this period which I came across a fiction Sulthana's Dream translated in Muslim Mithram magazine in 1927, written by RS Hussain from Bangladesh. The plot of the story was a dream of girl entertaining anguish about the plight of Indian Muslim women. This story questions the very basic notion we entertain about being man and woman. The heroin of the story was laughed at by the women on street of the country she reached in dream. Her friend Sara explains the reason for laughing at as her masculine appearance.

Sulthana. Masculinity! What they mean by it?

Sara. They mean you exhibit manly fear and shyness.

The narrator of this story is a girl observing pardha and living in seclusion from strangers. In dream world she takes it as a joke and then become very happy thinking that her lifestyle befits man. All the way side sights are strange to her. The most surprising is that she never met a man.

Sulthana. Where are men?

Sara. They are at their places.

Sulthana. What do you mean by 'their places'?

Sara. Oh. I am sorry. Your are here for the first time and you don't know our ways. Our men are kept in houses.

Sulthana. Like we are protected in our special homes.

Sara. Yes, it is so.

'What a surprise' Sulthana exclaimed. She laughed. Her friend Sara also laughed.

Sara. My dear Sulatana. What an injustice is this. You are locking up innocent women and let loose men.

Sulthana. Why? As we are frail by nature, is not living inside house is safe to us?

Sara. But we have no safety so long as men are roaming outside. Is it good that a wild animal enters market place.

In this story Sulthana arrived in a country dominated by women where men are kept inside houses acknowledging their innate limitation and the responsibility of running the state is taken up by women.

Sulthana heard that in the remote female dominated country, they rule the country and control the society and men are entrusted with the task of bringing up children and managing domestic affairs. She told her friend that my friends will be surprised hearing it.

Sara. You tell them whatever things seen here.

It is the role assigned to Sulthana. The narrator tries to explain the problems faced by women in the society by relocating the man and woman in their spaces. The role of natural forces played in designing this world is to be specially evaluated. Scientific knowledge, role played by Universities in national affairs etc is also discussed in this story. Through this story what the author dreaming is not a society in which educated woman with specially acquired skill manages domestic affairs; but a society in which social and political power is wielded by them.

Even if such strong ideas, writings and activities were present among Muslim women, they have not found a place in mainstream discourse or discussion about renaissance. Though the name of Haleema Beevi occurred in one or two recent studies, she was portrayed only as a product of renaissance movement; having no role in its conceptualization and execution. It suggests essentiality of a unique perspective for identifying the works of Muslim women and recognizing them as agency of social reform.

INTERNATIONAL

Rights of migrant workers: exploring illegal/irregular/undocumented migration in UK

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This is a modified version of the paper presented at the Historical Materialism conference at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in April 2013, and draws on a current research project jointly carried out by researchers based at London Metropolitan University and University of Manchester in the UK .

A number of terms such as “illegal”, “irregular”, “unauthorised”, “clandestine” are used while talking about migration without valid permits, each with a history and political meaning. The terms are highly contested with no universally accepted definitions: they may apply to those who have some form of visa (for example, a visitor visa), but no right to work, or those without any residence rights. The term “illegal”, sometimes linked with people smuggling and trafficking, is used by states and policy makers seeking stricter border and immigration controls, and works to criminalise migrants. It is also heavily used by much of the media stoking racist and xenophobic feelings, as part of a discourse on migrants as a drain on limited resources, as undermining the conditions of native workers, etc. The term “undocumented” is increasingly being used by civil society organisations and academics coming from more sympathetic positions, and is used here to mean migrants without a valid residence permit authorising them to live in the UK.

According to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), currently 214 million people live outside their country of birth and about 10-15 percent of these may be undocumented, although obtaining exact figures is difficult for obvious reasons. The reasons people migrate are many: the migration may be poverty driven, a result of environmental degradation and disasters, or a result of wars and conflicts. The effects of the global economic downturn, and of unequal development can be complex: for example, studies have found that economic development in the Global South can correlate with increased poverty-driven migration. In this study, the migrants express a variety of reasons for their migration and their stories often hint at underlying macroeconomic shifts in both places of origin and destination. Coupled with these drivers of movement are recent changes in global migration governance taking the form of increasingly restrictive and punitive immigration policies in many developed countries of destination, particularly aimed at the so-called low-skilled migrants.

Particularly relevant to the research described here is current UK immigration policy governing low-skilled migrants originating from outside the European Union. The need for these workers in the labour market is evident from surveys and qualitative research, including this research: undocumented migrants often work in low-skilled, low-paid sectors where vacancies are hard to fill and retention of staff is difficult. In addition, where particular language, cultural and other specialist skills are needed, businesses struggle to recruit from the available legal workforce. Nevertheless, there are currently no legal employment routes for low-skilled migrants from outside the EU. A new five-tier, points-based immigration system for employment-based migration of non-EU citizens was phased in between 2008 and 2010 in the UK. Although unskilled worker migration was included under Tier 3 of the system to replace previous low-skilled immigration programmes, in practice, this tier never became operational, and in early 2013 Prime Minister David Cameron announced plans to shut down Tier 3. In addition, sanctions on employers employing undocumented workers were strengthened in 2006, and enforcement was stepped up. There is a potential fine of £10,000 pounds per undocumented worker employed in a business. Recent government announcements have suggested doubling these fines and introducing new rules requiring landlords to check the immigration status of tenants and fines for failing to do so. The present UK coalition government pledged in their election manifesto to deliver a reduction in net migration figures, and have stepped up rhetoric and action around ending irregular migration.

The discussion here is based on in-depth interviews conducted with 55 workers and 24 employers belonging to three migrant groups: Chinese, Bangladeshi, and those from Turkey and Northern Cyprus, including Kurds. The worker interviews were conducted in the migrants’ first languages by community researchers, and the employer interviews were conducted in English. Worker interviews explored their migration history, work history in the UK including ways of finding work, their terms and conditions of work, etc. The employers were from “ethnic enclave” businesses, namely immigrant-run businesses employing mainly co-ethnic workers and based largely in areas of immigrant concentration. Interviews with the employers included their own work histories in the UK, how they set up their businesses, how they recruit workers, and their experiences of, and attitudes to, employing undocumented workers. The narratives were analysed using qualitative data analysis software to extract common themes.

Before recounting some of the workers’ stories, it is useful to look briefly at the spectrum and consequences of (il)legality. The focus here is on those who are undocumented, i.e., without the right to live in the UK, and therefore also without the right to work.

This has huge consequences for the workers: for example, they are unable to open bank accounts making it difficult to send money overseas; they can't legally rent places to stay; they can never travel out of the country for a visit (if they want to continue working in the UK). Of course, there are emotional and psychological consequences – isolation and loneliness coupled with the constant fear of raids, detection and deportation. Above all, it affects their position in the labour market, affecting their access to jobs, and making them more vulnerable to exploitation. Becoming completely undocumented can occur through many routes, and this is reflected in the narratives of the workers. Migrants may enter the UK with a visa and then overstay, or enter as an asylum seeker and then remain once the asylum claim is rejected. Entry can also be through clandestine means – being smuggled across borders, using forged documents, etc. Some migrants transit through a spectrum of legality, for student visa holders working longer than the permitted 20 hours a week, or tourist visa holders working in violation of their visa terms. Rather than a static phenomenon, illegality can be seen as a process – produced through changes in immigration policy such as the withdrawal of the Overseas Domestic Worker visa in the UK, making English language requirements more stringent, and the shutting of pathways for low-skilled migrants from non-EU countries. Regularisation on the other hand can also reverse this process.

Many complex and contradictory themes emerge from the workers' and indeed the employers' stories. These stories indicate migration status mobility: the movement between being "illegal" and "legal", in both directions, including having various intermediate statuses. At the same time, migration status intersects with other social hierarchies, in particular, gender. Co-ethnic networks can both provide opportunities and support, while also serving to limit possibilities. Running through the narratives were the strategies workers adopt to remain hidden in an environment of high surveillance and constant threat of detection and deportation – at considerable cost. Perhaps most importantly, these workers emerge not simply as victims, but with agency and initiative, albeit in a very constrained environment. Some of these themes are illustrated in the following vignettes drawn from two of the worker interviews:

The first story is of Liang, a 44 year old man from China who was interviewed in July 2012 and at the time had been living and working in the UK for four years. He used to sell motorbikes in China, but as more people could afford cars, and motorbikes became less popular, his business suffered and he couldn't keep up with his loan repayments. His children were at college and he needed to earn more money. "I thought it might be easier to earn money outside China."

He borrowed more money to pay snakeheads (people smugglers) – about £10,000 (Rs. 8 lakhs) – and they arranged a six-month business-visa for him to come to the UK. These agents also arranged a place for him to stay once he arrived: a bed in a room shared with four or five others for twenty-five pounds a week. He overstayed once his visa expired. He found his early jobs through Chinese language newspaper ads in London: these were very short-term, very low paid jobs doing manual work in restaurant kitchens. He then tried manual work for a construction contractor: this was hard, poorly paid, and irregular. After six months, when work became very irregular and with no improvement in pay and conditions he decided to go back to restaurants: using the networks he had built up to this point he asked around and managed to find a job as a kitchen porter. Here he was able to save up some money (he lived and ate at the restaurant) to buy a moped, and then found a food delivery job for another restaurant. He got his driving license, tax disc and vehicle insurance for the moped with the help of friends.

He described a moped accident during this period which provides an insight into the human cost of "illegality". As an "illegal worker" you have to be a very careful driver because having an accident means the involvement of the police, and going to hospital; but despite his careful driving he is hit by a car and injured. Not being registered with a doctor in the UK, normally he would get any medication he needs via acquaintances from China. But in this instance the police arrive at the scene of the accident and he is taken to hospital in an ambulance and kept for seven hours. His injury takes time to heal and he is unable to return to work for two months, runs out of money and has to borrow from friends and acquaintances for food and a place to live. Once he recovers he finds another restaurant delivery job. At the time of the interview, he was working as a food delivery driver, working eight hours a day, seven days a week, with slightly improved salary and conditions. He felt that this was as far as he could go as an undocumented worker with the skills he had. He had cleared all his debts and was planning his return home. "All I am interested in is that I have work, and that I can earn some money so that I can go home as soon as possible."

The second vignette is of Arjin, a 22 year old Kurdish woman from Turkey who was interviewed in July 2012. At the time of the interview she had been in the UK for two and a half years. She came as a student after encouragement from her sister and brother-in-law who were living in London. When the time came to get an extension on her student visa she couldn't demonstrate an adequate level of English and her application was refused. Her loss of status was thus related to a changing immigration climate and stricter requirements on the level of English. She tried various other ways of getting a visa, but failed. She didn't want to go back to Turkey at this point: "what will I do if I go back. I will need to get married to some guy. Instead of waiting for a husband in Turkey, I would stay here and work until I get caught."

As a student, she worked part-time as a waitress in a restaurant, working ten hours a day, two days a week, and getting paid £50 per day, including tips. When her visa extension application was rejected and she had to give up her studies, she looked for full-time employment. Looking for jobs as an undocumented worker proved harder. She tried a few other waitressing jobs but kept getting fired because her English was inadequate: as a woman the fact that she couldn't speak English had more impact on the possibilities

she had – as a man she could have worked in the kitchen where language skills wouldn't have mattered so much, but as a waitress her jobs were customer-facing. She also experienced sexual harassment in one of the jobs.

Arjin found her next long-term employment as a waitress through a shop-window ad. This was a friendly workplace with English-speaking customers and she improved her English here. Working ten hours a day, six days a week, she got £170-220 a week, including tips, a considerably lower rate of pay than when she was documented. After one and a half years, by which time she was working 12 hours a day without holidays and taking more responsibility in restaurant, she asks her Turkish employer for either an increase in salary or a reduction in hours. He responds by saying: “my black girl, my black girl, you want an increase, but do not forget that you are an illegal in this country.” She reminds him that “you employ an illegal migrant at your workplace. Are you threatening me with this? You hold the same risk as much as I do.” Nevertheless, she left that job, and at the time of the interview had been doing another similar job in another restaurant for about two weeks. In the failed bargaining process her employer brought in her gender, her ethnicity and her status to deny her basic employment rights; her only recourse in the end was to leave.

These stories illustrate some of the themes mentioned earlier: the production of illegality through policy changes; migration status as an additional disadvantage intersecting with other inequalities; the human cost of remaining hidden in a surveilled environment; and the workers as active agents making choices and decisions. While recognising that illegality is produced through state policies and policy changes, within these constraints and structures the workers' narratives indicate their ability to negotiate these constraints.

Although the emphasis here has been on the workers' stories, the employers' narratives also provided insight into the context in which these stories unfolded. Employers take a risk in employing undocumented workers, and the question of why they do so elicited a complex mixture of responses. Some of it was about cheap labour. There were also repeated stories of skills shortages particularly in the restaurant sector: employers spoke about the difficulty of finding chefs with particular cooking skills. Finally, some were sympathetic to the workers due to their own personal or family migration histories, family or community obligations or political sympathies (e.g. among Kurdish employers and workers).

Above all, these stories highlighted the effect of immigration policies, both on the workers, by pushing them into increasingly vulnerable positions, and on sectors of the economy where the need for particular skills cannot be fulfilled by the available UK workforce. Undocumented migrants make a significant contribution to the UK economy and this would be increased by regularisation allowing them improve their wages and conditions and pay tax. The workers' narratives also suggest that a conceptual framework centred on victimhood and exploitation alone is inadequate. While acknowledging the levels of exploitation, it is crucial to understand the process by which they negotiate the landscape of structural constraints and discrimination, and create some (limited) space via their skills, resourcefulness and tenacity. Policy recommendations and effective movements in solidarity with undocumented workers would need to take into account the diversity of their experiences, their motivations, and their survival strategies.

INTERNATIONAL

European Parliament urges the EU to fight caste discrimination

■■■ The elected representatives of half a billion Europeans from 28 countries in the European Parliament (EP) today adopted a strongly worded resolution on caste discrimination.

Copenhagen (IDSN)/10 October 2013 – The European Parliament has sent a strong message of support to hundreds of millions of people all over the world who are subjected to caste discrimination by urging the EU to step up efforts to address a human rights issue that causes almost unimaginable suffering.

Prior to adopting a resolution on caste discrimination, MEPs from a wide cross-section of political groups spoke passionately about the topic and condemned this form of discrimination in very strong terms. Some even argued that goods from caste-affected countries should be boycotted, and there was broad agreement that EU institutions are not doing enough to address the issue.

The EP resolution calls on EU institutions to recognise and address caste discrimination on par with other grounds of discrimination such as ethnicity, race, religion, gender and sexuality; to include the issue in EU legislation and human rights policies; and to raise it at the highest level with governments of caste-affected countries.

In the debate's opening speech, Green MEP Eva Joly, chair of the Committee on Development that tabled the resolution, quoted the

Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh. A few years ago he compared caste discrimination in his own country to South Africa's despised apartheid system. "Despite this declaration, despite the abolition of 'untouchability' in the Indian constitution, despite laws, 260 million people are suffering daily from atrocities committed with complete impunity," Ms Joly said, referring to the estimated number of people across the globe who are subjected to caste discrimination. Most of these live in South Asia and are known as Dalits.

Other speakers noted that caste discrimination has no place in modern, democratic societies. Labelling it "one of the biggest paradoxes of the 21st century", the liberal MEP Leonidas Donskis noted that "it is imperative to ensure that the fight against caste-based discrimination becomes part of the standard EU human rights language and is systematically included in the Union's efforts worldwide."

EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmström claimed that this was already happening and listed a number of tools that the EU system is using to address the issue, including human rights dialogues with affected countries, and development programmes. However, her statement was met with some scepticism from MEPs.

"I don't really agree that this is put on the agenda quite often," said Alf Svensson of the European People's Party Group, and others went further: "If we have all these EU instruments, and 260 million people still suffer caste discrimination, we are failing," Michael Cashman of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats said.

Many MEPs spoke of the brutal violence that Dalit women and children are subjected to. Others argued that trade relations with caste-affected countries should be examined. One speaker mentioned the importance of the draft UN guidelines to eliminate caste discrimination, and urged the EEAS to promote them. Speaking on behalf of the GUE group, MEP Paul Murphy praised the work of Dalit activists, saying that they were pointing a way forward to confine "this barbaric feudal remnant to the dustbin of history."

IDSN and its members now urge EU institutions to take action on the numerous points raised in the resolution in order to address caste discrimination. Speaking from the EP in Strasbourg, IDSN coordinator Rikke Nöhrind and Manjula Pradeep, IDSN Executive Board member from India, noted that the resolution had secured very broad cross-party backing.

"We were encouraged to hear from Commissioner Malmström that caste discrimination is a high priority for the EU, and that it wants to fight against it. However, we also agree with the many parliamentarians who say that more could be done. Caste discrimination is one of the world's most serious human rights problems, and we believe that the EU can play an important role in ending it."

Manjula Pradeep, Director, NAVSARJAN (Gujarat) attended the parliament as observer
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For the IAWS

You are twenty, going on twenty one, soon you will think you are old,
 All who surround you, steer and guide you, some not so young, nor bold.
 You are a rover, without any cover, not even a permanent home.
 Many who love you, want to settle you, within the walls of a room -
 Because they believe in - order and ruling
 Filing and accounting order.
 Records are needed, as and when heeded
 To avoid in the future - disorder.
 But you, my darling, were born without a farthing -
 To challenge a powerful system,
 The symbol of a hope, from many who were broke
 But believed they could transform the system
 Not through destruction, but persuasion,
 Carrying the torch for knowledge -
 Through research and teaching, action, debating -
 Enriching young minds with courage.

Structures these days, age faster than earlier,
 And become homes without people,
 With declining rationale, sponsors and personnel
 The life-force moves away - as natural.
 Life is dynamic, Knowledge not static.
 'Tis a mistake to tie them down.
 Challenge especially, needs strategically
 New thrusts, ways and not frown
 On changing methodology, for order and maintenance
 Of records, history and the spirit -
 Of moving on gracefully, welcome affectionately
 New people ready to (wo)man it.
 Retain your youth, and remain a rover
 Keep on challenging the system!
 Systems - though obdurate, hesitant and cussed -
 Know they must bend to the wind.
 Fanning that wind is your raison d'etre -
 Think up new ways to do it better.
 Monolithic models hid most of our reality,
 Bharat darshan opens door to diversity.

— Vina Mazumdar

BOOK REVIEW

Feminist Counselling and Domestic Violence in India

Edited: Padma Bhate- Deosthali, Sangeeta Rege and Padma Prakash • Published 2013, Routledge

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The significance of a feminist framework for counselling in cases of domestic violence cannot be over-emphasized. Domestic violence is the most pervasive form of violence against women that inhibits woman's right to life with dignity. The women's movement has carved spaces for women to come out and share their concerns, and assert their right to a life without fear of violence. One such space is that of counselling; by framing counselling within the paradigm of feminism, the Women's Movement has tried to craft a space where survivors of domestic violence can share their experiences and concerns in an environment which asserts the primacy of their right to a dignified and violence-free life and one where they are not blamed for the occurrence of that violence. An important outcome of the women's movement's struggle to frame the issue of domestic violence within the principles of feminism is that even the courts have come to recognize the significant physical and psychological impact of domestic violence on women, and the importance of appropriate counselling in order to enable survivors of violence to surmount these fall-outs effectively. Whether we look at the demand for insertion of 498-A and recognition of cruelty against women or the passage of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, there has been a legal recognition of 'domestic violence' and its adverse impact on women's physical and emotional health and overall well-being. As Indira Jaising aptly mentions in the foreword "the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 enables judges to direct women for counselling. The rules say that counselling should be done only after an interim order is passed. The object behind the provision is to first give a woman an assurance, a stop violence guarantee before counselling begins. Unfortunately this is followed more in breach than in implementation".

While women's organisations and NGOs have made significant shifts in terms of recognition of various forms and consequences of violence against women, and the ways to ensure safe spaces for women to come and share their concerns, a major area of concern has been the gnawing gap in terms of documentation of the various strategies and methods employed. The current work, by the editors Padma Bhate-Deosthali, Sangeeta Rege and Padma Prakash, is a significant addition to the discourse on counselling for survivors of domestic violence in general and feminist counselling in particular.

Another major issue is that public health response to different cases of domestic violence has been poor in most instances. This brings us to the question of state responsibility towards its citizens. For many women hospitals are the first contact point, in cases of violence. If well recorded, the medical reports and documents can actually serve as factual evidence in criminal cases. However, this is an area that leaves a lot to be desired. The editors have clearly brought out their rich field experience with the Government hospital in Mumbai, and in doing so have contributed to the sensitization of other existing counselling disciplines and practices. The Dilassa hospital based health care model is unique and fills the gaps present in the traditional response to domestic violence. The model serves multiple ends – located in the hospital it reaches out a large number of women, it bridges the gaps between public health and domestic violence and last but not the least allows for extensive documentation that can be used for future referrals and data generation. This model has been open to adaptation by many other organisations in their endeavour to address violence against women.

While much has been written on Feminism, Women's movement and violence against women, this book breaks new ground by bringing all these threads together and looking at them within the context of counselling. Feminist Counselling borrows from both feminism and the women's movement, and builds on more than a decade's work by NGO's and women's groups. This book on feminist counselling, traverses through the various milestones of the women's movement and captures various sustained attempts by groups across the country to understand this pervasive structural discrimination that perpetuates violence in the everyday lives of women.

Comprising ten chapters, the book fills the void in terms of writings by Indian authors and practitioners on feminist counselling. Beginning with the need for feminist counselling to feminist practice models in Domestic violence counselling; the book sets out the emerging issues and standards in feminist counselling effectively. It looks at the structural discrimination and how gender and power intersect, perpetuating violence against women. Unlike mainstream counselling methods that overlook social context and engage in victim-blaming, maintaining status quo; feminist counselling examines gender roles and relations and draws inter-linkages between causes of violence in the domestic sphere and social relations. The book underscores the significance of feminist counselling in validating the women's experiences and locating the discrimination and violence that women face, in the domestic sphere, as part of the larger patriarchal order. The fulcrum of feminist counselling – The Personal is Political— is a recurring theme, that cuts across most chapters in this book. Power is central to any discussion on violence, the book looks at the relationship of power not only between the perpetrator and the

woman but how power operates in the relationship between the counsellor and counselee. The principle of 'client as their own best experts' ensures that the woman is a participant in the counselling process rather than mere recipient of information. The authors have kept the role of the counsellor grounded. Women who approach counsellors do not belong to a homogenous category. A counsellor should be able to recognize how domestic violence intersects with social location and other indices of caste, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc. This would also enable the counsellor to contextualize and decide the kind of support a woman needs.

The various initiatives in grounding violence against women are covered in this book. The Special Cell for Women and Children, a collaborative effort between TISS Mumbai and Mumbai Police has been offering counselling, legal aid and emotional support to women in distress. The initiatives by Masum, Saheli, Vimochana, Bhumiika and many others in this book capture the range of strategies to address domestic violence from a feminist perspective.

The book contains not only the famous Duluth Model of Power and Control, and the Cycle of Domestic violence but also a localized version of cycle of violence 'Chakrabhed' that looks at violence in the marital home and in the natal home. The recognition of the diversity of anti-women experiences and how women's negotiate and address the various patriarchal and fundamental forces that inhibit access to basic rights and freedoms is noteworthy, in the book.

Employing a feminist lens the authors clearly demand rights from the state towards adequate support and health care in cases of domestic violence. The compliance with various international treaties, especially CEDAW that India is signatory to, is relevant, in the context of state accountability. This book is an ideal read for anyone who wishes to understand and appreciate the need and significance of the feminist methods of counselling and of the various ways in which feminist principles are applied in the field of counselling. A special mention needs to be made of the simple and comprehensible style of writing. This book is an essential read for everyone working in the field of counselling for survivors of domestic violence.

The Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS) SNDT Women's University in association with the Department of Economics and Akshara organized a memorial meeting on 19 July 2013, to mourn the untimely death of Dr. Sharmila Rege, the founder Director of Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre at the University of Pune. The programme began with Veena Poonacha placing on record the many achievements of Sharmila Rege. She said that apart from her brilliant contribution to Women's Studies theories through her incisive analysis of the complex intersections between caste and gender identities, Sharmila will be remembered for her political activism. She will also be remembered for providing new directions for Women's Studies as a member of the UGC Standing Committee for Women's Studies and also the Indian Council for Social Science Research. Veena Poonacha then read out the condolence message sent by the Indian Association for Women's Studies and Maithreyi Krishnaraj the former Director of the RCWS.

Many speakers spoke of the ways by which Sharmila had touched their lives. They remembered her friendliness and the warm informality of her interactions with everyone. Chhaya Datar described the hard struggle Sharmila and Vidyut Bagwat had to establish the Centre. Apart from the lack of finances, they faced resistance to Women's Studies from within the academia. Ramesh Kamble, Surender Jhondale, Nandita Gandhi and Nandita Shah said that Sharmila's scholarship had uncovered an important aspect of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's work, namely his incisive analysis of caste and gender. A crucial aspect of Sharmila's work was her understanding of the formation of identities. She believed that an individual could transcend her class and caste locations to consciously adopt another identity. Anantara Kamble spoke of how Sharmila's work had matured over a period of time. What Antara appreciated about Sharmila was her capacity to accept criticism. Sharmila had not only taken serious note of her criticism but had also encouraged her to pursue her critical ideas further. Veena Devasthali mentioned the impact that Sharmila had on the students of the University when she was invited to deliver a lecture. Chaitra Redkar and, Jaswandi spoke of Sharmila's quality as a teacher and her capacity to reach out to students from the marginalized groups.

Vibhuti Patel recalled with gratitude Sharmila's support in the 1990s, when she was going through the lowest phase of her career. Sharmila had given her opportunities to be in touch with the academia by inviting her to conduct short term courses and lecture in refresher courses. The programme concluded with the rendering of powerful and evocative songs of resistance and human dignity by Shambaji Baghat, the well known poet, singer, play writer and scholar who recalled his interactions with Sharmila. He added that she had broadened his understanding of history and the politics of historiography. She made him realize that history could also focus on family, community and local history.

Veena Poonacha

ARTS

BOLLYWOOD AND DISABILITY

■ ■ ■ Anita Ghai, Associate Professor, Department Of Psychology, Jesus and Mary College, New Delhi
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Bollywood projects itself as a fantasy of a homogeneous culture that masks the hierarchy of subject positions and belonging divided along the lines of gender, class, rural/urban divide, caste and to my mind disability. Disability in most Indian films is used as a meta-narrative, thus allocating the viewer to create meaning within the larger, scattered, melodramatic filmic space. In the movie *Black*, I explore the ambivalent role of characters with disabilities, both as sites of transgression and as repositories for cultural tensions in a postcolonial world. Based on the life of Helen Keller, the film traces the tensions of a Christian family, where the protagonist Michelle McNally (Rani Mukerji), a blind and deaf woman reflects on her life. She is in search of her lost teacher Debraj Sahai (Amitabh Bachhan) who was the 'perfect' teacher. Her quest to find him takes twenty years. The story reveals how, over the years, the teacher has lost his memory and ability to recognize. Michelle's search is rewarded with her discovery of her tutor seated at the fountain near her house, his back turned towards the camera. Interestingly, this is the exact place where Debraj, though in an unorthodox manner, led Michelle's first tryst with the joy of a spoken word, when she discovers the word for 'water'!

Similarly, we first see the baby Michelle, with her back towards us, being cajoled by her mother Catherine. Thus in turning away from life, they face each other. Michelle as a little girl is totally confused and angry because of her disabilities. Her parents do not know how to deal with the little girl as she becomes more and more destructive and wild - she topples a candle and creates a fire at home and hurts her little baby sister. The father (Dhritiman Chatterjee) decides to put her in an institution. Her mother (Shernaz Patel) fights to find solutions so that she is not institutionalised. The mother manages to find a teacher, Debraj, from a deaf and blind school. Though eccentric, the teacher is dedicated to his profession. Though the teacher's meeting with his ward is not pleasant, he slowly reaches a truce with her. He gradually changes the wild persona into a presentable young lady. Though the father was at first against his rough handling of the girl, he later accepts him when he sees the positive progress in Michelle. Debraj slowly introduces Michelle to the world of light and sound. With his help she tries to make sense of the pitch dark world around her—hence the title of the film '*Black*'. She learns her first words. The teacher becomes her constant companion and he has big ambitions for her. He helps her to get into a regular college and sits with her during class interpreting the lessons to her through hand contact to fulfill their dream to make her a graduate.

I am not sure whether the director has been able to capture the pain of a sibling who is frustrated with her parents for not giving her adequate attention. Consequently, the sister (Sara) is ambivalent and it is very late when Michelle learns of this antagonism when Sara confesses her dislike towards her older sibling. She is portrayed as a hostile made to take the audience's fury. As Bhabha suggests, 'the work of hegemony is itself the process of iteration and differentiation [which] depends on the production of alternative or antagonistic images that are always produced side by side and in competition with each other,' then we can understand 'a politics of struggle as the struggle of identifications and the war of positions' (1994, 29). After attending Sara's wedding, Michelle begins to wonder about love. An inexperienced and curious Michelle wants to kiss Debraj. He reluctantly does so but decides to leave Michelle on her own because of this demand and the position she has put him in. Twenty years after enrollment, Michelle does manage to gain her Bachelors of Arts, and with her proud parents looking on her, she even gives a speech to the graduating class. Wearing no black graduation robe, she thanks her parents and her teacher and she announces that she will only wear the robe so that her teacher may see her.

Within the Indian context, overcoming is the thesis that is played in innumerable movies. Consequently the failures in college do not tend to overcompensate. What is problematic is the pedagogic erroneous brute of encountering Michelle, Debraj realizes that the only way to tackle her is to shock her, be aggressive with her. Michelle is not like the other students, so ordinary methods do not apply to her. Incessantly yelling through the entire first half of the film at a child who he knows cannot hear and see, the narration of taming of a troubled and disabled child is so loud, noisy and over-expressive that it somewhere kills a sensitivity that comes from being subtle. Any educator would be able to tell the director that a child, who has the mother as the sole support, would not get along with the teacher immediately. Though the teacher, unlike others, does not assume that the child is cognitively impaired, his reactions are problematic. It is almost as if Michelle's silence places her outside the normative and ultimately, she serves as an Other, an object outside.

The movie touchingly creates a fusion between the vulnerabilities of both the teacher and the student. It is through the encounter with these that they become aware of both their disabling and their ablest parts. For instance, Michelle and Debraj's first meeting is complemented by the rattling sounds of tin cans tied Michelle's waist, so that her whereabouts are known and years later Michelle finds Debraj tied to chains after getting the Alzheimer attack. Water is symbolic for both of them as Michelle feels the touch of water as in Debraj's teaching her first articulation is "water" Similarly as a grown up and mature Michelle creates a new world

for Debraj, he feels the water to learn the same word.

In one sense *Black* and other films on disability break the pattern of fantasy. Cinema has moved away from escapism and makes the viewers understand other people's realities. Many disabled people in India loved the movie as they identified with the characters in *Black*, perhaps coping with similar problems, anxieties and relationships. The cathartic aspect of Bombay cinema can be understood as a resolution in some way. Real problems in life such as disability are more complicated and difficult to resolve. The critical question is whether the reality allows the viewers to overcome feelings of alienation and marginality. The film endorses patriarchal structures, specifically those of family, 'expectations' from mothers, gender roles in society. Debraj's masculinity stands out as he takes over Michelle's life as he seems to be everything including translation, instruction, organization and support. I think the director contributes to disability as being firmly rendered as pathological and asexual.

I wonder what would be the reason in changing the teacher Anne Sullivan in 'Miracle Worker', an American version (1962), from woman to Man? Intuitively, if I pre-supposed Michelle into a boy, and make the teacher into an aging woman, I wonder whether the same masculinity issues would work out. Is it because the director knows for sure that hetero-normative rendering is part and parcel of Bollywood? The fact that an older man is characterized, the plot is then set to construct sexual tension. Had the director been genuinely addressing disability in the context of sexuality, there would have been discursive spaces where a dialogic possibility could be created. However here there is no space for the narrative to develop further. Notwithstanding the morality issues of the teacher and his deep investment in her, the abandonment of the student who is sexually becoming alive seems distinctly ableist. There is the issue of subjugation for those who have been disabled (read) colonised and how the fantasies of inferiority and subordination have been internalised and have become a part of the self. Her sexual desires, however, have to be sublimated and possibly displaced. In this sense, images of masculinity in the film reflect the silence of the disabled woman, thus perpetuating dominant social ideas about sexuality in the context of disability. The image of disabled woman, thus dialectically read, reveals that it is not simply the able male who is always already the oppressor, as is the common assumption, but rather that woman as an abject signifier can be merchandised even by enlightened, able women.

Even the feminist voices have implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, undermined disabled women's rights to sexuality, motherhood and intimate personal relationships. Such an unwelcoming image of woman remains, therefore, a fixed trope in the hands of Bollywood, negotiating coloniality and postcoloniality, and crossing over able-bodied parts to disabling parts, with little chance of emancipation. A disabled woman could be read as abject figures, in Julia Kristeva's (1980) terms. The abject is not defined by its 'lack of cleanliness or health', but by its capacity for 'disturb[ing] identity, system, order.' It is that which 'does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (p. 4). Although Kristeva has not disconnected the abject from ill health, my understanding is that ill health and the 'in-between' that troubles order inform one another. The disabled body (or mind) exists in a realm of ambiguity, lingering somewhere between life and death—a constant reminder of the other side of normative life. If the abject is what one must 'thrust aside in order to live' (p.3), then the ill or disabled subject, especially she who resists cure and containment, is by definition abject. One strategy to grant woman full agency requires the contemporary, feminist viewer to take responsibility. Though Bollywood cinema has increasingly begun to include 'queer representations', disability seems to be complex and fleeting exploration of sexuality reifies the ableist discourse. What is critical is that Bollywood continues to glorify disability through and strengthening dependency and vulnerability.

In its attempt the film tends to problematize the "naturalness" of disability and normalcy, while allowing audiences a false defensive ideology of ability. Such a rendering allows viewers to perpetuate their wish to pass for normal, and able-bodied. The 'desire' remains out of the ambit of the film. Taking a cue from Gayatri Spivak (1999: 304), the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling that is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world' woman caught between tradition and modernization, culturalism and development. As Amrita Chhachhi puts it, 'the symbols and repositories of communal/group/national identity . . . [so that] [t]hreats to or the loss of control over their women . . . are seen as direct threats to manhood/community/family. It therefore becomes essential to ensure patriarchal controls over the labour, fertility, and sexuality of women' (1991: 163-5). *Black* therefore does not seem to articulate the transformative potential of disability, as the physical and gender-based representations resonate with cultural and political implications. *Black* returns repeatedly to Michelle but does not go ahead to accept the figure of the sexualized woman. Though it does create space for disability and values Michelle's personhood, the difficulty is to prompt the audience to read Michelle's disability as a political message. If it happens then cinema itself becomes an alternative form of political participation.

Black creates and maintain a status quo where the 'disabled' body incorporates with the existing social patterns, while arbitrating the normative hegemony. In this sense the representation of disability is trapped in a subordinate relationship to ablebodiedness and patriarchy. One wishes that the disabled character would exist in a binary that excludes them even as it depends upon them to develop a status quo.

REMEMBERING...

VINADI

March 28, 1927 - May 30, 2013

“My passport describes me as a social scientist, but very few know me today as one. I am known as a ‘woman activist’, ‘a feminist’, ‘a trouble maker’ and a ‘gender specialist’ in undefined areas. Of all the descriptions that attach to me, however, the two I like best are: ‘recorder and chronicler of the Indian women’s movement’ and ‘grandmother of women’s studies in South Asia”- Vina Mazumdar in her memoir, Memories of a Rolling Stone. Vinadi’s life was much more than that. To highlight the same, we have put together excerpts from her memoir as well as from interviews and tributes.

“Teacher, educationist, administrator, researcher, institution builder, thinker, speaker, mother, wife, fighter, rebel, feminist, iconoclast, student. Born into a middle-class Bengali household, she was taught to read by the family driver, Nagen. Supported in her desire to study and travel by her mother (who persuaded her father), Vinadi’s life journey led her from the Diocesan Girls’ School in Calcutta to Banaras, Patna, Delhi, Shimla, Behrampur and Oxford where, on her second trip, she took along her two young daughters, and managed to live a life combining the pressures of intense study and mothering.



The most important turning points in her life came in the early 1970s when she was persuaded by her friend and mentor, J.P. Naik, to join the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) which was then “in great difficulty” because both its Member Secretary, and its Chairperson had, in Vinadi’s words, “no knowledge of the subject.” Vinadi took on the task, and with the support of her good friend and colleague, Lotika Sarkar, they produced one of the most important documents about women to come out of independent India —Towards Equality: The Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (1974-5).

Vinadi became a key figure in the women’s movement in India. The activist years of the 1980s and 1990s often saw her in the forefront of demonstrations against dowry, rape and violence against women. But there was another aspect to her and that was the support and encouragement she gave to new ideas, young activists, indeed anyone who sought her out. I remember how it was Vinadi who, in the early days of the setting up of MANUSHI, provided space and support within the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) for the founding collective to meet, and then guided the collective through its painful split. This wasn’t the only group to receive such support: since the news of her death, emails have been pouring in from women all over the country, each one with a personal story of how much she learnt from Vinadi.

Scholarship and activism apart, Vinadi was also an institution builder. Five years after the CSWI report was published, she founded the Centre for Women’s Development Studies (CWDS), an autonomous research centre under the ICSSR, to which she remained connected for the rest of her life, and to which she lent her energy and expertise, making space for new scholars and researchers.

As close to her heart as CWDS was the work she initiated in Bankura, Medinipur with rural women whose wisdom and maturity she valued all her life. She never forgot the first encounter with the women, one of whom told her they had no time to think of the future because “thinking about problems we cannot solve will lead to insanity. And what will happen to our children if we lose our minds?”

With Vinadi’s passing, a whole era of activism seems to have gone. Old world feminists like her and Lotika Sarkar and others, led lives in which their politics informed every aspect: they balanced work and home, husbands and children, friends and relatives, comrades and fellow travellers, with the ease and good humour that came so naturally to them. What sustained them was their commitment to the world of women, a world at the heart of which lay a belief in human dignity. They loved the institutions they set up and were loved by them. “Urvashi Butalia, feminist writer and founder of Zubaan, an independent non-profit publishing house.

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Vina Mazumdar, one of the most significant women leaders of post-independent India, coined a phrase that Women’s Studies was a movement and therefore she always referred to women’s studies as the women’s studies movement, breaking the dichotomy between scholarship and activism. We in India were the first to establish this kind of concept to what can be called harmonising activism with scholarship, and inspired other countries with this concept. Vina and CWDS provided leadership not only to what can

be called women's studies and the "intellectual" side of the women's movement but she inspired and energized many other spaces as she was always a political person even more than a "scholar" or a woman leader. It was politics, an understanding of India's political history and a pulse on current issues in the political arena of India, that gave her, the report, as well as CWDS a color and a quality which none of the other centers of women's studies could ever match.

We had a valuable and exciting relationship beginning with the preparation of the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) report and continuing for all of the almost four decades of our work. In the early years, from 1975 to about 1990, Vina and I being Delhiwalas, were included in every possible forum, government as well as international that were looking at women's issues and what can be called at the Women's Question. If a committee was being formed, whether it was for implementation of the Equal Remuneration Act, or for evaluating Universities of Agricultural Sciences to see whether their home-science departments were in fact enabling women in the rural areas; we were chosen. In those days, every ministry – ministry of labour, ministry of rural development, ministry of education and of course ministry of women and child – would have a committee attached to it, and both Vina and I would be a part of it.

We were on the monitoring committee of STEP (Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women) a new programme that was started in MWCD (ministry of women and child development), as we were in these other committees that I have listed.

We came from extremely different tracks, she was a political scientist and a well known political as well as academic leader, and I was an economist but not as politically significant and come from a somewhat hot house atmosphere of scholarship.

Invariably, when we spoke in these meetings, it was almost like we were signaling each other. As the IAWS began to move with national conferences and as our institutions, the ones that we founded and developed, began to get gelled and as many more actors came on to the scene of what can be called women and their progress, our lives were not as intimately connected. Yet at every conference including the last one that we both attended together in Lucknow- the NCWS, I can still hear Vina's voice, a very loud commanding one saying, "Hey Devaki! Come here and sit down." By that time she had begun to find walking a little difficult. So, we took rooms next to each other in Lucknow and could not stop talking to each other. She invited me to a drive back with her to Delhi, so much was our desire to reflect, laugh and share our ideas together. Sometimes, because we were always clubbed in every public and political space we used to call each other either Heckle and Jeckle or Laurel and Hardy and sometimes, the Qutub Minar and Taj Mahal. The last one was a joke, as anyone who came from outside India and wanted to get some insight into what was happening in what used to be called at that time the women's movement (now moving from gender to feminism) they had to see the two of us. So, that is why the idea of tourist monuments.

Vina and Lotika Sarkar were really what can be called the engines which drove all of us to clarity and some form of excellence. Since, they have followed each other so quickly, I would like to imagine that they are laughing away somewhere, smoking their cigarettes and fighting on issues. Enjoy yourselves, Vina and Monu. Soon some of us will join you.

Devaki Jain, development economist, activist, one of the pioneers in gender studies

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I first met her in the mid-1970s and was always transfixed by her words, both about her own life and about her work on India's report "Towards Equality" for the first United Nations Women's Conference in Mexico City in 1975. She was a remarkable person to listen to, and a magnificent fighter for what she believed in most: equality for all and the rights of all women. She can be considered the grandmother of the women's movement and women's studies in India.

Responding to the UN's call for a report from each country, Dr J P Naik, head of the ICSSR, had asked Vinadi to serve as secretary to the Committee on the Status of Women in India which was preparing the report. She was in charge of collecting data from all parts of India about the conditions of women of all castes and classes, including tribals. She talked about the nightmares she had as she read the incoming data, which affected her deeply, intellectually and emotionally. From my knowledge, the Indian Report was the most complete and detailed of any country, and led to considerable discussion outside and within India about the unequal status of women nationwide including the link between women's empowerment and poverty alleviation. It led to a demand for the removal of these inequities to achieve the goals of the Constitution.

This report led Vinadi (founding director), and others to start the Center for Women's Development Studies in New Delhi, which became her base of operations from then on. She was involved with numerous women's issues over the years, including serving on the Board of the Population Council, and writing a critique of the "western" development paradigm (after the Earth Summit in 1992) which emphasized equity and focused on peasant women's rights. Along with others from CWDS, she was instrumental in organizing a series of National Summit Conferences in South Asia supported by UNIFEM and FAO. To my knowledge, these have been the only National Conferences to promote a dialogue between peasant women's groups and rural development practitioners,

policy makers, agro-scientists and activists. These fora showed the wide differences between women's priorities and approaches to environmental issues compared to those generated from the top-down, or even by men of their own households. Vinadi was a shining light in these meetings and saw to it that poor-often illiterate but knowledgeable-women were heard on numerous issues, including land rights (still an issue), deforestation, problems of water, seeds, and the integration of these and related issues.

She was always involved in making visible the work that women did, and responsive to their requests for training. Her project in a very poor part of Bankura District in the mid-80s required Vinadi and others from CWDS to visit there often, and to provide training for poor rural women using available basic raw materials. Throughout her life, Vinadi was a fighter against injustice and for equality for all women and all human beings. Even when she was ailing, she could still give a good verbal fight on behalf of poor and suffering women. *Renowned anthropologist, Joan Mencher*

Excerpts from Vinadi's memoirs:

CWDS marked a new direction in my life in many ways and gave many sleepless nights to Didi. She was worried that I was throwing up a secure job with an agency supported by Government of India, when three of my children were still studying. She accused me of becoming a rolling stone...With CWDS close to house, the children would drop in frequently to ask for money, keys and so on. Everyone at the office got to know the family. ...All of us have fond memories of the Panchsheel days. There were many meetings in the house too. I remember several Manushi meetings in that house too...Our flat was small but there were regular parties and get together. Shashwati and Indrani would bring all their friends home and all of them argued till late in the night about political issues. Ranjani and Surajit were in school but they would sit with everyone listening to all the heated exchanges. With all my work, I developed the technique of preparing quick meals and the kids learnt to be self sufficient because I was travelling a lot..." (Memoirs, pp.98-99)

"In October 1983, Florence Howe, founder of the Feminist Press came to CWDS... The seminar with Florence took place in the dairy town-Anand- in Gujarat. It was the first International Conference On Women's Studies to take place in India... According to Florence's notes, my summing up of our meeting mentioned three major issues for mobilization (a) that traditional education in India did not change women's relationship to men. Instead it divided women from each other by the hierarchies of caste, class, race and ethnic differences (b) laws by themselves, though important, are inadequate in defeating the inherited hierarchies and (c) political power is more complex, because of the confusion between voting rights and political power. The seminar was thus a learning process for both Florence and myself and reasserted the importance of activism of the lowest groups of women in our two class-ridden societies... In 1980, we gave it some shape at Copenhagen, by bringing in friends and colleagues from Africa and other continents to form Women's Studies International- A network..." (Memoirs, p.107-8)

"Unlike in Mexico and Copenhagen, at Nairobi, third world women's groups initiated discussions, held demonstrations and cultural activities...A major achievement on our part was to bring together academics from different parts of the world to discuss women's studies. This followed the earlier efforts at Copenhagen in 1980- which acknowledged women's studies as a powerful analytical tool for understanding development, and for pushing intellectual horizons of the women's movement. What strategies did we need to ensure continuity. How could we breach the walls of the academia? Above all, where would we find the resources?... all suggestions were put forward to the Planning Committee of the NGO Forum for Beijing...the political dimensions of women's studies was acknowledged-indeed this was something all groups were agreed upon, no matter which side of the political spectrum they came from" (Memoirs, p 135-136)

On CSWI

"For the first time we were coming to terms with the real diversity of cultures, traditions. And that what we called traditional roles, the kind of traditional role models and culture that we in the middle class thought we needed to break to become independent...for the first time, it was about coming to terms with the understanding that we were all a very small minority, not the bulk of Indian women. So, it was the confluence of two things-first, it was masses of census data put together for the first time (1961) and, second, it was seeing this diversity in terms of actual figures...Also we had just started going to the field, so there was the other source. Hearing poor women, rural women, slum women, tribal women, hearing them speak... there was also this discovery of the diversity, and that trends of change did not affect people in different categories in the same way. So what we had gained had not been shared by the rest of the women. They had in fact lost much of their traditional bases...they were facing tremendous difficulties and once they started opening up and talking, it was just like receiving body blows. I don't think any of us had ever done that kind of self questioning... the other intellectual challenge was how do we put this into a framework...trends that changed over time became much more visible when we could put Census, NSS and all these kinds of data together...it came out as a historical trend. So the answers lie also in history...where are the key impulses within this extraordinary society of ours where any change sets of different sets of dynamics which go in different directions..."

Shirin Rai, A Conversation With Vina Mazumdar, International Feminist Journal of Politics, 9:1, March 2007, p 104-111

REMEMBERING...

Lotika Sarkar

1927 to 2013

Prof. Lotika Sarkar who played a central role in several path-breaking and crucial legislations for gender justice and empowerment of women during 1975-2005, passed away at the age of 86 on 23rd February 2013. In the women's rights movement, she was known as Lotikadi. When other stalwarts of women's studies touched our hearts with inspirational speeches in the women's movement gathering, Lotikadi floured us with her legal acumen. She was the first Indian woman to graduate from Cambridge. Lotikadi was in the peak of her career, when she was asked to join Committee on Status of Women in India, 1972 that prepared Towards Equality Report, 1974. As a pioneer in the fields of law, women's studies and human rights, she prepared the chapter on laws concerning women in the Status of women's Committee Report with gender sensitivity and analytical clarity for furthering women's rights.



Dr. Lotika Sarkar was the first woman teacher of law faculty at the University of Delhi and taught Criminal law and was a mainstay of the Indian Law Institute, Delhi during 1980s and 1990s. She was a founding member of the Indian Association for Women Studies.

In 1980, along with Dr. Veena Mazumdar, Lotikadi founded Centre for Women's Development Studies. Along with three professors of Law of Delhi University-Prof. Upendra Baxi, Prof. Kelkar, Dr. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Lotikadi wrote the historic Open Letter to the Chief Justice of India in 1979, challenging the judgment of the apex court on the Mathura rape case. I remember cutting stencil and making copies on our cyclostyling machine of the 4-page long letter for wider circulation. Translation of this letter into Gujarati and Hindi served a crash course for me to understand nuances of criminal justice system, rape laws and sexual violence as the weapon to keep women in a perpetual state of terrorization, intimidation and subjugation. Wide circulation of the Open Letter resulted in birth of the first feminist group against rape, Forum Against Rape in January, 1980.

When Lotikadi came to Mumbai for the first Conference on Women's Studies in April, 1981 at SNT Women's University, we, young feminists were awe-struck!! Ideological polarization in this Conference was extremely volatile. Lotikadi's commitment to the left movement did not prevent her from interacting meaningfully with liberals, free-thinkers and also the new-left like me. Indian Association of Women's Studies was formed in this gathering. In the subsequent conferences, Lotikadi attracted innumerable legal luminaries to IAWS.

At the initiative of her students, Amita Dhanda and Archana Parashar, a volume of Essays, Engendering Law: in Honour of Lotika Sarkar was published in 1999 by Eastern Book Company, Delhi.

Lotikadi and her journalist husband Shri. Chanchal Sarkar, both were kind, generous and trusting. After her husband passed away, she was under immense trauma and grief. Taking advantage of this situation her cook and the police officer whose education they had sponsored usurped her property and house. Her students, India's top lawyers and judges mobilized support and signed an open letter studded with such names as Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer, Soli Sorabjee, Gopal Subramaniam and Kapila Vatsyayan. Jurists, advocates, academics, bureaucrats, journalists and human rights activists had signed the open letter demanding justice for her. Finally, during her last days, Lotika Sarkar's property was transferred back to her and her assets handed over to her to allow her to live her life in peaceful serenity, which she so deserved. Lotikadi's traumatic experience invited serious attention to safeguarding the rights of senior citizens by both state and civil society.

Lotikadi was a conscience keeper not only for policy makers and legal fraternity but also of women's studies scholars and women's movement activists. The most appropriate tribute to Lotikadi is to proactively pursue the mission she started with her team in 1980 to fight against rape and various forms of structural and systemic violence against women and to strive for social justice, distributive justice and gender justice. Resurgence of activism against sexual violence and feminist debate around Justice Verma Commission's Report as well as Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance, 2013 constantly reminds us of pioneering work of Lotikadi in terms of creating a strong band of committed and legally aware feminists who are following her footsteps. Let us salute Lotikadi, torchbearer of gender justice by continuing her heroic legacy.

Prof. Vibhuti Patel, Head, Dept. Of Economics, SNT University, Mumbai

REMEMBERING.....

Sharmila Rege

■■■ 1964 to 2013

The sudden demise of Sharmila Rege, a Phule –Ambedkarite, leading feminist scholar, activist and compassionate teacher, is a huge loss to feminism, gender studies, to dalit studies and dalit women’s movement in particular. In 2008, in her inspiring Savitribai Phule lecture on ‘Education as Trutiya Ratna: Towards Phule- Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogical Practice’ sponsored by NCERTI at SNDT Women’s University, Mumbai, she said, “There is an urgent need for feminist discourse to turn to Dr Ambedkar. It is time not to talk about gender in isolation but to include class, caste and other factors. Therefore, there is a need to reclaim Dr. Ambedkar’s writings as feminist classics,” said Prof. Rege. She dwelt on a few chapters from Ambedkar’s work as feminist classics. “The feminist discourse, at large has remained ignorant of the rich and complex interpretations of caste and gender as conceptualised by Dr Ambedkar,” noted Prof Rege,

Sharmila’s book, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Reading Dalit Women’s Testimonies* (2006) left a deep impact on sociologists, political scientists, women’s studies and Dalit studies scholars. In the same year, Sharmila received the Malcolm Adiseshiah award for “sharpening the perspective on caste and gender by examining the differences and the connections of power that existed between women while also recognising what connected them as women.”



Krianti jyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre (KSPWSC), University of Pune which Sharmila headed since 1991, in many ways, exemplified the shape that gender studies could assume within higher education , its institutionalization. A range of programs from undergraduate levels, a bilingual system of teaching and learning (the first Bridge Course Manual, *Building Bridges: On Becoming a Welder* ,2010) transformed KSPWSC into a dynamic centre for Phule Ambedkarite pedagogies and exchanges

From Sharmila’s writings...

THE intellectual beginnings of this essay can be found in an autobiographical account of my engagement with feminism and sociology as a student, a lecturer and an activist.

As a sociologist located in a UGC sponsored Women’s Studies Centre, seeking to include/incorporate/integrate feminism in sociology, one found oneself on the margins, along with those who experienced the academy as an alien terrain. In academic life, women’s studies organisationally exist as a semi-separate space, only in relation to ideas and research and not in relation to any convincing inter-disciplinarity. One thus travels between women’s studies, the zone of exclusion, which allows greater expression of feminist ideas and practices, and the zones of inclusion within sociology, in relation to which one stands as an outsider...Location as a feminist (outsider) in the academy gives one a vantage point that binds epistemology and ontology such that all knowledge (even the insiders’) emerges as located, grounded and limited..

...Academic borderlands are the territories that lie between the academy and activism, sociology and gender studies, metropolitanism and regionalism, disciplinary boundaries and identities and interdisciplinary capacities. The ‘borderlands’ are themselves no doubt a contested zone, co-inhabited as they are by people of different castes, classes, languages, ethnicities, sexualities and politics. More importantly, in the academy, these socially contested borderlands are epistemological borderlands constituting the interface between different claims to knowledge.

... As a feminist on the borderlands, one finds that the selective incorporation of feminist ideas has come at the cost of assimilation and, more importantly, less dialogue across boundaries. The feminist challenge is as if locked into a framework of ‘successor science’ versus ‘sociological revenge’. The feminist borderlands have themselves come under sharp scrutiny as the unified notions of female subordination have come to be challenged. Feminist critics of sociology find themselves turning to the discipline with a new-found sense of belonging. The mission is still to explore, from the margins, what sociology can be and should not be, but with a more discerning sensitivity to the history of the discipline. (*Histories From Borderlands: Sharmila Rege*, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2000/495.htm>)

Against the Madness of Manu: B R Ambedkar's Writings on Brahminical Patriarchy, selected and introduced by Sharmila Rege (New Delhi: Navayana), 2013; pp 266,

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To read this book is to mine a world of layered scholarship and the rewards are diverse and rich. For those who have followed Sharmila Rege's work over the years, the coming together of her many concerns – a critical sociology of caste, knowledge systems produced by anti-caste movements and thinkers, the caste-gender conundrum, pedagogical practices that foreground and take to read this book is to mine a world of layered scholarship and the rewards are diverse and rich. For those who have followed Sharmila Rege's work over the years, the coming together of her many concerns – a critical sociology of caste, knowledge systems produced by anti-caste movements and thinkers, the caste-gender conundrum, pedagogical practices that foreground and take seriously the life-worlds of the dis-privileged – in this single volume should prove a veritable treat. For feminists, grappling with the manner in which the axes of gender and caste intersect to constitute a system of graded inequality as well as what Rege felicitously refers to as “graded violence towards women”, her reading of Babasaheb Ambedkar's writings on women can only be exciting and very suggestive. Anti-caste activists and thinkers who know all too well the venality and cruelty of the caste order, may find themselves surprised by how the most pernicious aspects of the caste system are also its most patriarchal.

For those of us who are familiar with the scholarship and practice of anti-brahman and anti-caste movements and ideas across this subcontinent, Ambedkar's extremely acute observations are bound to appear at once familiar and novel. This is so because some of the questions he raised with regard to the relative status of shudras and women were also matters of concern to say, men like E V Ramasamy Periyar and the young feminists in his movement. It was novel because he identifies for us the logic that underlies “the madness of Manu”, and which render Manu's obsession with establishing and tweaking social differences and hierarchies, his prejudicial disregard for the shudras and chandalas and his obvious misogyny, crucial and hegemonic aspects of the Hindu social order.

The book has four sections. An extensive introduction interrogates the reluctance and failure on the part of Indian feminists to seriously engage with Ambedkar's writings on women. Dismissive, indignant and mostly ignorant, as it is, this studied non-engagement, argues Rege, has to do with the Indian intellectual and academic disregard for Ambedkar's ideas on the one hand, and on the other, it has to do with feminist inability to productively contend with the novel and radical manner in which he brings together the personal and the political, the home and community. This inability, she goes on to say, contrasts with the lively debates that have ensued in what she calls the “dalit counter publics” comprising dalit scholarship on Ambedkar's writings and ideas in Marathi, popular cultural expressions, including music, theatre and visual art.

Companionate Marriage

Citing a popular visual rendering of Ambedkar and his first wife, Ramabai on the day of their marriage – this image features as the cover of this book – Rege leads us into a fascinating detour through dalit popular perceptions of Ambedkar's conjugal life. Picking up an argument from her earlier book, *Writing Caste, Writing Gender: Dalit Women's Testimonios*, she suggests that the ideal of companionate marriage, which marks the upper-caste woman's entry into the modern world, has to be viewed alongside another ideal and one which repositions conjugality within the context of an evolving political community. This latter, Rege demonstrates, is one that Ambedkar helped shape, and by that token, it rested on the resilience, trust and deeply affectionate commitment that Ramabai had for her husband's work. To be sure she argued with him, did not always accept his views, but ultimately she realised, notes Rege the utopian power of his vision and endorsed it. Ramabai's example, we realise, especially if we are familiar with her earlier work (cited above) was one shared by several women in the Ambedkarite movement, who took to heart Babasaheb's injunction to rework the terms of both community and conjugality. This aspect of our historical experience still awaits a feminist reclaiming and unless we do so, we may not be able to grasp how Ambedkar did caste and gender simultaneously.

The value of this introduction is also on account of how Rege unpacks this vexed relationship between caste and gender: she points out that the impossibility of attending to the one without attending to the other is not always easily grasped. Often, those who bring caste into considerations of gender are “allowed” to do their thing, while others go on to do “gender”; likewise those who engage with caste, but not gender, appear oblivious to the manner in which they end up endorsing normative aspects of the caste order – she points to the presumptions that underlie certain non-brahman considerations of femaleness in the Marathi context, and notes that these men invariably “sexualised” western modernity, while rendering “non-brahman patriarchies invisible”. In the event, Rege makes it clear that to undertake a critical and reflexive feminist analysis in the Indian context, one cannot and must not easily disentangle caste from gender.

Given the manner in which, in some instances, subaltern rejections of caste have led to a persuasive yet ultimately hyper-masculine public culture, which on that account lacks the critical edge to fight caste (as is evident in the non-brahman Tamil context), Sharmila's injunctions to keep together our analyses of caste and gender appear all too important.

Neglect of Ambedkar

This introduction is followed by three sections of texts featuring Ambedkar's writings. Section one comprises selections that examine and explain the structural basis as well as the historical contexts that produced female subordination and degradation in the Hindu social order. The next section features three riddles from his much-derided *Riddles in Hinduism* – his outlining of these riddles help us ponder the relationship between marriage practices and the elaboration of social differences and inequalities. The third section is devoted to the Hindu Code Bill, and the manner of its demise – the argument here derives from Ambedkar's ethical determination to secure legal guarantees, however limited these might be, for his vision of sexual equality and justice.

Each section is preceded by an extensive introductory essay – by Rege – that places Ambedkar's arguments in the context of the immediate historical context, his life-long concern with a knowledge that might yet secure for the dalits and other lower castes their secular redemption, and most important, over and against debates within Indian feminism. Annotations, explanations, citations and a usable index complete the book.

Taken together, the three sectional introductions outline a set of very valuable ideas: the first points to our habitual neglect of Ambedkar's views on the caste order, particularly his insistence that we see caste as entailing a relationship that rests on endogamous marriage practices. Social reproduction, we realise, is crucial to exercises of power, authority and control in caste society. Rege calls attention to salient aspects of Ambedkar's argument in this regard – his views on how castes retain or do not retain sexual parity to prevent exogamous unions, and how they manage "sexual surplus". She also frames his understanding of the "fall of Hindu women" in this context, and shows how he understood shifts in sexual and conjugal practices, particularly those that occurred with the brahmanical victory over Buddhism, as leading to both shudra slavery as well as the degradation of women.

Useful for Feminists

Ambedkar's reading of Manu's dicta – essays that feature in the second section – with respect to who shall marry whom and become whom, which is what constitutes the "madness of Manu", extends his earlier views on this subject. For feminists this section should prove useful: for one, it provides a conceptual template to analyse contemporary sexual and demographic anxieties, the ever-declining sex ratio, for instance: if sati, enforced widowhood and child marriage enabled brahmin men – historically – to shore their sexual and social hegemony, while taking care of "surplus" brahmin women, female infanticide and son-preference ensure that women are forever in deficit, and this almost ontological disregard for their existence then "explains" and "legitimises" every sort of subordination. Secondly, these essays on how the smritikaras sought to "fix" caste identity in the face of proliferating and hybrid social identities, should lead us to examine, as Rege's explanations suggest we should, similar policing of hybridities in our own time, through khap and caste panchyats and crimes of (dis)honour.

Rege's own illustration in this context is apposite to our concerns: discussing the manner in which differential marriage (and sexual) laws and differential laws of descent for different castes were sought to be put in place by Manu, Rege brings up the contentious debates around the figure of the devadasi, both in the heyday of Hindu social reform and in our own time, when feminists have differed in their understanding of caste-mandated sexual labour. She argues that while feminists may want to see in the figure of the temple dancer and her modern-day counterpart, the bar dancer an agential persona, that works only if we choose to ignore the structuring power and mandate of caste. For in all contexts, the sexual labourer is more often than not from the poorest and most abject communities. She argues that this was why for Ambedkar the figure of the murali was one marked by the stigma of caste and brahminical depravity. If he sought to "reclaim" the murali, this was not because he thought she should be reformed into marriage – he says, for instance, that one may earn a living in myriad other ways – but because only on the ground one gains through a rejection of a caste-ordained practice, may one seek to build a new sense of the self.

Rege's framing of the Hindu Code Bill debates begin an argument that could well be extended into another book. For inevitably, we want more from this section, since the scholarship on this score, as Rege notes, is far from adequate and feminist legal scholarship sadly wanting in this respect. Ambedkar was brought into this debate late, but he made up for lost time by immediately reframing its concerns within a new ethic he clearly hoped would animate social relationships and transactions. His obvious interest in reforming Hindu law to reflect his – and others' – radical vision of equality, justice and citizenship did not win him friends. On the other hand, he had allies, who endorsed his reform measures, and these included almost all the women in the Constituent Assembly, and liberal members of the House. The story of the Hindu Code Bill still remains to be told in all its drama and detail, and Rege has given us a very valuable cue to respond to – and one hopes that many do.

Earnest Examination

Against the Madness of Manu is as much about the doing of scholarship as it is about being critically attentive to texts that we have habitually ignored or put aside. For nearly two decades, Rege has pointed to the importance of constructing a knowledge world produced by various counter publics, both non-brahmin and dalit, and within these, feminist visions and articulations. She has also alerted us to how we may be reflexive about knowledge making as such: in what contexts, from what locations, and through what discursive means we theorise and argue, and what we seek to foreground, and what we end up subsuming are not to be taken for granted, but earnestly examined. She has also shown us that to be reflexive does not mean that we adopt a "reconciliatory" tone,

for that could be condescending at best, but that we attend to voices from the margins, without seeking to recoup them within familiar and established feminist protocols of understanding. Nor are we to be combative, and argue, as some have, that there is dalit patriarchy as there is brahminical patriarchy – more important is to ask ourselves how within this system of graded inequality and violence, patriarchal structures work their effects.

And it is not mere conceptual clarity that a book like this offers: it bears the deep impress of practice, of several years of classroom transactions, of effort expended in creating and sustaining new circuits of knowledge that bring together bilingual, even trilingual worlds, and the continuous forging of lively and dynamic relationships, with dalit students, thinkers, non-brahmin publicists, feminist scholars and activists.

Against the Madness of Manu is an invitation to practise maithri, social fellowship of the most fundamental kind, and in that sense, it echoes that deeply moving and brilliant text, The Buddha and His Dhamma.

(Acknowledgement: Economic And Political Weekly, Vol - XLVIII No. 29, July 20, 2013)

IAWS condoles the passing of Dr. Hemlata Swarup, former Vice Chancellor of Kanpur University, after a prolonged illness on the 5th of September, 2013 in Kanpur and a founder member of the Association. Born in 1929, in Bijnor, Dr. Swarup pursued higher education in Banaras Hindu University, where she studied both Literature and Political Science. These were the years of the anti imperialist struggle gathering momentum and as a student Dr. Swarup was influenced by Mahatma Gandhi. She was drawn to political activism in her student days and emerged as a leading office bearer of the BHU Students' Union. Her doctoral work focused on the writing of Mulk Raj Anand. That the political struggle drew her to secular democratic values became obvious when Dr. Swarup opted for marrying Dr. Harswarup Lal-lak, a medical doctor who came from a different caste background and who was active in public life with the Communist Party of India. The pursuit of a progressive agenda with regard to social change remained a marked feature of her public life and involvements. She used her position to advance critical thought and progressive cultural values, especially amongst the youth, through the institutions she headed and helped to build.



Dr. Hemlata Swarup was a founder member of the Indian Association for Women's Studies and helped to disseminate its ideas and promote critical enquiry from a gender perspective through her institutional location.

XIV National Conference on Women's Studies

4th -7th February 2014, Guwahati

Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement

Organised by

INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

in collaboration with

**Gauhati University, Cotton College State University, Guwahati
Tata Institute for Social Sciences, Guwahati and
North East Network**

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Information on Participation and Paper Presentation

Participation

- Participation is open to all those who register for the Conference.
- Conference Registration is compulsory for all.
- IAWS life membership is optional but we strongly urge participants to join the Association.
- Please note that participants who are not IAWS members have to deposit Rs. 200 (for general participants) and Rs. 50 (for students) as Conference Membership Charges.
- The subscription details and membership form are included in this brochure and are also available on the IAWS website www.iaws.org.
- All participants and paper presenters are requested to complete the registration formalities and make travel bookings by the prescribed date.
- Please intimate your itinerary at least two weeks prior to the Conference.

Paper Presentation

If you would like to present a paper in one of the sub-themes/ Pre-conference Workshops, please prepare an abstract of about 500 words. Abstracts should be sent to the subtheme/ Pre-Conference Coordinator concerned, preferably by email.

The abstract should clearly contain the following:

Title

Name of the author(s)

Full address for correspondence

Telephone and Email id

Abstracts should reach coordinators by 20th November 2013; Acceptance will be communicated by 5th December 2013.

Following acceptance of abstracts, the coordinators will communicate with you regarding paper presentation.

Abstracts will be published as part of the conference proceedings.

CONCEPT NOTE

Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement

The nation has recently witnessed huge protests and intense debates on the context, forms and scale of gender-based violence, including, more specifically, sexual violence in its various locations. These encompass vastly different sections of society, movements and organizations and address the multiple sites of violence extending across regions, social classes and communities. This increasing violence points to the fact that women are directly in the line of fire in the current scenario. Equally significant, it shows that the message of the women's movement and its struggle for the rights of women can no longer be seen as a movement for sectional rights. This highlights immense possibilities even as it starkly poses challenges before us.

There is enough evidence to show that in the two decades since the initiation of the 'new' economic policy and imposition of a monolithic market-driven model of development, the challenge of ensuring the well-being and quality of life for the masses has become greater. Gender gaps in various indices of development have widened and social inequalities, including those premised on historically determined exclusions, have deepened in numerous ways. This is manifested in inter- and intra- regional divides, ownership and access to resources, especially land, housing, food and water and for more specifically gender-based hierarchies, with regard to labour; wage disparities; rural-peri-urban-urban livelihood and employment patterns and the feminization of poverty. With the increase in 'developmental' imbalances and unequal access to basic entitlements, there is a blurring of the distinction between 'inclusionary' policies to address 'exclusionary' practices. There is a persistence of caste, tribe and community based disparities, of discriminatory attitudes towards issues of disability, and towards expressions of non-normative sexual orientations. In short, the structural barriers to attaining a human and 'humane' life appear to have become more rigid.

There is a long list of challenges faced by women in contemporary Indian society. Equally striking is the way in which the prevalent monolithic paradigm of development has gone hand in hand with monocultures of the mind and intolerance and dominant hegemonic perspectives seek to replace the pluralist heritage of our cultural past. In a nation committed to diversity in faith, languages, and ways of living, we see greater aggression and an attempt to present homogenized notions of the nation, nationhood as well as of Indian womanhood. While political formations actively propagate such strident assertions with moral overtones, the media and the market play their part in defining these. Such homogenized 'mainstream' articulations seek to marginalize critical discourses and further, to even delegitimize them, thereby also exacerbating exclusions and denials in both, the cultural and the political domain. These patterns of exclusion and marginalization of women cut across religions, communities and regions, erasing the rich variety of customary rights and cultural practices and pose a complex set of challenges at the individual and societal level.

The central concerns of equality and pluralism cannot be perceived in isolation from the State, its policies and the changing terms of its interface with citizens. The withdrawal of the State in favour of the private sphere in recent decades also marks a departure from fundamental concerns of wellbeing; a change in the character of the judiciary; and increasing use of military and para-military forces against citizens and people's movements. Reduction in investment in social and public goods in the name of reducing fiscal deficits has seriously affected educational institutions as well as citizens' ability to garner their rights. The retreat from universal commitments, accompanied by withdrawal of subsidies and support has resulted in a rising burden on the poor, especially women. As protests against these policies and their impact on the lives of the people gather momentum, the State, in an attempt to contain the tide of unrest, appears to have embarked on a mission to carve out an artificially generated consensus and hold together a fragile coalition on behalf of the ruling elites. This only adds to the vulnerability of the masses and of women.

The women's movement has engaged in debates on these issues from its myriad locations. It has critically engaged with processes of policy formation to argue that these need to be democratized along with the content of policies. Similarly, the movement has actively worked to preserve the pluralist culture and historical legacies of our people against fundamentalist assertions of women's rights and womanhood per se. Commitment to equality and pluralism is both an underlying principle as well as a necessary condition for women's democratic advance in Indian society today.

We hope that this National Conference will reflect on the complex set of challenges facing our democratic polity and the nation state from diverse disciplinary perspectives and experiences from the ground. This reflection is needed to redirect attention to some of the fundamental challenges. This also demands sensitivity to the diversity and complexity of the situation in the North East. As we hold our National Conference for the first time in this region, we wish to learn from experiences here and elsewhere, in terms of both, seeking alternatives as well as constructive ways to engage with strategies to advance democratic, egalitarian and pluralistic perspectives.

Programme

Monday, 3rd February, 2013: Pre-conference Workshops:

- (a) Engaging with the voices of women with disabilities:
Venue: Bosco Reachout, Ullubari
- (b) Young Women's: Resisting Violence and Exploring Legacies:
Venue: Cotton College State University

Tuesday, 4th February, 2014

Registration:	8:00 am onwards
Inauguration:	10 am to 11:15 am
Venue:	Gauhati University
Speakers:	Ilina Sen , President, IAWS Vice Chancellor, Gauhati University
	Dr. Syeda Hameed , Member, Planning Commission Representatives of Institutions supporting the Conference
Tea break:	11:15 am - 11:30 am
Madhuriben Shah Lecture: Exploring Plural Identities:	11:30am - 12:15 pm Women's Studies to North East Studies Nandita Haksar
Plenary 1:	12.30 pm - 1.30 pm Building Women's Studies in the North East Coordinator: Archana Sharma
Lunch break:	1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Subthemes: (Parallel sessions)	2:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Wednesday, 5th February, 2014

Plenary 2:	9:30 am - 1:30 pm Women's Movements in the North East Coordinator: Monisha Behal , North East Network (NEN)
Lunch break:	1:30 pm - 2:30 pm
Subthemes: (Parallel sessions)	2:30 pm - 5:30 pm

Thursday, 6th February, 2014

Plenary 3:	9:30 am - 11:30 am
Women in South Asia:	Contemporary Challenges Coordinator: Seema Kazi
Special Session:	11:30 am - 12:30 pm Sexual Violence against Women: State Responsibility and Culpability Speaker: Vrinda Grover
Lunch break:	12:30 pm - 1:30 pm
Sub themes:	1:30 pm - 3:30 pm
IAWS General Body Meeting:	4.00 pm

Friday, 7th February, 2014

Reporting from the subthemes:	9:30 am - 12:30 pm
Valedictory:	12:30 pm - 1 30 pm

Note:

- Also planned:
1. Cultural programmes in the evenings.
 2. Screening of FILMS on Women's issues.
 3. Interaction with WOMEN WRITERS from the region in collaboration with Zubaan.
- Details to be announced later on the IAWS website Program Schedule**

Plenaries / Special Sessions: All Plenaries to be held at the Central Conference Venue in Gauhati University

SUBTHEMES

Sub-theme 1: Women's Rights and Entitlements to Land and Land-based Resources

The lack of a productive asset base for rural poor women was raised by the international women's movement as early as the first UN Conference on Women in Mexico (1975). In India, the report of the Committee on the Status of Women (CSWI, 1975) noted the sharp decrease in numbers of female cultivators and an increase in the number of female agricultural laborers in India. The CSWI also identified land reforms as a key measure to improve the condition of rural women. Women – in particular single, female headed households – are the poorest of poor.

Entitlements to land are determined by diverse socio-political systems that have evolved over time and sometimes exist concurrently. In South Asia, for example, inheritance patterns in land vary within and between countries and further by region, religion, caste, community, and ethnicity. Inheritance rights to land, particularly agricultural land, have been most difficult to enact. In India, it took almost half a century, to amend the Hindu Succession Act (HSA) of 1956, in 2005. This amendment, overriding the varied tenorial laws of different states, enables daughters, including those who are married, to become coparceners in joint family property.

Studies have shown that a key factor linked with rural poverty is land. In the South Asian context, arable land has been analyzed as the most valued form of property, for its economic, political and symbolic significance. Research has shown that individuals who own land generate much higher rural non-farm earnings from self employment than people without land.

In regions facing hunger and chronic under-nutrition, women are often the main food growers. Rural women are responsible for half of the world's food production. Secure property rights for women can have an impact on women's overall role and position in the household and community. A large percentage of households, estimated to be between 20 to 35% in India and Bangladesh, are de facto, female headed. For widows and the elderly, in particular, ownership of land also creates possibilities for drawing support from relatives. Land titles also serve as collaterals in accessing the benefits of development programs such as production credits for farmers. In regions with high male migration and where women are the principal farmers, such support is critical for their households.

Coordinators:

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Subtheme 2: Encountering Globalisation: Women, and Access to Social Security

Politicians and media commentators of a particular persuasion never tire of showcasing the ubiquitous presence of tribal women from the Northeast in the service sector in urban India. For them, these women stand out as examples of how globalization has created niche markets for marginalized communities. After all, it is difficult to grudge tribal women their chance at social and political mobility from the margins to the centre of the supposed Indian dream. As a matter of fact, the so-called Indian dream has become a South Asian template, where local elites are able to capture and sequester resources by force. For them, globalization has been an opportunity to showcase indigenous culture and products to a curious world of consumers and the market outside.

The opening up of India's economy coincided with increased assaults on public goods and common property regimes in all parts of the country, including the Northeast and the wider South Asian region. Hence, for many marginalised sections of society, the need to find alternative livelihoods and incomes was not just another choice flowing out of an assembly line of job opportunities for the new millennium. This was a need forced, sometimes even coerced, upon those who were most vulnerable. Empirical studies and advocacy work has shown that women – especially those already suffering caste, class and tribe related marginalization – have been hardest hit by this economic transformation.

For every story of upward mobility for women in the broad region we call South Asia and in India in particular, there are inconvenient questions of marginalization and increasing exposure to violence. If one were to follow the trajectories of women whose social security and access to resources have undergone a violent transformation, one would have a more critical view of globalization and of those who claim to be its champions.

This concept note is an invitation for those who wish to present papers on the broad issues raised by the narrative above. To reiterate, it invites researchers and activists who are working on issues related to: (a) women's access to resources, (b) migration, (c) land use; (d) agrarian change; (e) livelihoods and social change and any pertinent issue that can show creative connections and linkages leading to a more gendered, layered and textured understanding of globalization.

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Subtheme 3: Women in Urban India: Debating Labour/Employment, Poverty and Violence

The Census of 2011 has shown that the decadal increase in the number of people in urban India exceeded that of rural India for the first time since independence. Greater absolute growth in the urban population is based on the relatively greater increase in numbers of women in urban areas in comparison to rural areas.

This subtheme invites papers that examine how various sections of women are engaging with urban spaces. Although the contemporary period, its development/growth/accumulation paradigm, and related configurations and reconfigurations of urban spaces will frame the discussion, historical perspectives will also be welcome. The discussion will be organized around three areas.

The first relates to labour and employment. Aggregate female work participation rates (FWPR) in urban India have remained low. However, statistical definitions of work, labour and employment have long remained a matter of debate. Papers are invited on formal or informal urban employment, based on macro trends or micro issues specific to regions or sectors of trade and industry, including sex work and entertainment work. Studies focusing on the specific laboring experiences of groups marginalized on the basis of caste, class, community, sexuality or gender are also invited.

The second area relates to gender dimensions of poverty in urban areas, where dependence on the cash economy is more marked. Especially in the context of the debates around the feminization of poverty, concerns have been raised about the definition and centrality of women headed households. Some feminist scholars have suggested a shift to the concept of women maintained households where we see a feminization of responsibility and obligation without a concomitant rise in entitlements. This area would also include social, political, and planning approaches towards urban poverty, issues of food security, housing, civic and social amenities, as well as the cycles of displacement faced by the urban poor.

The third area relates to violence against women. The wide ranging public anger and mobilization following the Delhi rape and murder of December 2012 is indeed a historic moment in the struggle against violence against women. Apart from urban women's experience of specific forms of violence including engagements with law and law enforcement agencies, exploration of the urban dimensions of everyday social, cultural and economic practices that underpin various forms of violence against women, and the specific vulnerabilities of working class women may be included in the discussion.

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Subtheme 4: Pluralities: Caste, Inclusion and Intersectionalities

Diverse cultural practices and traditions in India deny justice, dignity and equality to Dalits in general and Dalit women in particular. Brahmanical patriarchies have pushed the Dalit women to the margins and this is manifested in all aspects of life in varied forms. With globalization and changing dynamics at national and international levels, the elite dominant classes are accommodated into the new economic and social order while the poor are further denied their due share right from resources to politics. The post-1990s, with the state's withdrawal from public sector and all the major welfare schemes and the multidimensional dynamics of caste, class, and religion, have pushed Dalit women beyond the peripheries of all margins. This combines with persistent violence and varied forms of exclusions, alienation of community's access to natural resources, particularly land.

Dalit women's movements, since the 1990s, have evolved alternative ideas of their own development, forming networks, literary forums, activists groups etc, impacting the feminist discourse itself in redefining notions of violence, work, poverty, etc. Dalit women's writings are complex yet point to an ongoing process of self definition in varied contexts. Recent engagements within the dalit women's movement suggest their diverse cultural practices and how these are linked with their past and present life world, work and sexualities and how these were being transformed. There is, thus a need to highlight the varied forms of dalit women's engagements in diverse contexts, the internal dialogues. This will also enable identifying areas of conflict or disagreement with feminist and other movements and sites for better dialogue. One of the key concerns on the intersectionality of caste and gender discrimination concerns dalit women's work. What forms have hereditary caste based labour including sexual labour assumed and what are the underlying processes? This is an area requiring more data bases as well as dialogues. In this context, the ongoing dialogue on sex work and sexualities needs to be carried forward.

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Subtheme 5: Pluralities: Ethnicity, Language and Gender

The Indian subcontinent is peopled by a variegated multitude of populations, belonging to many ethnic, and at least seven major language families. This linguistic and ethnic diversity is however always under threat, from the state, the dominant development paradigm, as well as from social and educational practices that privilege Hindi and English in education and public life. The low social and cultural prestige accorded to non-Scheduled languages means that the vast majority of Indian languages are regarded as "primitive". Responding to this, speakers 'choose' not to access education in their mother tongue(s); this, in turn, ensures that a small language remains, at best, a small one; at worst, it shrinks by the day. In a parallel process, the dominant mainstream policies of market liberalization are today pushing many small ethnic communities and their livelihood systems to the brink of extinction.

We seek to examine some questions the current scenario raises: what accounts for the devaluation of minority languages? How has this affected their socio-cultural identity and relations with the dominant population in social, economic and political terms? What implication does this have on gender and the process of development among the ethnic and linguistic minorities? What could be a viable development model and terms of integration of different ethnic groups into the Indian mainstream? How do we resolve the debate between full integration and separate development?

To what extent is the shift away from one's language, a shift away from its public use? What role does gender play in determining the extent of such shifts? Does societal multilingualism play any role in furthering language maintenance? How is ethnic identity presented and maintained in groups that have shifted away from their language(s)? How do such groups negotiate their relationship with Hindi, English, or the dominant regional languages?

Answers to the above questions are critical if the problem is to be resolved and we move towards a more equal and harmonious society.

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Subtheme 6: Equality, Conflict, Pluralism and Women's Studies

Divided into three sessions, the first will focus on the challenges of raising issues of equality within. Women's Studies have taken diverse paths seeking to transform disciplinary structures/ frameworks of analysis. However the challenges posed by other excluded categories, those of caste, community, region, sexuality and disability which play an important role in maintaining the hierarchical social order need far more attention.

This session will focus on the following: How can we analyze the contentious intersections of gender, caste, community, region, sexuality and disability in terms of relationality? How can curriculum take these into consideration? How can feminist movements and research translate into curricular concerns and practices? How do we deal with diversities, inequalities, and unevenness of cultural capital and the aspirations of practitioners-- researchers, students, and teachers-- of Women's Studies? Why is the 'language question' crucial? How can women's studies interrogate the assumed binary of quality and equality in higher education?

The second session will focus on gender, conflict and the state, exploring how Women's Studies allows for an interdisciplinary interrogation of the fraught relationship between the 'nation' and the 'region,' situating this conversation in the 'Northeast' of India – a 'region', a political space, an embattled killing field of insurgencies, where 'Northeast' is continuously reproduced through the narratives of militarism and counter-insurgency. Can Women's Studies offer a way to disentangle the enmeshed webs of violence and conflict which relentlessly produce an 'Other'?

Some possible questions include: How far is the interdisciplinary space of Women's Studies useful in initiating new ways of producing knowledge that does not reproduce the lines of the nation, the region, and the international with pristine territories and borders? How do we think through the overlap between the distinctive characters of exceptional and everyday forms of violence in the North-East, especially because of the ways in which women's bodies become sites of militarised violence?

The third session will focus on Gender, Pluralism and Religion, opening up discussions on at least two levels. First: debates on gender issues in relation to religion, and faith practices, in south Asia. Second: initiating a conversation between two interdisciplinary formations: religious studies and women's studies. Papers are invited to reflect on (and not only) the following: feminist reinterpretation of religious, textual traditions; new interpretative frameworks in feminist inspired religious studies; gender, faith practice, and new religious cultures; popular religious practice, marginal discourses (caste/sect etc), and their engagements with questions of gender.

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Subtheme 7: Education, Knowledge and Institutional Space(s)

After a considerable gap in time, since the publication in 1975 of the Towards Equality Report, there has been a recent and renewed realization among feminists of the need to engage critically with the theory and practice of education in institutional spaces.

It was the blatant attempts by the BJP led NDA government to "saffronise" school textbooks that alerted a public (beyond a few committed educationists) about the importance of investing critical attention in educational matters. The efforts by the same NDA regime to rename "Women's Studies" as "Family Studies" revealed the continuum of the efforts of a right-wing government to impact education at levels ranging from school education to higher education.

The more recent drift in educational policies has again revived feminist interest in education since these policies seek to include girls

and women in greater numbers in educational institutions. Feminist critiques of these policies are seeking to assess and analyze the manner and implications of “feminizing” education in this moment.

There is also the need to explore the gender dynamic in relation to a range of themes and areas of emerging focus in education, such as in educational leadership and management as well as teacher education at all levels. It is pertinent too that our studies attend to the manner in which the institutionalized space of education gets constructed, negotiated and re-configured in a given socio-political setting. Undoubtedly, the changing nature of the dynamic between the state, market and educational institutions is significant.

Also the kind of promise that modern educational institutions offer to marginal groups, women among them requires investigation. Development related debates and discussions have been focusing on women’s education for some time now and it is imperative to engage critically with these, understand their implications and extend them in directions that ensure equity, pluralism and substantive justice.

In this subtheme, we invite papers on any one or a combination of the following issues:

- Gender issues in the teaching profession
- Teaching materials and textbooks
- Policies on gender and education
- Identity formation in educational spaces
- Gender issues in educational leadership and management
- Mainstream and alternate pedagogies
- Knowledge production in disciplinary domains
- Women, work and education
- Marriage, education and domesticity
- Role of women’s organizations in education

A special session within the subtheme will focus on the North East where in addition to the issues and themes flagged above, presentations exploring the gendered dimensions of education within the colonial period in the North East will be included.

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Subtheme 8: Culture and Region

In recent times regional politics has emerged as one of the greatest challenges to the Indian state. It is now recognized that underdevelopment, that is, in relation to the current paradigm of ‘development’, is largely due to cultural factors historically determined by geography, ecology, and ethnicity. Contrary to popular perception these so-called backward regions are not arid deserts but ecologically diverse and rich in natural resources. Historically these areas and the diverse ethnic groups living there and who have developed rich and unique cultures through centuries, have been exploited, both materially and culturally by the more developed neighbors.

In India, culture has traditionally been the site, through institutions like caste, to create hierarchies of power and privilege, and the peoples of these regions have been relegated to the lowest rungs of the caste ladder or totally set outside the caste hierarchy as outcastes or barbarians.

Papers are invited focusing on the cultural specificities within the region or across regions to discover patterns of unequal treatment and exploitation between different groups and between men and women. The disruption of the old structures has brought new conflicts and contradictions.

Inter and intra regional cultural specificity in conjunction with market forces has also affected the patterns of migration and immigration in the region. They are victims equally of the cultural insensitivity of centralized development planning attuned to a linear concept of development, building mega projects involving de-forestation and occupation of ‘wastelands’ (jhum-lands), leaving the erstwhile inhabitants, who had nurtured the environment for centuries through ecologically sound practices, without livelihood or occupation, the only options being to migrate peacefully and join the faceless urban work-force or erupt in violent protest as is

happening now all over India and not just in the Northeast. Is it too late to search for alternative roads to development, and thus ensure both equality and plurality? Can we look to state intervention to include cultural rights as part of human and fundamental rights, with provision for equal gender opportunities in framing culture policy?

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Subtheme 9: Women, Peace and Security in India

There is now wide acceptance of the fact that modern armed conflict has a disproportionate impact on women and girls even though most are not directly engaged in combat. The long years of conflict in various parts of India have left several communities bereft of the peace and development that they rightfully deserve.

Arbitrary application of security laws at the national and state levels directly affect women's lives. In India at least nine national laws and ten state laws form the framework of Security Laws. Amongst these the most discussed because of its gendered impact are the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 (No. 28 of 1958), Armed Forces (Assam and Manipur) Special Powers (Amendment) Act, 1972 (No. 7 of 1972), Armed Forces (Jammu and Kashmir) Special Powers Act, 1990 (No.21 of 1990). . Needless to say, the impact on women over decades of militarization has been particularly acute.

From Sharmila from the North East has been on a fast for about ten years protesting the AFSPA in the North East. Unlike other protesters in India she has had to face imprisonment as fasting is considered as an attempt at suicide. From a feminist or human perspective the narrow focus of the national security paradigm as we have observed in the North East and Jammu and Kashmir, aims at protection of territory by use of force and ignores and negates feminist thinking, women's lives, their concerns, their self-esteem, and other related issues of equality, social justice and poverty which are marginalized. Women's survival is linked to the search for alternative paths to peace, progress and development.

There would be three sessions. The first is titled 'State and Security Laws: Women's Perspective'. Paper presenters would be expected to critically evaluate the legal framework of the Indian security system from the gender perspective. Debates around the AFSPA will also be covered. The second session, linked with the first, is titled 'Alternative Feminist Security Paradigm'. Critiquing the existing militarized and masculinized security perspective, it will attempt to offer an alternative security perspective from a feminist standpoint. The third session is titled 'Women's Initiative for Peace' and it will provide a conceptual framework, the possibilities as well as real cases of women's interventions in peace building. This sub-theme will also focus on Security Council Resolution 1325.

With the objective of providing fresh and promising perspectives on the most severe challenges to women in conflict situations in India, these three subthemes are aimed at bringing together academics, activists, media reporters, researchers to discuss, widen and deepen the current discourse on women and security. For all the three sessions, media remains a connecting strand.

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Subtheme 10: Documenting Gendered Histories: Nation, State, Region and Local

This sub-theme seeks to focus on areas which the so called “mainstream” historiographies have ignored especially with respect to the forgotten histories of women in struggle in the national, regional and local contexts. The discussions in the session should be a step in the right direction with respect to the development of a gender sensitive knowledge system which addresses the various gender inequalities, injustices and disparities in our society. The themes that the sessions can focus upon are as follows:

Conceptualising and Documenting Gendered Histories: This session can focus on ways and means to conceptualise the idea of gendered histories so that the documenting can help in the building up of oral and documentary histories of women in mass struggles in the colonial and contemporary periods. The session can deal with methodological issues in historiography and the problems of writing histories of issues like matriliney and its impact on women’s rights, and women’s participation in regional autonomy movements. The aim will be to explore ways of laying the basis of a gendered knowledge system.

Autobiographies of women in mass struggles: The theme will focus on the use of testimonies, biographies, oral and archival histories to recover women’s voices from nationalist and local struggles since the late colonial period. The focus will be on the nationalist movement, local struggles over natural resources, and the role of women in militant movements. It can also cover the participation of women in trade unions, peasant organizations and the formation of women’s groups and organizations especially after the CSWI report. Documentation of on-going struggles can also be one of the aims of this endeavour. Participants compare the experiences of India with other regions such as Africa and Latin America if possible.

Voices from the past and present: The main aim of this section will be on inviting women activists to talk about their own lives and recording oral histories. This session will largely be based on invited activists from north east, central India and other parts of the country.

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Subtheme 11: Women’s Movement’s Engagement with Policy

Indian women’s movements and women’s studies scholarship have together brought to bear a critical lens on the shifting ways in which state developmental policies have constructed women’s identities, subjectivities and citizenship in the decades since Independence. Over the years, women’s groups, activists and scholars in India have challenged the welfarist bias of the Community Development Programmes that invisibilized women’s labour contribution to the economy, demanding that women be recognized as workers and peasants in the urban unorganized and agrarian economies of the country. Women’s movements have fiercely opposed the targeting of women by the state’s family planning policy and its manifestation as state-sponsored violence against the bodies of women of the laboring classes and subordinate castes. Since the 1980s and the 1990s, women’s movements have engaged in increasingly complex ways with government policies following the emergence of women as central actors in economic development programmes (such as women-targeted microcredit or the Self -Help Group phenomenon), the mainstreaming of rural poor women within micro-enterprise and income-generation oriented anti-poverty schemes and the positioning of women as agents of gender-transformative change within their communities (via initiatives such as the Women’s Development Programme (Rajasthan), the Mahila Samakhyia and the nationwide literacy campaigns that mobilized women neo-literates en masse).

This sub-theme invites its paper presenters to reflect on the rich, complex and fraught engagements that women’s groups, activists and scholars have initiated and sustained with state policies and developmental projects/initiatives over the years as well as to reflect critically upon the debates, issues and concerns they have raised. What dangers, opportunities, conflicts and challenges have been generated by a plethora of governmental programmes that solicit women as the principal actors/ targets/ recipients and sometimes even include women’s groups and NGOs as ‘partners’ in implementation? If we have had to move away from condemning the exclusion/ marginalization of women from state developmental policies and resources in the earlier decades towards critically interrogating the terms on which women have been included and incorporated within these, how successful have women’s movements been in negotiating this shift? Have we paid sufficient attention to rigorously documenting and understanding how the existing social

hierarchies and solidarities of gender, caste, class, region and religion are being re-configured through the new spaces and resources that state developmentalist projects make available for women? We invite paper presenters to situate ourselves – our own academic and activist engagements with governmental policies, in the light of the rich legacy of engagement that we have inherited and to ask what new questions we should be raising and what insights/ perspectives should we be refining to better understand the emerging political economy of gendered citizenship in India.

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ATTENTION: FOREIGN PARTICIPANTS

Foreign Participants planning to participate in the XIV National Conference of the IAWS to be held in Guwahati, Assam, from 4th -7th February 2014 may please note that all foreign participants attending conferences in India need official Clearance from the Ministries of the Government of India (Home and MEA). All Foreign Nationals, (friends of IAWS) attending the IAWS Conference need to go through this.

- Registration formalities for foreign participants thus need to be completed well ahead of the conference since clearance from the Ministry takes time.
- This includes foreign guests invited by the organizers to attend the IAWS conference.
- All foreign participants are requested to immediately send necessary details regarding passport, date and place of issue, citizenship/ nationality, visa grant applications, institutional location etc. to the IAWS Secretariat.
- Last minute requests from foreign guests wanting to register cannot be entertained.
- Official Clearances take time and late applications may not be processed and permission not granted.
- Foreign participants if presenting a paper may please send in requests for clearance with full details and letter from the co-ordinator confirming selection of paper
- IAWS does not offer grants for travel or stay to foreign participants, unless otherwise indicated.
- Registration charges for all foreign participants are 100\$ (equivalent in Rupees).
- IAWS does not entertain requests for special accommodation by foreign guests. Those opting for the same will have to bear the charges for the same.
- All foreign participants would have to comply with registration formalities and reporting to the local police on arrival, including in Guwahati, as per Indian laws.

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PRE-CONFERENCE CONCEPT NOTES

3rd February 2014

Engaging with the voices of women with disabilities

Northeast India has an unhappy and traumatic history of neglect, apathy and insurgency, and despite popular positive perceptions of the status of women, actually has a rather poor track record in terms of gender based violence, specifically, sexual violence in its various locations.

The 2001 census stated that 2.2% of the Indian population was living with a disability. However disability rights activists, NGOs and even many government agencies estimate the real prevalence to be 5–6% of the total population. The rights of people with disabilities get low priority in India and more so in conflict zones like Jammu & Kashmir and the Northeast .

There are both pragmatic and sociocultural issues in identifying, locating and reaching women with disabilities. Many disabled women are confined to their homes and thus less likely to access the state's mainstream programs or services. Many factors compound their situation, such as terrain, weather, lack of mobility aids; being single and female in a traditional setting; and fear prompted by experiences of stigma or harassment.

Lack of comprehensive data on women with disabilities adds to their 'invisibility' and marginalisation that keeps them out of the ambit of engagement and interaction with women's groups and movements.

The proposed preconference will address the concerns of women with disabilities especially in the context of conflict-induced trauma. It will highlight the issues of women with disabilities to initiate a dialogue within and between women with disabilities and members of the IAWS, identify gaps in both acquiring knowledge and the statutory provisions of the State and the existing scenario such as support services, resources and advocacy. There will be discussions about the livelihoods of women with disabilities, especially in situations where they are generally single and are part of and head female headed households. Another aim is to understand the challenges faced by women with disabilities with regard to sexual and reproductive health, and extend the discussion on issues of disabled women to other states that ignore the reality of disability in the context of gender.

The workshop will attempt to draw up an action plan to educate mainstream organizations on disability issues, so as to encourage inclusion of women with disabilities in their future policies and programs. It will underscore the lack of inclusion of women with disabilities in mainstream policies, programmes and schemes. It is hoped that as an outcome of this workshop participating women and all stakeholders will work with IAWS to conduct orientation programs on sexuality, reproductive health care, sexually transmitted diseases and enable access to available support services for women (with disabilities) in different parts of the Northeast and hopefully other parts of the country to make them more 'visible' and empower them with better control over both their bodily and livelihood integrity.

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PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP II:

3rd February, 2014

‘Young Women’: Resisting Violence and Exploring Legacies

This pre-conference brings exciting possibilities for exploration and raises some critical questions, like how does ‘age’ become an important criterion for ‘difference’ among women? What is the nature of its intersection with categories, like caste, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, etc.? What challenges do these intersections pose to processes of gender justice? The attempt is to raise questions related to different axes of intersections, exploring their meanings, and the interplay of various categories, in the context of marginality that gives rise to complex manifestations of injustice. The workshop will be organized in two sessions.

Session 1 – Interrogating Violence

In the midst of far reaching changes that are ensuing in contemporary times the challenges faced by marginalised groups and young women are manifold. On the one hand, there are denials, exploitation and marginalisation; while on the other, there are assertions for dignity, self-respect and autonomy, which are more often than not met with violence – both in overt and covert forms. In this session, we invite presentations that explore the contentious intersections of caste, gender, community, sexuality and labour, which get inflicted in terms of violence against young persons in contemporary times.

Session 2 : Exploring Feminist Legacies from the North East

While violence against women is endemic, it is important to raise and understand the specific issues arising out of women’s location in conflict areas. The status and gravity of the condition of women from these regions could be located in the framework of collective violence – against entire communities, disappearances and mass killings of men, and sexual assault on women. Further, in the context of uneven economic development, in ecologically fragile regions, there are instances of displacement and loss of livelihoods. What are the women’s struggles emerging from such contexts and what is the history of their resistance? How are women negotiating various institutions, like the family, community, state and market, in which they are embedded in complex and at times contradictory ways? What is the nature of diversity within the North East region itself, which necessitates moving beyond generalised presumptions? What are the newer possibilities for modes of organising, strategising and political initiatives? In this session, we invite presentations that document and reflect on the negotiations, struggles and resistance of women from different north eastern states, and the challenges these pose to feminist politics and the women’s movement.

In these sessions we wish to engage with the themes through conversations and dialogue; hence, we propose to include diverse forms of presentations, including paper presentations, short films/documentaries, plays and/or performances, etc. The time limit for each presentation will be 15 minutes. If the presentation is going to be in a vernacular language, then advance information is required so that translations can be arranged. For further details see information on participation and paper presentation.

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General Information

How to Register for the conference? Registration forms should be filled in clearly and completely and sent to: iaws@cwds.org / iaws.secretariat@gmail.com. For online registration, please visit www.iaws.org. For online bank transfer of Registration and or/ Membership fee, the details are as follows:

For Electronic Bank Transfer

**Name of the Bank: HDFC Bank Ltd; Branch Address: Gole Market Branch, New Delhi
Account No.:584100003034; IFSC Code:HDFC0000584**

Note: Please mention the Transaction ID, Date and sender's details (Name and City).

Last date for Registration: 10th December 2013

Details of Conference Registration Fee

Non member Student (without accommodation)* (150+50)	Rs. 200
Non-member Student with (with accommodation)* (500+50)	Rs. 550
Student Life Member (with accommodation)	Rs. 500
Student Life Member (without accommodation)	Rs. 150
Non-Student/Non Members (without accommodation)* (1000+200)	Rs. 1200
Non-Student/Non Members (with accommodation)* (1500+200)	Rs. 1700
Life Members/Non-Students (with accommodation)	Rs. 1500
Life Members/Non-Students (without accommodation)	Rs. 1000

The charge includes Rs. 200, Rs 50-Students as conference membership fee.

Registration for International participants US \$ 100 (See Bank Details Given Above for Electronic Transfers)

Accommodation for participants is being arranged at different venues in Guwahati

\Further details of the programme and specific registration issues will be available on the IAWS website, Closer to the time of the conference, at the Central Office or through enquiries at the following email id:

**secretariat.iaws@gmail.com (Central Office), New Delhi
iawsgu2014@gmail.com (Local Conference Secretariat) Guwahati**

- Local transportation will be provided from the State Bus Terminus/ Railway Station/ Airport to the Venue on 3th / 4th February 2014. Please intimate time and mode of arrival to the Local Conference Secretariat at: iawsgu2014@gmail.com and a copy to iaws.secretariat@gmail.com. All the participants are requested to report to the Conference Registration Counter at the Women' Studies Centre, Gauhati University on their arrival.
- Accommodation cannot be guaranteed for participants registering on the spot. No accommodation will be provided to the accompanying person without registration.

Completed conference registration forms and membership forms along with cheques/demand drafts drawn in favour of the Indian Association for Women's Studies payable at New Delhi to be sent to IAWS Secretariat:

(For online registration, signature not required)

For online Registration:

<http://www.iaws.org> & <http://www.cwds.ac.in>

By e.mail: iaws@cwds.org & iaws.secretariat@gmail.com

- Please notify your travel itinerary to the Local Conference Secretariat prior to your journey, at two weeks earlier to: iawsgu2014@gmail.com & iaws.secretariat@gmail.com
- Those who have enrolled for online memberships please bring your membership form with you.

The General Secretary

Indian Association for Women's Studies

C/o Centre for Women's Development Studies, 25 Bhai Vir Singh Marg, New Delhi-110001

E.mail: iaws@cwds.org / iaws.secretariat@gmail.com

<http://www.iaws.org>

IAWS CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM 2014Last Date of Registration: **10th December 2013**

(For non-members, including students, apart from Conference Registration Charges, a separate fee of Rs. 200 and Rs. 50 respectively will be charged as 'Conference Membership Charges'.

PLEASE FILL IN CAPITALS

Personal information

Name (in full): _____

Gender: _____ Age _____

Educational qualifications _____

Address: _____

City: _____ PIN: _____ State: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

E.mail: _____

Are you an IAWS Member?: Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes mention Membership No. _____

Check appropriate category:

Paper Presenter: _____ Participant: _____ Sub-theme Coordinator: _____

Do you require accommodation? Yes: _____ No: _____

Any special assistance required? Yes: _____ No: _____

If yes, check appropriate category:

Senior Citizen: _____ Disabled: _____ WheelChair traveler: _____

Any other (Please Specify): _____

Do you need crèche facilities Yes: _____ No: _____ If yes, age of child: _____

Conference Registration Fee

- Non member Student (without accommodation)* Rs. 200
- Non-member Student with (with accommodation)* Rs. 550
- Student Life Member (with accommodation) Rs. 500
- Student Life Member (without accommodation) Rs. 150
- Non-Student/Non Members (without accommodation)* Rs. 1200
- Non-Student/Non Members (with accommodation)* Rs. 1700
- Life Members/Non-Students (with accommodation) Rs.1500
- Life Members/Non-Students (without accommodation) Rs. 1000
- The charge includes Rs. 200, Rs 50-Students as conference membership fee.

Details of Payment:

DD/ Cheque* No. _____ Date: _____ Rs. _____

*(Rs.50/- additional for outstation Cheques)

Cheque /Draft may be made in favour of Indian Association for Women's Studies (preferably payable at par in New Delhi).

Bank: _____ Branch: _____

Place: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

IAWS MEMBERSHIP FORM

PLEASE FILL IN CAPITALS

Personal information

Name (in full): _____

Gender: _____ Age _____

Educational qualifications _____

Address: _____

City: _____ PIN: _____ State: _____

Phone: _____ Mobile: _____

E.mail: _____

Mailing Address (if different above): _____

Interest in Women's Studies (Please tick categories applicable)

Teaching: _____ Activism: _____ Writing: _____

Research: _____ Media & Communication: _____ Administration of Programmes: _____

Any other: _____

Type of Membership (Please tick categories applicable)

Life (Rs.1500/-): _____ (or) Rs.800/- (upgradation from ordinary): _____

Ordinary Members who have registered between 2011-2013 can become Life Members by paying the difference (Rs.800) within the three year period of their membership.

Student (Rs.250/-) (for 3 years) (Attach proof of Student ID): _____

Institutional (Life) Rs.10000/-: _____ (or) Rs.5000/- (upgradation): _____

(Ordinary Institutional member can become Institutional Life Member by paying the difference (Rs.5000) within the three year period of their membership (w.e.f. 2011)

Friends of Association \$100 (in Rupees equivalent): _____

Details of Payment:

DD/ Cheque* No.: _____ Date: _____ Rs.: _____

*(Rs.50/- additional for outstation Cheques)

Cheque /Draft may be made in favour of Indian Association for Women's Studies (preferably payable at par in New Delhi).

Bank: _____ Branch: _____

Place: _____ Date: _____ Signature: _____

(For online registration, signature not required)

For Electronic Bank Transfer

Name of the Bank:HDFC Bank Ltd.; Branch Address:Gole Market Branch, New Delhi**Account No.:5841000003034; IFSC Code:HDFC0000584****Note: Please mention the Transaction ID, Date and sender's details (Name and City).****Cheque /Draft may be made in favour of Indian Association for Women's Studies (preferably payable at par in New Delhi).**

Please ensure that the Membership form completed in all respects is sent to the following address:

The General Secretary**Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS)****C/o Centre for Women's Development Studies, 25, Bhai Vir Singh Marg (Gole Market), New Delhi 110001.**For online Registration: <http://www.iaws.org> & <http://www.cwds.ac.in>By e.mail: iaws@cwds.org & iaws.secretariat@gmail.com