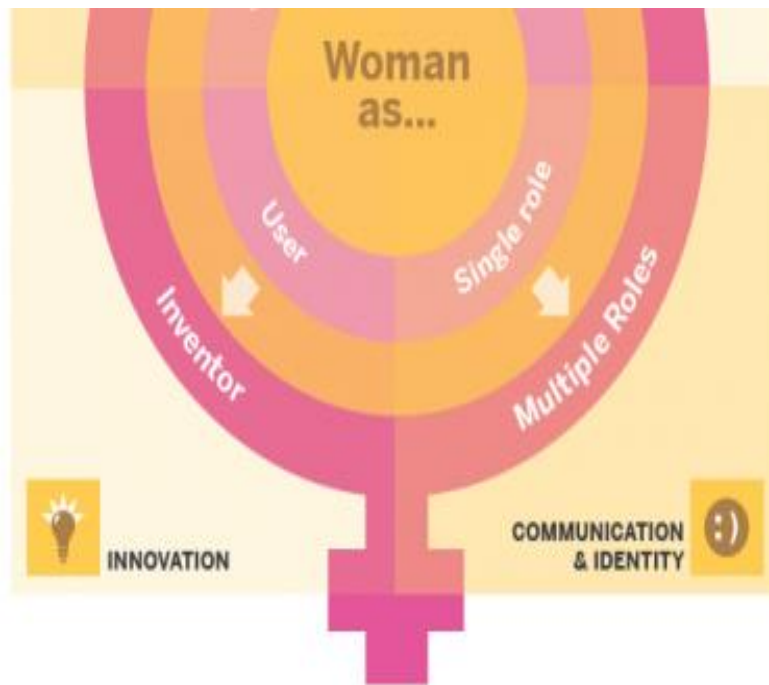


**WOMEN, SOCIETY, IDENTITY:
A COLLECTION OF WEBINAR SPEECHES OF
WOMEN'S STUDIES RESEARCH CENTRE,
UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA**

(Texts in Transcription)



Compiled by

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November 2021

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PREFACE

A Few Words from the Desk of the Director

Women's position in indigenous societies has not always been ideal. Integration into larger economic and political system, could actually improve some women's status, but this is not usually the whole some case. When indigenous societies join larger systems, this leads to a further discrimination of politics, and integrating women more and more into traditional roles often controls women's rights to different strata of society. Women in most of the cases rarely control funds - even those generated by their own efforts.

Since early 2020 till now entire world was under a single threat when academic pursuits were severely interfacing challenges. It was factor of a deadly virus which halted human interactions and any academic platform of physical activities were under serious challenge. It was the period when physical gave way to digital, and seminars gave way to webinars.

Women's Studies Research Centre of University of Calcutta too decided to defeat the Covid-19 challenge from the digital platform of webinar. The platform of Google Meet helped to develop national and international academic linkages and so from August 2020 onwards, we kept on organizing a monthly lecture by distinguished scholars across India and globe.

This file is a collection of speeches in edited form. However, any opinion expressed by respective scholars is entirely their own opinion and WSRC or University holds no responsibility towards the same.

I have been enormously assisted by Dr Kankana Sengupta, Research Officer of WSRC in this work of compilation.

There are 15 lectures under "Distinguished Lecture" series and those are compiled and will be uploaded in the website of University of Calcutta. These lectures are worthwhile and useful to understand identity issues of women in different areas and levels of society. In hope the readers will like these wonderful speeches.

Lipi Ghosh

Director

Women's Studies Research Centre

University of Calcutta

1, Reformatory Street, Kolkata- 700027

November 10, 2021

Webinar 1

Distinguished Lecture on

Trafficking of Women from Northeast India: Neighbourhood, Mainland and Global Linkages

Subir Bhaumik

BBC- Reuters correspondent and Editorial Director, Eastern Link

(The Lecture was delivered on 20th August 2020)

Thank you all for giving me this opportunity to present my viewpoints on a very important issue in Northeast India. I will begin my webinar by making three key arguments.

Trafficking in Northeast India: People were aware in the 1970s and 80s that one day Northeast will become the hub of trafficking as Ms. Paula Banerjee rightly said. She is not the only one to have said it. There are many others who have been saying this for the last ten odd years that Northeast India is emerging as a hub of human trafficking. Here, I will stick to only human trafficking and will not get into other types of trafficking like weapons trafficking or drugs trafficking which are also there on a large scale in this region. This makes the region very volatile and very unstable for various different reasons. To begin with, let me make a point that is there is a direct relationship between ethnic conflict and conflict that happens between non-state actors and the State and the instability that grows around it and trafficking. These are linked. This is not a Northeast India phenomenon. We have seen this happening in neighbouring Myanmar and Bangladesh. We have seen this happen in places like Thailand that was the nerve centre of the American War effort in Vietnam. Therefore, a situation arose where a large number of American soldiers were stationed for peacetime duties in Thailand in the 1960s. Thailand was used as a recreation centre for American soldiers thus opening a Pandora's box and as a result sex trade picked up. The Vietnam war and the American war efforts actually ended up in converting the peaceful Buddhist nation into a nation largely identified with sex tourism. This is unfortunate but true. The point that I am trying to make here is that there is a direct correlation between

conflicts of different kinds including the one we see in Northeast India, i.e. the conflict between non-state actors and state actors. Thus, it is not just the conflict among the State and some rebel groups but very often between rebel groups who are fighting for the conflicting demands of their ethnic homelands. In Manipur we have the Kuki-Naga ethnic conflict that had seen a bloody bout in 1992-1993 arising from a claim and counterclaim of strips of community land, leading to hundreds of deaths, including those of women and children. As a result, the conflicts which have scarred Northeast India for a very long time have resulted in the problem of Human Trafficking with women and girls paying the highest price. The rise of conflict and arising of problems like human trafficking are linked intricately and this is not unique to the Northeast. This has happened in Myanmar. This has happened in Thailand. This has happened elsewhere in Southeast Asia. So, coming back to this, the first point is how we link up these.

Number two is the kind of trafficking — from where to where? Now, the basic trend that we have seen is that the trafficking of women from Northeast India to the Hindi heartland, to North India, to Western India and also as far as Mumbai where, of course, there are huge markets for flesh trade and big red-light districts. This is one. This is *the direction*. It is unlike Thailand where the place itself became a hub and people flocked in there. But, in Thailand, if one thinks that it is only the Thai girls then it is a big mistake. Girls from Ukraine, Byelorussia, including those from Central Asian Republics, turn up there because they think they will get a good market there for the services they are prepared to render because of the perception that Thailand is the sex capital of the world. So, they think that if somebody is really looking for a good return on their services, better turn up in Bangkok and find these people coming from all over the world. The location of Thailand plays a key role in the success of the sex trafficking industry. It is close to war-torn Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia. China and Vietnam are also nearby. Various waterways along with porous borders also facilitate trafficking. People not just come here from the neighbourhood countries like Myanmar, Cambodia but also as far as from the Soviet Republic. This is the same happening now in Northeast India as well. One will find Naga, Kuki girls not really in brothels in Bombay to the extent that they are found in Guwahati or in Shillong where this trade is flourishing over the last few years because of local demand which is been growing and the local demand is manifold, and we can discuss this later. This is point number two that usually the flow is from Northeast to Indian mainland—I mean it is a generic term—but broadly towards North and Western India. I am not much aware of Naga and Kuki girls trafficking to the South, so I do not want to make a comment. But I have been told that in Hyderabad, there are girls from the Northeast especially Rohingya girls. Now, these Rohingya girls first made their way into the Northeast and then finally they found themselves ending up in Hyderabad with other Rohingyas as well. There is a big Rohingya population in Hyderabad and there are a lot of these girls in the flesh trade much as they are in the flesh trade in Karachi. Our good friend Ms. Chris Lewa who ran this Arakan Project has done quite a lot of path-breaking research on that. *This is the* major point that the flow is basically from the Northeast into the Indian mainland.

Number three, which is again quite important, is that this particular trade is known as standalone trade. It is closely linked with some of the other contraband illegal trades that are originating out of the Northeast. Therefore, we find that people who have invested in this trade, who are running this trade, who are the money-makers from this trade are also involved in weapons and drugs trafficking. They are involved in a number of other illegal trades. Thus, it can be said that women trafficking, drug trafficking, weapons trafficking tend to go hand in hand and those who are involved in these are actually into these various aspects of the trade. They run it side by side. That's the real danger especially for people who are involved with security. Here is a pattern of trade which if it was just about women may not really bother about security lines but if those guys who are into this trade are also into arms trafficking and also into drug trafficking, then, that's cause for a major worry especially considering the security of a state. Here, I am in no way saying that human trafficking is not a bigger problem but it when combined with other illegal trades becomes a huge threat to national security. I have really solid evidence, at least, from the Indian States on the Myanmar border that the people in this trade are very often the same set of guys who are involved in women trafficking, drug trafficking and weapon trafficking as and when it suits them. So, these are the three quick points that I would first make. I would now, actually, try to provide some details.

Lot of empirical work has not been done on this trend of women trafficking out of Northeast India. There is one very strong report which I used in one of my important BBC kind of documentary and also online feature. It is called, "Assam's missing girls and the sex trade". I was the one, I can say who actually started this story. I have followed it up from time to time and even later when I had left BBC and I was editing the Seven Sisters Post. I had also written a very strong editorial saying that these girls from Assam who have gone into this trade and when they come back and are incapable of carrying trade due to their age, they have nowhere to go because they are stigmatised, and their families are not willing to take them back. So, the need is that the Government of Assam should set up old age homes for these hapless women. I feel very strongly for some of our sisters who have been forced into this kind of a thing. We have written about this from time to time – sometimes purely as news articles or investigations and sometimes as editorial pieces where our opinions were involved. At the end of 2006, the Bureau of Police, Research and Development of the Assam Police has done some documentation about such women, and it is the only such organisation in the region to do so. Most of the other police forces in the region often ignore this stating that insurgency is the main problem in the region, and we don't have enough people to actually look at trafficking, to actually chase them up. Because of the lack of definitive knowledge of trafficking and the laws involved among the authorities in most of the cases the culprits just get through because the case was not carried out properly. The Bureau of Police Research and Development, Assam Police, however, reported that between 1996 and 2006, 3,184 women and 3,840 female children were trafficked from Assam between which means more than 7000 women. This number was reached in ten years. This means two women every day are being trafficked out of Assam! It is a serious thing that if two women on

average are trafficked out of only Assam, of course, there are multiple conflicts, then how can one say that this is not a serious problem? This is a serious problem. This is as serious a problem as insurgency. Now, if we look at insurgency. Well, it is conflict playing out and we have the state actors and the non-state actors who fight it out. The point is, one of the important fallouts of insurgency is women trafficking. When these kinds of conflicts multiply, the problem of human trafficking worsens. Why? Because conflicts breed instability, they breed vulnerability and create a situation in which a lot of women find themselves to be totally vulnerable. They don't have jobs. They don't have incomes. Their families are not being able to support them anymore. They are in refugee camps. They are in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps.

I am particular about differentiating between refugees and IDP camps. 1996 Survey is the starting point. If we recall Prafulla Mahanta's Government came to power in 1996. The AGP led coalition came to power defeating Congress. Immediately, there were huge riots between Boros and non-Boros which led to the displacement of some 2.5 lakh people or more around 3 lakh and the death of nearly 100 people. There was chaos in Western Assam and I have covered this whole phase as a journalist. This is important for me for various different reasons but not the least because this was the worst outburst in Assam since 1983 - the Nellie Riots and all that. In these riots, the deaths were not as many as in the Nellie riots. In the Nellie riots, 2500 or 3000 deaths were reported. Here there were not so many deaths because the security forces were deployed but the IDP problem was huge here. People were thrown out of their homes. They were rendered homeless and then we found and I have checked this out on the ground after getting this report. This is how we journalists actually work on the ground, especially that is the BBC culture where we do the groundwork after the report. We actually visit the place and we try to find out a few cases and figure out whether the report actually matches the reality on the ground. I have spoken to a large number of people who have been rendered homeless in those areas of Western Assam which we are talking about at the moment. This pattern became fairly clear. There was one gentleman — one Adivasi. Adivasi meaning people from Central India — the Santhals, the Mundas and the Orangs who were targeted by the Boros. Both sides have their own sort of militia groups. Birsa Munda group - representing the Adivasis, and Boros, of course, have the National Democratic Front for Boroland (NDFB). Here in this situation, we had people who actually told me that there was this Adivasi leader who said at least 200 girls from my village have left Assam because they have been promised jobs. Where have they been promised jobs? Punjab, Haryana and we checked this out further. We actually reached those places. Some of my BBC colleagues, based in Delhi, actually were asked by me, to get the details of these girls. We found very disturbing patterns. We were told that some of these girls are married. We found that some of them have actually been married on paper. They are actually sex slaves nothing better than that. They enjoy no rights. They can't leave these places. They can't go back home. It is not like a normal marriage where the girl can go back home as and when she likes it to meet her parents. Here the people who had married them were the farmers, the local rich people who were looking for these kinds of girls. Why would they do that? It is mainly owing to the pattern of

foeticide, “*ladki hone wala hai, to gira do*”. There is a huge problem of female foeticide and infanticide in North India. People there want bahu (daughter in law) but they don’t want girls to be born in their houses. They think of girls as a burden. This has led to a poor male-female ratio in North India. Therefore, there are more men and less women and less women to marry, especially for those who are financially not so well off. Thus, these kinds of people marry girls from areas like Assam by paying an amount. They are worried that since these girls have been brought by a combination of deceit, cajolery, threat, force and of course payments made to the dalals not exactly to the family members, thus they do not allow these girls to visit their homes or meet their parents. They are basically sex slaves and are supposed to produce children, do the household chores and keep men happy.

Some of my friends will say at least it is better than these women ending up in red light areas. Well, we can have that debate, but I have found that these women are tortured and oppressed. They are forced to marry people, some of whom were thirty years older to them. I feel there is really no difference between these girls who are forced to marry and leave all contacts with their families and those who end up in red light areas. They are on the same boat.

Now, let me come back. How this trade thrives? We need to really look at our politics, our networks in Northeast India. That is, all these places, like Karbi Anglong, where I did quite a bit of ground-level research or the Boro areas which actually produced many of these trafficked women because that’s where the conflict was at its worst and in other parts of Assam as well. We invariably find that there is a very well-oiled network of the dalals, of people who are into this trade. It begins with the neighbourhood spotter usually with some kind of local club connection, some local clout that the man has and invariably these are people who come up with job offers to women or their families. These people make money both ways. They fleece the families, who believe them and think that their daughters are going to get engaged in some real-time jobs and they are going to make money and send back money home. In this kind of hope, they actually end up paying some kind of fees to these people. These guys then take the girls away and through a certain ‘mechanism’ the girl ends up in one of the sales points. Either in one of these families who want a sex slave or they end up in one of the red light districts or in worst cases, they land up somewhere across the border not limited to the boundaries of India. I know some of these women who have ended up in Pakistan or somewhere in the Middle East as well. Therefore, there is this well-oiled network of people. We may think that this guy who comes up with a job offer in a remote village in Karbi Anglong — is a cog in the wheel. He is connected to a much bigger network and the networks thrive because they have political patronage or have important people in the police and a lot of money is involved. Therefore, these patronage networks keep this whole thing going and when one tries to actually take these people on, try to get at the bottom of the whole thing or do something to stop it, they run into a lot of trouble. Lots of journalists like me have faced this problem. We get threats or forcefully prevented from covering such stories. Here another little point I want to make is that not all the *swalis* (Girls in

Assamese language) or daughters and all the sisters are ending up in this kind of trade. They are not being trafficked. There are many of them who are getting legitimate jobs. The fact is that in the Indian hospitality industry today, our sisters from the Northeast have already made a mark which is not just in the restaurant or some pub but also in renowned hotels. However, there is still a lot of racism for these women coming from the Northeast and we hear many cases where they are discriminated against or stigmatised. But these women with their hard work and dedication are trying to break the glass ceiling and pave a way for a better future for the women of the Northeast.

Now, there are two more points that I will make, that it is not just one-way traffic. It is not just NE girls going. It is also a transit point. A lot of girls from Myanmar, Chin Hills and other places – they come to places like Mizoram and Manipur. They find themselves being sucked into the local level, the regional level sort of flesh trade, which operates now in an ever more prominent way. This can be seen in Guwahati. I have been in Guwahati since the 1980s. I can't remember seeing women at twelve a clock at night waiting for customers on the GS Road. Now, I can see that happen. I am talking of the 1980s when Assam was in flames. It was the peak of the Assam agitation. There were a lot of problems. I have operated since those days in Assam. I know the place and this whole area – the GS Road area – now at night there are joints where people go and pick up girls. All these girls are not local. The local girls have gone to Punjab or Haryana. This market gap here is filled up by girls coming from Myanmar, Chin Hills or some other states of Northeast India. In most of the areas of Northeast India with a few exceptions, there are conflicts and as a result, there are many IDP camps. Because of these camps, there are large numbers of vulnerable women who are easy targets of the poachers. Therefore, there is a situation where there it is not just girls from Assam or local girls going out. There are also girls from elsewhere in the region coming in. There are girls from Bangladesh, Nepal or Myanmar. So that's why I said we have a volatile neighbourhood. This volatile neighbourhood produces conflicts. It has been producing conflicts almost on a regular basis. Therefore, alongside these conflicts that have survived, thrived and scarred this whole region we also have this trade which has slowly sucked in women from not just the region itself but from countries around it and that includes even countries which are economically not so poor as Bhutan. If we look at Bhutan's development indices – they are not bad off. Still, Bhutan girls can be found in this trade.

Here let me round up in the next ten minutes what I have tried to say. Northeast India has this huge problem of women trafficking. This is multiplying. This is growing and despite the fact that we have an old Report, and we have some piecemeal data coming from other police forces like Tripura, Manipur where the data is very incomplete. Even efforts to put together Thana level data have not been made. Police forces give a lot many excuses and will agree that we have a problem of insurgency rather multiple insurgencies, and this is a serious problem. They will also agree that they have taken note of it and have made some effort at least to check out the dimension of the problem. I have a very definite point here to make is that it is not just the State

Governments who are facing this problem but the whole country. There is a need to take gender commitments seriously. If the entire machinery can't take care of its women, then what are we doing as a nation. I will make a strong argument here that all the police forces should have strong Gender Cells. The police forces need to adopt more humane behaviour towards these women. All the regional police forces need to have proper Gender Cells to actually get a grip on the size of the problem. If we do not know the size of the problem, the measures that we may take be woefully inadequate. Secondly, we need to have a definite way to prevent things. Prevention is always better than cure. So, the push and pull factors are important. Therefore, these State Governments, especially, now in Covid times with the economy going downhill when the problem is going to multiply many manyfold need to have Gender Cells in Police Forces. There is a need to have definitive measures in mind to stop this problem. Last but not the least, there is a need to work on the linkages that exist between women trafficking and the other forms of trafficking that I have talked about. That's where the Security Forces or the security planners actually need to understand that there is more at stake than what meets the eye. This is number one. Secondly, I will refer very quickly to the work of one of my students. She is a Vietnamese girl. She has finished her PhD. She had huge data. She has done wonderful work which I hope to get published in India very soon called, "Regional Conflicts in SE Asia and the Thai Sex Trade". It's a wonderful work that links the flow of women into the sex trade of SE Asia, especially Thailand and how it links up with the different conflicts not only in the region or the region around but also in the larger Asian region – the Central Asian States and all that. That explains why at a certain point of time Bangkok would have girls coming from Ukraine or from Belarus or from Uzbekistan or from some of these places and from elsewhere in the world as well. She has done a wonderful piece of work. The point she has made and which I am also making here is the direct co-relation between conflicts and trafficking and therefore if one were to really look at this whole issue with an idea of putting an end to it then there is a need to actually address the root cause, which is to address the conflicts. We can't have conflicts going on. We can't have IDP camps. We can't have people running away from home totally vulnerable and then wish there will be no women trafficking. There will be women trafficking so long as women are vulnerable, so long as their families are vulnerable, so long they are reduced to the kind of situation that we find in most conflict-driven areas. That's true about Northeast India. What I am trying to drive at here is what we find in Northeast India is not something very unique to the region. It is part of the broader regional realities. So, what has happened in Myanmar or what has happened in Thailand is also happening or replicating in various forms in Northeast India. The last point that I would like to make here is that I am closely connected with the Durbar Mahila Sammanaya Samity in their fight for the legalisation of the sex trade. This is something very crucial. There are people who raise an awful lot of issues wherever we talk of the legalisation of the sex trade. The fact is that this trade is there. It is going to remain. It is not going to go away. What kind of protection do we provide to the girls, to the women who are into it? If we don't legalise it then they are vulnerable to the gangsters, to the police, they are vulnerable to extortion, and vulnerable to all kinds of problems, threats and all that. So, there is a need to

provide protection in the trade as well as protection after that the trade years. Protection after the trade years means when these trafficked women are abandoned as they are no longer young enough to run the business and they are forced to return back to their home states then the family is not willing to take them back. In this regard, the governments need to establish old age homes or rehabilitation centres so that these sex trafficked victims can live in their old age peacefully. Last, I would like to say that meaningful steps should be taken by the Government as well as by NGOs working in the field to arrange the repatriation of victims, their re-acceptance by their families, and their gradual re-entry into the life of their communities.

Webinar 2

Distinguished Lecture on Women in Ethno-nationalist Conflicts in Northeast India

Uddipana Goswami

Lecturer, Critical Writing, University of Pennsylvania, USA

(The Lecture was delivered on 17th September 2020)

Thank you, Prof. Nongbri. Thank you, Prof. Lipi. It's a pleasure to be here and I am really grateful for this invitation to speak today on a topic that is very close to my heart as well as something that I have been working on for a while now. Prof. Nongbri was also my PhD supervisor at JNU. I would not be here if it was not for her. Thank you for agreeing to Chair the session. It really means a lot to me. Having said that, I will not waste too much time because this is going to be a long talk. I will just get into it. As Prof. Lipi said, I am going to talk about women in ethno-nationalist conflicts in Northeast (NE) India which is a topic that I have been working on for a while now. Before we understand the situation of women in the conflicts, I feel that we need to understand the *gendered nature* of the conflicts themselves. I don't know how many of you were there in last month's talk by Dr. Subir Bhaumik in the same forum. He had spoken about women's trafficking in NE India and that is just one of the many ways in which conflict has affected women in the region disproportionately. It has affected everybody. But why is it that women are the most vulnerable? When we study conflicts anywhere in the world, we see that women are the most affected. Why is that? I wanted to take a look into that. I will be speaking about both the gendered nature of the conflicts, and I will be looking at how women are affected.

During the peak conflict years and even now, intermittently, (although we are past that very violent gory stage) we hear about sexual atrocities against women by the armed forces. Even where the armed forces are not involved in the NE, I find that the data is really alarming. Violence against women has been increasing steadily and the statistics on domestic abuse for instance is alarming. Where is all this coming from? Why is it that we don't see women in the

public forums of reconstruction and reconciliation? We are in the post-insurgency situation in most of the NE states now, I should say, but we don't hear women's voices in these public forums. Why is that? Before I go into these questions, what I want to do is to take a step back and look at the cultures, the structures and the systems that make such violence against women possible and also the structures that make women invisible on the public forums. That forces me to think about power relations, about disempowerment and about those who are removed from power and therefore are marginalised. My research into the women in NE India is really a look into the conditions of marginality and the many different kinds of violence — political, interpersonal, personal and political — that take place in these various margins. In my work, I find co-relations between marginalised constituencies. So, I look at women as one of the various marginalised entities. I look at both gendered marginalities and geopolitical marginalities. So, when I am talking about geopolitical marginalities I am thinking about the NE as the periphery of the Indian mainland. I question how these marginal entities negotiate their relationships with centres of power. Over and above the women of the NE, the peripheral region also has become a marginalised entity. That is, like I said, one of the entities that I explore and I also look at its conceptual relationship with the mainland. That raises a lot of questions that can be studied through a feminist perspective. As a feminist peace researcher, my enquiry involves engendering conflicts in the NE. That means not only putting women in the centre of the enquiry but also developing a gender-sensitive theory and practice. There is a bulk of literature on the NE conflicts, but most of it is endocentric. Most of it is gender blind. Thankfully, I should say, we have developed rich literature on women in the conflict zones. There are a lot of studies that have been done and that are now coming up. I hear about a lot of younger scholars who are working on gender issues in the NE. When I first started looking into gender issues in the NE, I remember, I started with studying Paula's work, for instance. Paula Banerjee's work where she talks about women being caught between the two-armed patriarchies in the NE had quite an influence on me. There are scholars who have been talking about women's agency in the conflict environment and there are a few scholars who have also talked about women who participated in violent activities in the insurgency movements. Rakhi Bonita's work comes to my mind when I am talking about that. Despite this rich literature on women in the conflict zone what I find missing is the feminist interpretation of the conflict situation itself. I believe in order to truly understand the situation that women find themselves in, in the conflict zone; we need to start from there. This is a gap that I hoped to fill when I started my work on gender. I started it when I came here to the US as a Fulbright scholar to the University of Pennsylvania. That is my post-doctoral work. I am following up on that with my current book. I am working on a monograph on ethno-nationalist conflicts and gender. I will be talking a lot about my current research and weaving my narrative through that.

My research starts with using a gendered lens to study the mainland and periphery relationship. I look at, for instance, the patriarchal process of nation-building in India when the Indian nation was being constructed in colonial and early post-colonial times. It was being

constructed as a feminine image — the feminine imagine of the nation that was being created and in order to protect this female body, there was valorisation of a kind of militant masculinity — militant masculine nationalism. It is very essential to look at the gendered beginnings of things. Any perceived threat to this national feminine body, therefore, met with violence. For instance, when some of the communities in the NE resisted being included in the whole idea of the Indian nation starting with the Nagas (as we all know), this was also perceived as a threat. What was the reaction? The reaction was a violent pushback. I will not go into the history of state sponsored violence in the periphery. We have read, we are all aware of how, for instance, civilians were aeri ally bombed in Mizoram, or we know about the secret killings in Assam. What was happening in the periphery in the meanwhile? As I said, some communities in the NE, meanwhile, were resisting being included in the Indian national imagination like the Nagas. They were being threatened to be crushed like dogs. But there were also those like the early Asomiya leadership, for instance, who were very keen to be included in this new nation — included in the national imagination. To that end, they were willing to self-construct the region as the feminised ‘other’. Although most of the early leadership of Asomiya nationalism were male they still went with the self-description/ self-construction of Asomiya as the youngest daughter of Mother India. The very fact that a predominantly masculine leadership should assume such a feminised identity, to me, it indicates, that the patriarchal structures in the region were perhaps more accommodating than those of the mainland. I want to pause here and talk about a misconception that’s there among many scholars and it is also a very popular misconception that we hear about in everyday conversation that women of the NE were entirely free from patriarchal controls in the early days. I have to clarify that I do not subscribe to that view. Prof. Nongbri has worked a lot on gender in the NE and she tells that patriarchal structures are there. They are stringent and they are controlling. But I do believe that when we think about it on a relational scale that gender relations in the periphery were somewhere less dichotomous than they were on the mainland. So, there were, for instance, alternate models of masculinity and femininity that existed and this was mainly among indigenous communities of the region. That is perhaps one of the causes why if we look at the mainland and the periphery, relatively the patriarchal structures were less rigid. This is what I aim to do in my future project after my work on ethno-nationalist conflicts.

Without going very deep into that right now, suffice it to say here that there was a discernible shift in the gender dynamics after the NE started being nationalised and integrated into India. My question was, when I started working on this issue, what happens when disparate, different nationalities and sub-nationalities with varying levels and structures of patriarchal control collide? What happens when they come together, when they associate and often get into conflict with each other? Hegemonic masculinity – that’s what starts taking root. I have traced the entire diachronic development of this phenomenon of how hegemonic masculinity started taking root in the NE and how that led to a mutation of gender relations in the periphery and how that in turn translated into changing ethno-nationalist dynamics. It might seem a little disjointed, but I am moving from gender relations to ethno-nationalist dynamics. Feminist thought says that

dichotomous relationships are power relationships. They are characterised by hierarchies of subordination or superordination, structural inequalities, unequal access to power and resources and when there are such unequal structures there is always the potential for violence. When these inequalities start coming to the surface violent responses come to the fore and that is how the ethnic hierarchies, for instance, play into the whole gender discourse. When there is so much latent violence, it is only a matter of time before direct violence breaks out and once direct violence breaks out the kind of responses that it elicits, for instance, if violence begets violence, if the state response to violent resistance is also violence, then there is a kind of legitimisation of this whole culture of violence. In this way, violence started manifesting itself in the NE through intractable conflicts, through militarisation and through militarism. I have written extensively about how militarisation, brutalisation of the armed forces and even laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) have a palpable relationship with the legitimisation of hyper masculinised violence and finally criminalisation of the society that we see around us in the NE today. In this entire environment of violence who is the most affected? The women, of course. Women studies have established already that there is this distinct relationship between intractable conflicts and the kinds of violence that are being formed: sexual and political violence, internet and public violence – all of these are prevalent in societies where there have been intractable conflicts. In my work, I merely expand upon this and explore the connections between militarisation, hyper masculinisation, and gendered violence during ethno-nationalist conflicts. I also believe that we have seen such violence escalate because we are not reframing our approach to peace in the NE.

We are still looking at Peace as an absence of Violence. What I mean when I say that, is that when we feel like we are in a peaceful situation now that the different insurgent groups have signed treaties and they have come back to the “mainstream”, they are in negotiations with the Government and there is no or lesser violence on the streets, no regular bomb blasts, we can walk out on the streets and party at night — we feel there is peace. However, this is a kind of negative peace. This is the kind of peace that is established by ceasefires and treaties and political reconciliation. It is not organic peace. It is not positive peace. Organic peace is a condition of life where we do not have to fear any kind of violence. But when I am in the NE if I am walking out, I am still wary about walking out after a certain point of time at night. Forget walking on the streets. I am scared to walk on the streets. Like I said, society has become so criminalised that there is violence everywhere. Violence has become normalised for us. Why is that? I believe very strongly it is because we have not reframed our attitude or approach towards peace and peacemaking. We have become habituated by conflict systems and structures. They are all about the power of money and the gun. They are about polarising structures. They are about binary and violent structures. How do we get beyond that? How do we look at alternate approaches to peace? Like, as I said, how do we achieve organic peace? The peace that is a way of life. That is a condition of life and not merely an absence of violence. What I did when I came up with these questions is to follow the women of the NE into their marginalised spaces. They

are marginalised entities in the NE. They are marginalised in the political sphere. They are marginalised in the public sphere. They were invisible. Thus, I thought I should follow them into their marginalised spaces. They are targets of violence. They are marginalised from the mainstream processes of post-conflict reconstruction. We have all these National Conventions – Jatiya Mahasabhas in Assam for instance. I do not see too many women there. I do not see any of them there. What about women's agency? Have they lost their agency entirely? This was a question that kept coming back to me. I really began my research from a place of anger. I saw that women were invisible in the public sphere. Why is that?

Thus, I spoke on multiple platforms about how these same women who have played very crucial roles in ethno-nationalist movements are now invisible. I had met so many of these inspirational women. I knew they were playing very important roles in the insurgency movements, for instance. They were themselves rebels. There were other women who were very strong members of civil society organisations, and they were making a lot of differences in the resistance movements that were there in the NE. I am especially talking about Assam because that is where I have done the bulk of my fieldwork. But then when I was looking at the public platforms recently, I did not hear one single women's voice. Not one that was heard, not one that was heeded. That is when I started my research. What I found when I went into these marginalised spaces, when I followed these women and started to find where they were, I actually saw that they were really transforming the post-conflict reality within their marginalised existences. The margins then became the centre of my enquiry in that sense. From that point on I started looking at ethno-nationalist conflicts through the lenses of conflict transformation. I do believe that there is a huge gap currently in the literature on the conflict in the NE. I have not myself come across any literature on conflict transformation in the NE. I have written a chapter myself and I am working on it now. I am yet to look at researchers looking at the conflicts in the region as not such a bad thing after all. This is not to negate the violence that has happened. This is not to negate the trauma, the extreme disruption. It is not to negate any of that but to also be able to move on from there and to be able to look at conflict as also a catalyst for social changes, structural changes and to be able to look at them as agents of change and something that can transform the existing reality and help reconcile relationships and create a new reality.

I have been working on ethnic reconciliation for a while now. When I see the kind of music, for instance, that's been produced in the NE, the kind of fusion that's happening – that speaks to me about ethnic reconciliation – an Asomiya singer singing a Boro song, for instance, that has not happened earlier. It is happening now. It has become a staple for us now. Where did that come from? It all comes from the conflict years. These are the positive effects, the transformational effects of the conflicts that we have seen, that we have lived through all these decades. I think we need to start looking at conflicts differently and I actually found that women of Assam were doing this quietly in their marginalised spaces. They were doing this away from all the public platforms of reconciliation and reconstruction. They were really creating a new

reality and making a positive peace. This kind of peace is powerful. It is powerful but it is not confrontational. It is not the traditional idea of peace as we have been pursuing in the NE for a long time. These ways of making peace actually redefine gendered relationships in the region. I met women who are helping each other out. They are creating co-operatives for instance — weaving co-operatives. They are borrowing motifs from each other across ethnic communities and that is something that was perhaps unheard of before the conflict years, and they are showcasing their own ethnic richness. They are helping other women join in. They are becoming economically independent. They are using whatever resources they have. I met Asha workers who are going out of their houses. They are out on their bicycles all day. Their husbands are at home and complaining that they do not even feed them anymore. But these women are bringing in the money that the family needs. They are being professionally fulfilled. They are making a difference in the community. They are making a difference in their homes. It was really inspirational to meet all these women. Ethnic reconciliation in the true sense of the term was actually happening right there. This is happening in small towns, villages away from the urban centres. I feel that this is what sisterhood and solidarity are all about and as a feminist peace researcher I can tell that I found it very satisfying. When I teach my students the course “how to live a feminist life” I always emphasize on the idea of ‘power with’ instead of ‘power over’ and tell them that ‘power with’ is always more powerful than the desire for ‘power over’. It is only the marginalised entities that can really appreciate this kind of power — power which comes from alignment, power which comes from solidarity or power of togetherness. I saw the women of Assam were doing just that. While I thought that they had withdrawn from the public platforms, that they had resigned themselves to their marginalised existence, I realised that what they are practising is something much more powerful. We all know how non-confrontation has been used as a very effective strategy of resistance in the past. We live in the land of Gandhi. The women of Assam are using it towards building peaceful existences for themselves. That is the note on which I end the monograph that I am working on.

Webinar 3

Distinguished Lecture on Atmanirbhar Bharat - National Education Policy 2020-Women's Perspective

Meena Chandawarkar

Former Vice Chancellor, Karnataka State Women's University, Vijayapura

(The Lecture was delivered on 12th October 2020)

Thank you, Prof. Ghosh, for giving me this opportunity. I am grateful to the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, University of Calcutta, to you and of course to Mukul Kanitkar ji for arranging this opportunity. Prof. Ghosh, Director of Women's Studies Research Centre, University of Calcutta and all the distinguished faculty members, invitees, research scholars and participants --it is indeed a matter of great pleasure for me to participate in this webinar. The corona pandemic it brought with it many difficulties and many problems but along with the problems we have also got a very wonderful opportunity of being connected to anyone across the globe because of frequent use of this platform either the Google Meet or Zoom or WebEx or whatever it is. Times are difficult because we never knew about this lockdown. We never experienced these problems. But in spite of that we have all risen to the expected levels and our faculty members across all the educational institutions in our country and across the globe have got themselves accustomed to preparing e- content and to deliver online classes to their students and make the best of whatever resources available. As the Corona pandemic battle goes on outside, one-third of the world's population is confined within the four walls of their homes working from home and working for home and that is the woman. I appreciate this initiative taken by the Women Studies Research Centre to conduct this webinar. Being the Chairperson of the UGC Standing Committee for Woman Studies, it is a matter of great pride and privilege for me to participate in this webinar on an important topic *of Atmanirbhar Bharat and National Education Policy 2020 from the women's perspective*. As I said the Women's Studies Research Centre is organizing it because women have been seriously affected because of the pandemic. Let us at least look to the positive aspects of how we can do the best of the opportunities available. It is during the period of lockdown when times are very difficult that these two major announcements were made *of Atmanirbhar Bharat and the National Education Policy* and hence, the importance of this topic which I have chosen today.

India, as we know, is the largest democracy in the world. A country which has survived many many conquests by foreigners, which has faced so many natural disasters in the form of floods or draughts or earthquakes or tsunamis and what not—an epidemic and now the pandemic. A country with more than 18 percent of world population, a country with hundreds of languages and a country with a very very rich demographic dividend with more than sixty five percent of the population being less than the age of thirty-five. This demographic dividend is our greatest asset and both these policies the Atmanirbhar Bharat and the National education Policy 2020 will have a great influence and will be a great support to our youth of our nation. Now just as we all are reeling under the Covid 19 pandemic, these two important announcements of the Atmanirbhar Bharat and the NEP 20 have been made and I would like to share from the women's perspective whatever I think or my views about these two announcements.

The first announcement of *Atmanirbhar Bharat* was made by our Prime Minister Hon'ble Narendra Modi ji on 12th May 20 when he announced India's Covid 19 pandemic related economic package. He said, I quote, "*Atmanirbhar Bharat is not about being self-contained or being closed to the world, it is about being self-sustaining and self-generating. We will pursue policies that promote efficiency, equity and resilience*". So Atmanirbhar Bharat does not aim to be protectionist in nature cutting off from the rest of the world as some may have thought. Foreign direct investment is most welcome, technology is welcome, intellectual inputs from foreign scholar's welcome, foreign researchers also- to make self –reliant India the most important part of the global economy. India strongly believes in the Sanskrit phrase 'basudaiva kutumbakam'. This phrase is taken from Maha Upanishads which has been engraved at the entrance of the Parliament of India. It means the world is one family. It is with this belief that *Atmanirbhar Bharat* aims at making self-reliant India not only for her but also for the entire globe – for all the countries of the world because we all are one-it is one family. Numerous Government decisions have taken place after this policy has been announced specially regarding micro, small and medium scale industries boosting scope for private participation in numerous sectors like defence, solar and the like. I would like to share my power point presentation so that I you can see the points which I would like to share with you and make it more understandable.

This announcement of a 20-lakh core package –a huge package-was made with the noble intention of making this 21st century– 'India century' and chalking out a way to go ahead and to use our indigenous resources, make them available not only for ourselves but for the entire globe. It is a distinguished shift from being self-centred to a very human centric approach. Self-centred speaks about your own self. But a human centric approach speaks about the programme for the entire humanity. It is a question of Human Centric Globalisation versus the Economy Centralised Globalisation. As I said vasudaiva kutumbakam .

Some of the words which have been commonly used for the *Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan* are 'Vocal for local' meaning local products must be appreciated and if there is a timely pat on the back, definitely the persons or the individuals can be more resourceful, and their ability can be tapped to the maximum potential. So local products must be appreciated and made competitive vis a vis the global ranks because we can't compromise on quality. Unless and until we know what is the quality of international brands we cannot improve ourselves if there is a necessity. Appreciation and enhancing competitiveness is a must.

Another term 'local for global'--Local products should have a global appeal and reach because unless and until it stands to compete with the global products there will be no demand for that as much as we

expect. They have to have global appeal and reach and make for the world and not for ourselves. The modification is Make in India for the world-- making the best use of our resources for the entire globe. That is what is very very crucial.

When we speak of these two policies i.e., *in Atmanirbhar Bharat there are five pillars as against three pillars of the NEP.2020*

In Atmanirbhar Bharat the five pillars are

- **The *Economy*** which focuses on quantum jumps and not just on incremental changes.
- **Secondly, the next pillar is *Infrastructure***-one that represents modern India. All the indigenous resources must be used and infra structure must be developed in such a manner that we can welcome, and we can facilitate our own people as well as people from outside to use our resources and be self- sufficient.
- **The third one is *System*** which is entirely technology driven. These are the days of 21st century and technology we have seen now meetings are on, functioning is on, classes are going on just because of technology. Technology driven system is the third pillar.
- **Fourth one is a vibrant *Demography*** of the largest democracy in the globe.
- **The last one being *Demand*** for full utilisation of power of demand and supply. There is a lot of demand but sometimes because of ignorance, due to other problems like technology, finance or infra structure, manufacturing cannot be done as per the demand. Hence Atmanirbhar Bharat focuses on full utilisation of the power of demand and supply.

Similarly, the National Education Policy rests on the three pillars which are:

- Jnan which is Pursuit of knowledge
- Pragya i.e., Wisdom and
- Satya i.e., Truth.

These have always been our principals. These have always been our values and the NEP once again reaffirms our faith and our interest in three most important aspects on which NEP rests.

We have seen that within a very short span many steps have been taken for making India self- reliant. It is hardly three or four months, and a lot of progress has been visible e.g., we needed the Personal Protection Equipment very badly. There was a lot of demand at a time when India was not manufacturing, or manufacture was negligent before 1st March. But just within two months i.e.by the end of April we started manufacturing 4.5 lakh PPEs per day. That is not a small achievement and now 600 companies are lab certified for manufacturing such kits. So many other welcome initiatives we have been witnessing like the largest fund of 21thousand crores have been set up by IIT Alumni Council to support self -reliance. Reliance India and TecMahindra have already developed capability to run an entire 5G network using purely home-grown technologies. The Defence Ministry has also imposed import embargo on 101 items

in a staged phase over five years. The Minister for Chemicals and Fertiliser has also announced that India will be self-reliant in fertiliser production by the year 2023. Shiv Nadar University and Dassault Systems have established a unique Centre of excellence for design and innovation. HDFC Bank and Apollo hospitals have also joined hands for quality healthcare. The Research for Resurgence Foundation (RFRF) in association with the Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal organised an indigenous Video Conferencing App Competition in April. There were about sixty-five entries. College of Engineering, Pune, bagged the first prize followed by Jaipur, Rajasthan and the third consolation prize went to an individual. The RFRF is also working with Start Ups for Indian made wires and chips. It has entered into the All India Council for Technical Education with whom they have signed a MOU for self-reliant Bharat. We all know that 20% of the engineering graduates who pass out are women. In South India the number is higher as compared to North India. This MoU is definitely going to help our daughters, our girls who are going to become engineers and who will take advantage of the various facilities offered by the Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan. I would just like to mention here that the Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal aims at national resurgence in the field of education based on an integral Bharatiya vision--a vision which acknowledges, which values, which recognises all our traditional cultures and our heritage. It aims at the overall development of our nation through purely Bharat centric efforts. This is why the Indigenous Video Conferencing App was organized by RFRF. It has already started functioning.

Now just to go through some of the professions which are dominated by women and who will benefit from the Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan. Women have dominated in retail, in hospitality, in personal care, in daycare (which is very common and a great help for working mothers) and also in the food sector.

Self-reliance necessitates that we should have some qualities. Self-reliant India needs well established and economically self-reliant women entrepreneurs. Skill is a must and skilled women in various areas of the economy have to be available for which a lot of training is necessary. So, training in local and for global outreach is the thrust of this abhiyan. Knowledge of financial support to women in MSMEs is also very important because there are some areas like incubation units or holding a hand or just supporting them in the initial stage so that the take-off can be smooth. So, knowledge and financial support to women is important. Partnering with social enterprises to employ the skilled women is important. Where will the women go if they are not having opportunities of employment? So, partnering with social enterprises to employ them is also necessary.

So, this is a unique opportunity may for Indian Start Ups to locally produce innovative and affordable products. It may be the different sectors like the food sector or the agriculture --. agro technological sector, technology, home nursing which is a very important facility for the care of elders or geriatric care. These are the opportunities which are available for Indian Start Ups.

Arts and handicrafts sector is the 2nd largest in employment generation and of these 55% employed are women. According to the 2011 census there are over 68 lakhs artisans in the country. This is an area where this abhiyan will be of great help to us.

There are numerous Government schemes like the Mudra Yojana Scheme. There are private sector foundations like Ernst & Young foundation and many more. All the Banks have schemes for women—both the private and nationalised banks and of course there are philanthropic institutions who have come ahead and shown their interest to help the women under this abhiyan.

The Ministry for micro, small and medium enterprises is the main engine of growth. They are the torch bearers of women empowerment on a global platform. Their Udyam Sakhi which is a network for women is for nurturing social entrepreneurship, creating business models of low-cost products and services to reduce social inequalities. Reducing social inequalities is a very important aspect of their help. Eight million Indian women have benefitted from this scheme and have used entrepreneurship and have used learning tools, incubation facility, and training programmes for fund raising, one to one counselling and mentoring, providing mentors, investment facilities and market surveys. So GOI has been persistently involved in revolutionising the role of women outside the four walls of their home.

There was a discussion of many women achievers like athletes, other sports persons, even film stars, people from education, people from agricultural background, people from NGOs and all of them reaffirmed their trust and support to help this Atmanirbhar Bharat abhiyan.

This is the picture of para-athlete Deepa Malik. She endorses the concept of Vocal for Local to promote handloom, handmade outfits which will promote Indian craft and also empower women and keep them connected.

Another innocent illiterate woman but highly empowered. She believes ‘hope is the rope for happiness in life’. These Adivasi women in Chhattisgarh have manufactured “Madhukam” which is a herbal hand sanitizer from the base of the traditional mahua brew. This is normally used for alcohol preparation, but these women have come together, and they have used it in a productive manner. We can see the fruits of this abhiyan. They have already started manifesting itself and they are known to the entire nation and to the globe that where there is a will there is a way. If Government is there to support them definitely you should come up to the expectations. You should know to work hard and have a lot of self- confidence and ensure that the abhiyan is successful.

These are some of the inspiring examples of Women Padma Awardees of 2019

Godavari Dutta— she is an awardee for Madhubani painting which is very traditional and very very beautiful and a very delicate art.

Rohini Godbole of IISC Bangalore for physics

Rajkumari Devi for agriculture-fondly known as Kisan Chachi from Muzaffarpur

Saalumarada Thimmakka from Karnataka. She is known for planting tress across a three to four kms stretch and nurturing them throughout. It is nothing but social work for the cause of saving environment and protecting the plants.

Jamuna Tudu- again for social work. She has been the Padma Awardee for taking up timber mafia. She is from Jharkhand and is also known as Lady Tarzan.

A very very important and a very inspiring example is that of Narthaki Nataraj. She is the first person from the transgender community who received the country’s top civilian honour.

These are a few examples of how Atmanirbhar Bharat in a short time span has taken off and it will take off in future because we are the ones who have to help it to take –off. Along with this another important policy- the National Education Policy was announced by the GOIs

This was announced by the Government of India. They accepted the Dr Kasturirangan Report which aims at developing individuals and developing our students to become good individuals of this country. It is said to be a landmark in the history of our nation. The points of view which were expressed by Mahatma Gandhiji in 1937—eighty-three years ago in his ‘nai talim’---a harmony between the head, hand and the heart. All these qualities have been finely blended in this education policy which mainly aims to make good individuals, holistic development of students with Indian ethos and value structure. Value based focus is the most important point that this policy focuses on. The goal is to achieve 100% G.E.R. (gross enrolment ratio) in preschool to secondary school level by 2030. We all know that 41% of population is less than 18 years and nearly half of this population is girls.

Today because of the pandemic schools and colleges have closed. There are classes online but how effective are these online classes is something which we have to really think because connectivity in rural areas is very poor and when there is no connectivity then interest also goes because they cannot be connected with the teacher. It is estimated that around 20% of the girls may not come back to school after the lockdown. This is a matter of serious concern for us. But we all should remember that every cloud has a silver lining. Just recently our Union Education Minister Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal ji said that around ten countries have contacted him showcasing their willingness to implement India’s NEP in their countries. It only speaks of the acceptability of the thoroughly studied policies and principles, deep rooted research undertaken to draft the NEP based on huge consultations. Perhaps no other country must have done this. Huge consultations from all the people across the country, all stakeholders across the country were made and the final draft was done by the Committee. The main objective as I said is to develop good human beings not machines who hare spiritually strong, deeply rooted in Indian ethos, physically committed to work and emotionally patriotic. It is a nation centric policy with the focus on human values and technologies aimed at making innovation, knowledge research and science to internationally accepted levels and make our education system by 2040 that is second to none. This is a very good goal/vision which the policy has in mind, and it is our duty, I think, we have to really be totally involved and committed... Implementation is in the peoples’ hand. The Government is there to support us. I am sure all of us will come together and help them in this

Another important aspect is, as I said, **Holistic Development** of the individual.

A child can fully grow in all respects i.e. spiritual, emotional, relational, missional, mental and physical growth of both the body and the mind. Learning to learn is a very important aspect but a very difficult one. So, learning ’how to learn ‘is one aspect and cognitive development and character building are important. Cognitive development process includes thinking, knowing, remembering, judging and problem solving. All round development leads to valuable contribution through innovation. But valuable contribution will only come when the skills are imparted, and the skills are utilised in the proper direction and values are imbibed by our students. The NEP aims at a curriculum in which 50% will focus on the subjects and 50%on general issues which help them to learn soft skills, general knowledge about the environment, constitution, agriculture, art and culture, about our ancient heritage and so on.

Education in Mother Tongue

These are the aspects which I am talking about from the mothers 'perspective.

The policy says education will be in the mother tongue up to Grade 5, preferably up to grade 8 though there is no compulsion that the medium of instruction should be taught in a particular language only. It is left to the parents of the child to decide which language the child will use. We all know that the child in the younger age from about two years is always with the mother, it watches the mother, it learns the language, learns alphabets, learns to talk, learns to play, learns to walk, to copy what everyone at home does specially the mother. The mother's influence is very very important, and the child should be taught in the mother tongue. In the 8th schedule of the Constitution there are twenty-two languages which have been mentioned and 97% of India's population have one of these twenty-two languages as their mother tongue. But you will be surprised to know that there are 19,500 languages which are used as mother tongue by different people across our country. This mother tongue which the policy refers to is about those twenty-two languages. The most important advantage of teaching in the mother tongue is that the child is able to express his thoughts; it gives precision of thought and clarity of ideas along with frank expression. He has always thought in his mother tongue, he has always spoken in his mother tongue. He lives in mother tongue; he survives the mother tongue, and he loves his mother tongue. Hence the child is able to express better in the mother tongue. Besides it introduces the child to the rich heritage of people's ideas, emotions and aspirations.

The last point is the most important point. Transgender individuals and those with disabilities have been categorised in Socio Economically Disadvantaged Groups. (SEDG). These and some other categories have never been included; they have historically never been represented in any education at all. But now their participation finds a place.

The important aspect of the learning process which the NEP 2020 focuses on is experiential learning which even Mahatma Gandhiji had emphasized. A child will learn only when it does something. Seeing is believing, we say, and doing is learning. When he sees he believes and when he does, he learns it and never forgets it and hence the NEP 20 focuses on vocational exposure at early ages starting from middle school itself so that when the child finishes the XIth standard, the child can decide with reasonable certainty about which programme the child would like to take up later on. This hand- on learning makes the learning process very very joyful.

The aspects which are suitable for women are that there is a lot of flexibility at the graduation level. We can choose any subject at graduation level. It could be Degree in Commerce and with a Certificate Course in Music. It could be a degree in engineering with a Certificate Course in any other programme. It may not be related to Engineering, but the child may be having interest, say, in photography. He/she can choose such subjects. A student of Political science can take a course in Tailoring or a course in Organic Farming if he belongs to an agrarian family or not if he has interest. There is a lot of flexibility, and the policy has also provided internships with industries and artists and craft persons.

The multiple entry and exit is the most suitable facility for women because there are so many problems which we face. It may be early marriage, or it may be parenthood, or it may be looking after elders at home or it may be due to some health problem. But whenever we want, we can enter and if we exit, we

don't lose that year because of the facility of the Academic Bank of Credit. The credit will be earned by the woman or by the student and whenever the person wants to join again then those credits will be taken into consideration. These are digitally stored.

This multidisciplinary education is a must for Atmanirbhar Bharat. You see the relation between Atmanirbhar Bharat and the NEP20. It is an ideal combination of Arts, of soft skills like leadership qualities, communicative skills, working in a team or empathy or scientific subjects –you take physics, chemistry, mathematics, and biology –whatever it is. Vocational subjects if you are not interested in arts science or the routine subjects, you can take up Vocational subjects say a tailoring programme, or something related to farming or something related to a hobby say dance or music. These are the pictures of different alternatives, of different options which are available for women.

Other important aspect is LokVidya in which the artisans are involved. This is the programme by which important vocational knowledge can be developed in India. It will be made accessible to everyone.

Artisans are the backbone of India's non-farm rural economy. and 55% are women who are involved. You see the Kantha art or embroidery which is very famous of Bengal or the Bidri work of Karnataka or the Blue pottery, of Jaipur and sculpture and architecture of Karnataka. Any course could be taken up under the Lok Vidya programme and important vocational knowledge can be developed.

We have always had an open education system. The NEP focuses on giving highest quality e in the class. But, once again, I repeat the teacher cannot be substituted by the machine. However, online education can provide more access to the women. It may not be possible for everyone to go to college and to attend classes and online education from the home will be the best alternative for her.

There are many alternatives which will be necessary for the way ahead. We have to all come together and we have to lend a supporting hand because the policies are for our improvement. Hence creating a strong human resource base lot of training, lot of specific plans for ensuring equity, improving internet connectivity in rural areas-- these are all aspects which are very very important combined with right attitude, and self-confidence and faith in the future.

Before I conclude I will like to mention that WSRC is one of the 159 WSCs which are being funded by the UGC. Most of them are doing a lot of work in research, a lot of work in WS and helping women come out of their never-ending problems which they are facing. The UGC has been a strong support for all of these, and valuable research is done. Aspects like teaching in the mother tongue, flexibility in courses, Academic Bank of Credit will all have a strong helping hand to all our WSCs to make their contribution more effective and to strengthen their hands. The fruits of these two policies will be seen shortly after implementation. The implementation has started. The NEP will take some time for the implementation to begin. The groundwork is already being done. But the seeds for witnessing the Nation of having an ideal position globally is sown in these two crucial policies. If India has to be a Vishyaguru-a guru for the entire globe, then our contribution as women (50% are women) is of great importance. A rainbow appears not because it wishes to appear but because circumstances are favourable to appear.

Let us join hands and use our talent and support to help in the effective implementation of the NEP and help in a complete Atmanirbhar Bharat.

I take this opportunity to thank the organiser i.e., the WSRC, the University of Calcutta and Prof. Ghosh for giving me this opportunity for which I remain very grateful.

Thank you, One and All

Webinar 4

Distinguished Lecture on Women and Health in Colonial Bombay

Mridula Ramanna

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(The lecture was delivered on 27th November 2020)

Indian women came under the official gaze of Bombay's health officials in the 19th century *Vaccination Reports*. Ananta Chandroba Dukhle, Vaccination Superintendent from 1858, described the difficulties he encountered, while promoting smallpox vaccination: the 'procrastination,' with mothers concealing their infants or giving false addresses, and not bringing their children for inspection. He found 'superstition, apathy,' the belief that vaccination offered slight immunity and led to syphilis and leprosy, and the fear of *Shitala Devi's* wrath. It was due to his dedication and perseverance, that he succeeded in the smallpox vaccination campaign in Bombay city.

The colonial view of the appallingly high maternal and infant death rates among Indians, was that it was caused by improper and insufficient food, early marriages resulting in the debility of mothers, maternal ignorance, particularly the habit of covering up the newly born infants, blocking windows and giving opium pills (*bal golis*) to fretful children, a relatively low standard of life, and unhygienic sanitary arrangements. Needless to say, the dai was demonized.

Indian initiatives in founding and financing obstetric facilities, from the mid -nineteenth century was due to the high maternal and infant mortality rates. The first Obstetric Institution opened in 1851, in Bombay city, attached to a general hospital, the Jamsetji Jeejebhoy (J.J.) Hospital. However, the numbers of patients were few, because an average Indian woman would not dream of showing herself to a male doctor, and the very idea of hospitalization for something as 'domestic' as childbirth was unheard.

The Medical Women for India Fund 1882, was set up by Sorabji Shapurji Bengalee, reformer and George Kittredge, an American businessman. The objectives were: 1) To promote Medical Education for women and Grant Medical College (GMC) admitted women in 1883 and graduates,

passed out from 1888. (Sketch of Emmeline DaCunha, 1899) 2) To set up a hospital for women and children to be managed by women. Bombay had the distinction of having the first hospital and dispensary exclusively for women and children. Cama Hospital(CH) was founded in 1886, with the generous donation from business magnate, Pestonji Hormusji Cama.

Contemporary perceptions of women and health late 19th century

The first challenge to Cama Hospital came from Indian Medical Service (IMS) officers, in the neighboring J.J hospital, who tried to ‘annex’ the donation, but the MWIF founders insisted there would be no compromise on the aim to have an exclusive facility for women and children managed by women physicians. The IMS contended that without the control of civil surgeons and male supervision, there would be ‘laxity,’ among the latter but, again, the views of the MWIF prevailed.

Dr Edith Pechey Phipson (1845-1908) was the medical officer, CH, before going into private practice in the city. She had an earlier history of what may be called ‘feminist’ struggle as one of the first women medical students in Great Britain. She was placed third in the list of honours students in Chemistry after her first year at Edinburgh and was entitled to the Hope scholarship. However, Professor Crum Brown announced that he would pass her over and give it to the next male student causing indignant protests in the press; *Spectator* 9/4/1870 *Scotsman* 15/4/1870 and *Times*, 25/4/1870. Pechey had to give up the struggle to graduate in medicine at Edinburgh and finally took her MD exams in German from the University of Berne in January 1877. She had asked Ireland to let her take her exams in midwifery in 1873 but was only permitted to do so in May 1877.

In Bombay, she provided an example of ambivalence in colonial reactions, in contrast to the draconian anti plague measures enforced, during the plague epidemic of 1896-7. Protesting the enforcement of compulsory hospitalization she complained in her letter in February 1897 to the *Bombay Gazette* –that the authorities in Bombay, were ‘perfectly satisfied to drag sick people from their room at a critical moment in the disease(plague)...[and] to hand them over to Dr. Chowksey.’ (Who was in charge of the Infectious Diseases Hospital)

Another interesting perspective was the appeal for equality by women medical students with their male counterparts. An application was made to the Principal of GMC by the first batch of nine women students, in 1884, asking for parity with male students, in their curriculum. They contended that not only were they supposed to make themselves thoroughly efficient in less space of time than male students but also while male students had an opportunity of acquiring thorough knowledge of every subject, they got a mere smattering of several subjects. This would suggest that the teaching of some subjects was glossed over by male teachers owing to ideas of Victorian propriety.

Krishnabai Kelavkar spoke of a cane curtain between male students and her at Ferguson College, Poona, where she pursued her education before joining GMC. She got her LMS in 1902 worked at the Albert Edward hospital for women and children, Kolhapur, for two decades and was awarded the *Kaiser-I-Hind* medal, for her services as a doctor and in the training of nurses. About her, the *Hindi Punch* wrote, ‘She heals the disease quite as well with her drug and her surgical knife as with her sweet smile and her gentle treatment of the patient.’

Miss R.A. Malabari who gave a ‘popular lecture on sanitary subjects’ with the help of diagrams explained the situation and structure of the lungs and their physiological functions. She then showed that overcrowded and badly ventilated dwellings and schools were harmful to health and emphasized the necessity of healthy exercise for girls and boys. She explicated the harmful effects of tight dresses and the deformities that would be caused by the lacing of corsets.

During the plague epidemic of 1896-7, when draconian anti-plague measures like isolation, inspection of plague victims and disinfection of houses were adopted, the purity of the family space and women’s space were perceived to have been violated. The examination of women plague patients’ arm pits by male doctors was regarded a violation of the body. Women physicians, who worked during the epidemic were Maneck Tarkhad Bahadurji, daughter of Dr. Atmaram Pandurang, Annie Walke, who succumbed to plague in 1898, and Cecilia Ferreira D’Monte, who later served as Medical Officer, Cama Hospital.

Career profiles of Women Physicians

Even before the first woman physician graduated from Bombay University, the celebrated Anandibai Joshi completed her MD at Women’s Medical College of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, in 1886. Joshi was appointed resident physician of the women’s ward at a Kolhapur hospital, but never took charge of her position, as she died soon after returning to India.

Gurubai Karmarkar, who also trained at Philadelphia, is an example of an Indian medical missionary. On her return to India, in 1893, she served the American Marathi Mission, for twenty-three years.

Daughter of reformer Dr. Sakharam Arjun, Rakhmabai came into the public eye, when her husband, Dadaji Bhikaji filed a legal suit for the restitution of conjugal rights in 1884. Their separation was settled through a compromise in 1887. Two years later, Rakhmabai went abroad for medical studies, encouraged by Pechey Phipson, and qualified for the MD in Brussels, in 1894, and later trained at the London School of Medicine for Women (LSMW). On her return to India, she worked at CH, for eight months as house surgeon & then at Surat 1895-1917, and as chief doctor to the princely states of Saurashtra at Rajkot, 1918-30. Her popularity was legion, and she worked selflessly during the plague and influenza epidemics, for which she was awarded the *Kaiser-I Hind* medal.

Motibai Kapadia trained in Britain, and, on her return in 1889, was placed in charge of the Victoria Jubilee hospital, Ahmedabad, for thirty years.

Dossibhai J. R. Dadabhoy earned her LMS in 1904 at GMC. She trained initially, at the Parsi Lying-in hospital, Bombay, and then in London, at the Royal Free Hospital and, being the first Indian woman to complete her MD in tropical medicine, at the LSMW. (1912) She was an LRCP, MRCS. She was the first Indian woman fellow of Bombay University. On her return to Bombay, she opened a maternity clinic, was honorary obstetric consultant at Cama Hospital and at King Edward Memorial Hospital (KEM). She was the first to use radium in cancer cases among women in India.

Rani Rajwade née Nagutai Joshi, was the daughter of Sir Moropant Joshi, a nationalist, reformer and legislator. A scholarship student and a gold medallist, at GMC, in 1908, she decided to pursue further studies in England and not marry till she completed her training. She did the LM (Rotunda), LRCP, (London) and MRCS, (Dublin) In England, she cultivated the friendship of leaders of the suffragette movement, like Emmeline Pankhurst, and subscribed to a fund, started to help Indian Passive Resisters in South Africa. On her return to Bombay, in 1912, she practised medicine for fourteen years, she set up her own consulting rooms, nursing home and operating theatre. In 1926, she married a widower, Maj. Gen. Ganpatrao Raghunath Raja Rajwade of Gwalior, and became very active in bodies concerned with women's health.

Jerusha Jhirad, a Bene Israeli won scholarships and prizes at GMC in 1912. She started general practice in Bombay, since residents' posts were not available to women. Her next endeavour was to get an MD in Obstetrics and Gynaecology from the LSMW but found that scholarships were only open to Europeans and Anglo-Indians. Subsequently, she secured a loan scholarship, from the house of Tatas, for her MD. Six months into her stay, there, she was awarded a scholarship, of 200 pounds per annum for five years, by GOB, as a special case. She completed her internship at the Garrett Anderson Hospital, London, and worked as house surgeon for a couple of years. When Jhirad returned to India, after the first world war, she served at Lady Hardinge College and Hospital, Delhi and then as senior surgeon, Bangalore Maternity Hospital. Finding the facilities in the latter limited, she started private practice in Bombay. She worked as honorary surgeon, (1925-28) CH. Till 1928, the top job at CH was held by British women, Jhirad was the first Indian to serve as Medical Officer, CH, 1928-47. Under her guidance, the work of the hospital expanded, and undergraduate and post graduate training facilities for women medical students were provided, there.

Kashibai Nowrange who did her LMS, in 1907, was one of the first few women to set up independent practice. Associated with medical forums and reform organisations, she has been regarded as exemplifying the female intelligentsia, a group fostered by male social reformers to play a mediating role between the separate worlds of male and female. She was instrumental in getting post-graduate courses run at Cama Hospital recognised for the MD degree of the

University. In 1934, she led a delegation of medical women to provide medical relief to the victims of the Bihar earthquake.

Tehmina Kaikhashru Adranvala, an important figure in the history of nursing in India, began as a trainee nurse, in nursing and midwifery in 1930 at the J. J. hospital. Thereafter, she completed the health visitor's course at the Royal Sanitary Institute, London in 1934 and Sister Tutor Diploma and Hospital Administration Diploma, University of London in 1947. From trainee, she progressively became ward sister, assistant matron, tutor and matron, between 1939 and 1946, and was finally Nursing Superintendent.

Obstetric Practices

The MD thesis of Anandibai, submitted in Philadelphia in 1886, was entitled, '*Obstetrics among Aryan Hindoos*,' in which she detailed aspects of childbirth from conception to infant diseases. She maintained that the history of past ages should not be overlooked for 'superior minds had labored with marked success in the same area of investigation.' Joshi held that actual childbirth was attended by the *dai* and elderly women of 'calm disposition' with the surgeon being only 'second hand to nature.' She referred to the lying-in room, fumigated with resins, the period of forty days seclusion, with dietary regulations and avoidance of manual labour. It is interesting that certain precautions for visitors to take, included washing of hands and feet, since Joshi held that the ancients believed in germs of infinite variety and minuteness.

Even among the westernized Parsis a woman after giving birth was considered unclean and was not allowed to touch anything. Dosebai Cowasji Jessawalla in her autobiography speaks of her daughter having to undergo the mandatory forty days lying in for her second born, even though she had not observed this practice for her first born in England.

Lady Yashodabai Joshi, mother of Rani Rajwade, in her account states that the new mother, was fed *laddoos* of various types, made with *khus khus* condensed milk and lots of *ghi*. 'The result was that the mother would rise from the childbed several pounds plumper.' With one of her own children, Joshi's husband had experimented with ass' milk as the child could not digest cow's milk, much to the horror of a lady doctor, who told him the child would become as dull as a donkey. Yashodabai recorded regretfully that her second child who was born prematurely, perhaps due to the jolts she had received on a bullock cart ride, died on the third day, 'because of the custom of giving opium.'

Rakhmabaibased on her extensive experience, noted that women would come to the hospital for medical examinations, but would not get admitted for deliveries. She devised a pragmatic solution to persuade them, by delivering a pregnant sheep and demonstrating the safety of the procedure. She had to work most of the time without qualified nurses, carrying forceps and other obstetric instruments, to remote huts and performing operations in flickering light. In one community, the umbilical cord was not allowed to be cut and the placenta was placed in an

earthen pot covered with ashes. It proved to be cumbersome, when the baby had to be fed. The cord was carried in the pot, until it dried up, and was then burnt.

Hospitals exclusively for castes and communities, made for their easier receptivity by women patients. The Parsi Lying In (1887), was established by Tehmulji Bhicaji Nariman who headed it for twenty-one years. He came to be hailed as representative of Parsi motherhood. The others are Ruxminibai Lying in hospital for 'high class women of poor means' (1910), a dispensary (1909) and lying-in-hospital for Lohanas (1913), the Lad Aushadalaya (1912), where a lady doctor treated 25-30 patients daily, Bai Moolbai Peerbhoy Dispensary and Sakinabai Moosabhoy Jaffarbhoy maternity hospital (1918) for Khojas, and Khatau Makanji Bhatia maternity and nursing home. (1922) Initially, Bhatia women were reluctant to take advantage of this facility, and would leave Bombay for their confinement, but gradually taboos seem to have worn down.

In the 1900s, more women physicians graduated and their presence in hospitals and dispensaries increased the number of patients for they discounted anxieties and inspired confidence. The King Edward Memorial (KEM) 1926, Wadia maternity hospital, (1926) and the adjacent Bai Jerbai Wadia hospital (1929) providing free treatment to children.

Women Doctors' Views on Maternal and Infant Mortality

In a talk on the 'Physiological Effects of Early Marriage,' 1890, *Indu Prakash* Pechey clarified that while convention saw first menstruation as puberty, real puberty was only in the 20th year. She portrayed the evils from this custom of early marriage: sterility, ill health of the mother, puny and deformed children.

Dossibai Dadabhoy and Jerbanoo Mistri presented papers at the All India Social Service Conference, Mumbai, (1924), when childbirth and motherhood were no longer moral issues but social linked with local conditions. Dadabhoy's contention was that seventy percent of infant deaths could be prevented, if the mother, medical practitioner and midwife were alert, with proper measures for infant feeding, including the promotion of breast feeding, and raising the standards of midwives. The wealthy could command doctors and nurses, but many women were left to 'muddle through pregnancy and labour as best as they can.' Dadabhoy suggested 'Preventive Obstetrics' which was supervision of women from early pregnancy till lying-in was over, as the solution for maternal and infant mortality

Mistri recommended more maternity homes and ante-natal care for expectant mothers, post-natal supervision. She regarded efforts to raise the standard of health and improve the efficiency of one half of the population as a great consideration in improving national prosperity, not only the poor, but also the upper and middle class women were ignorant of hygiene and the care of infants. 'Many women who are childless and permanently disabled are so from maltreatment received during delivery.' She suggested negotiation with the dais by training them

Jhirad opined that old mothers and grandmothers continued to hold sway in Indian families and imparted their time-honoured customs to the next generation, even as meetings were being held in town halls to organize welfare. She cautioned against imitation of the West, which would only increase the prejudice of the masses. Jhirad held that a large percentage of maternal morbidity, was avoidable, it was ignorance and superstition that prevented access to modern methods. 'Indians are naturally fatalists, which is helpful when unavoidable accidents occur but certainly trying when confronted with remediable complications.' Jhirad's investigations, in the 1930s found that most maternal deaths occurred amongst the poor, who lived in congested dwellings and were caused by puerperal sepsis, followed by anemia. While appreciating the welfare endeavours already undertaken, Jhirad recommended urgent improvements in housing, bringing down food prices, the education of the public on the need for a balanced diet and the organization of a blood transmission service.

Margaret Balfour, the first Chief Medical Officer of the Women's Medical Service (WMS) conducted a survey in Bombay hospitals, in the 1920s, found anemia in pregnant women increasing, and suggested that luxurious lifestyles and more labour-saving devices had contributed to this fact.

Health of Women Mill Workers

Shakuntala Talpade with Margaret Balfour, 1925-29 made an inquiry into the conditions of women mill workers. A comparison of the diet of the non- industrial workers and mill workers showed that the latter were 'better caloric' and had a higher proportion of carbohydrates but were extraordinarily deficient in fat. Though poorer, they bought the cheapest and most filling foods. While maternal mortality was lower due to this diet and the 'more active and open air' life of mill workers, the birth weight of workers' infants was found to be lower than those of the non-industrial workers' infants, due to the fat deficient diet of the former. Both these categories of women did not observe purdah and did all household chores including cooking, cleaning and shopping, and some even took in boarders. Their suggestions 1) light work should be given, during the later months of pregnancy, 2) one free meal and milk, should be provided daily, 3) improvements in the conditions of male workers, which would indirectly help women, since they continued to work even during advanced pregnancy, because the men gambled or drank away their salaries.

Welfare measures for the women mill workers were introduced both by employers and the Social Service League in Bombay. However, The *Royal Commission on Indian Labour published the Memorandum of the Government of Bombay (RCIL)* in 1929 noted that owing to ignorance and prejudice, the workers did not make full use of the medical facilities available, women being less willing to take advantage than men, but there had been an improvement, and more women were using hospitals, dispensaries and maternity hospitals, by the 1930s.

The Bombay Presidency Women's Council presented a memorandum to the Textile Labour Inquiry Committee 1939-1940 making an important observation: 'Where a woman is actually at work, the idea of a separate provision for her old age has not yet dawned and the idea that a woman's savings belongs to her men folk needs to be broken up.'

How did these women doctors perceive their role?

In an article entitled 'Woman as Healer,' *Journal of AMWI*, Hazel Machado, (1917) pointed out that, it was commonly believed that the study of medicine for women was unnatural and tended to deaden her feelings and there was something in it that was repugnant to the social order of things. But soon public opinion began to realize that there was ample scope for men and women to share in the 'noble work for the welfare of humanity.' She noted that gradually, attendance by a woman doctor on her own sex became the rule, rather than the exception. Sometimes, women medical students dropped out midway through their course for marriage or they would not pursue careers despite having qualified. Jhirad asserted that marriage was no bar to medicine. On the other hand, it brought into relief the best qualities of sympathy and fellow feeling. Women were suited to serve at ante-natal clinics, infant and welfare centres.

Avanbai Mehta who rose to be Assistant Medical Officer, CH, was lauded for her exceptional efficiency as an anaesthetist. Most cases, at the time, were emergency, since ante-natal work was unknown. Mehta averred, 'Let us resolve that we shall not rest till the message of medical relief is carried to the humblest cottage. Few professions offer such unique opportunities for public service such as ours.' In an article written in 1933, she said, 'patients are so inordinately fond of this 'Cama Bai's Hospital' that they almost consider it their birth right to come here for confinement.' She had seen girls born there coming back to give birth there. Mehta related how physicians had learnt through trial and error. An epidemic of green diarrhoea among babies in 1922 took a heavy toll. Tests at the Haffkine Institute were conducted, and several theories were put forth: malaria, organisms in the water but the epidemic was unchecked, till 1929, when the cribs were moved to the centre of the ward where babies with infections were isolated and a schedule of regular nursing by mothers was introduced.

Maternal and Infant Welfare & Involvement of Women Physicians

Though the Government and the municipal authorities provided some funding, yet they preferred to leave the space of women's welfare to semi-official initiatives and voluntary organisations and women doctors. The former were the Lady Willingdon Scheme, (1914) Bombay Presidency Infant Welfare Society, (1921) Bombay Presidency Baby and Health Week Association, (1924) and Lady Wilson Village Maternity Association, (1926) to train village dais. The working of these organizations has been discussed in Mridula Ramanna, *Health Care in Bombay Presidency, 1896-1930* (Delhi: Primus, 2012)

The Bombay Baby and Health Week Association, providing antenatal and post- natal care and running dispensaries in different regions of the Presidency doubtless achieved some results. In this context, the cover page of the *Reports of the BBHWA* shows how the message reduction in infant mortality was conveyed. It proclaims that ‘a healthy baby is a national asset,’ ‘care of the expectant mother ensures the health of the baby’ and ‘half of sickness and deaths in babies is preventable.’ It portrays the mother receiving advice from a lady doctor carrying her medical bag. Both women are portrayed in Maharashtrian attire. The picture of the lady doctor advising the mother makes two statements: that women doctors were involved in the campaign, and that mothers would heed advice from one of their own gender. The Voluntary Initiatives included the Poona Seva Sadan ran maternity homes and infant welfare centres and Trained nurses and the Seva Sadan Public Health School trained Health Visitors. Both these efforts are discussed in Mridula Ramanna, *Facets of Public Health in Early Twentieth Century Bombay* (Delhi: Primus, 2020)

Kashibai Nowrange attended the inauguration of the Bombay Sanitary Association, 1904. Speaking at the inaugural of the Anti- Tuberculosis League, 1912, she said tuberculosis was wreaking havoc among the poor, especially women. Krishnabai Kelavkar was the only woman on the central committee of the Bombay Medical Congress, 1909. Phirozbai Captain, Gulbai Doctor, S.R. Singara, and Shirin Commissariat were members of the Bombay Medical Union, established in 1884. Cecilia D’Monte was connected with the Bombay Presidency Infant Welfare Society and served as Medical Officer, Cama Hospital. Hazel Machado was a member of the Social Service League, a reformist body, set up in 1911, which instructed mill workers on sanitation, hygiene and first aid, and provided medical relief during the influenza epidemic 1918-19, and the famine. Myrtle Machado worked in the dispensary, maintained by the League for Combating Venereal Diseases, established in 1916.

Dossibai Dadabhoy was involved with the Bombay Presidency Infant Welfare Society, (BPIWS) the Red Cross, organised the blood transfusion service and blood bank (1942). Dadabhoy was on the Health Survey and Development Committee, chaired by Sir Joseph Bhole (1942-46). Jerusha Jhirad was a Fellow and member of the Syndicate, Bombay University. Both Dadabhoy and Jhirad served as President, Association of Medical Women in India (AMWI). After Independence, they served as Chairperson, Maternity and Child Welfare Advisory Committee, ICMR. Both were awarded MBE and Padma Shri. Jerbanoo Mistri was a member of the Indian Prostitution Committee, 1923, where she gave a note of dissent, along with three others, against the recommendations for regulation and punishments for prostitution. Later, she was Chairperson, parliamentary sub- committee of Bombay Presidency Women’s Council. She was also concerned with improving standards of cinema films, and worked to improve the condition of women in detention cells and in the two mental hospitals of the Presidency

Malini Sukhthankar was the first to be appointed Chairperson of the school committee and served on the health sub-committee, of the Bombay Municipal Corporation. She emphasised the

need for adequate nutrition. Rani Rajwade served as organising secretary, All India Women's Conference (AIWC) 1930,-1933, and Chairperson, 1934,1935 and 1939. On Rajwade's elevation, in the AIWC, Sarojini Naidu welcomed her, 'I remember how twenty-five years ago she had conquered Bombay as Dr. Miss Tai Joshi. --- I christened her the "spirit of India" Imagine my pleasure when I find how she has vindicated that prophetic name.' She had pamphlets, physiological charts and models distributed, explaining epidemics, preventive measures, mohalla sanitation, water supply, home remedies, first aid and childcare. She was Chairperson of the sub-committee on women's welfare, under the National Planning Committee, and discussed women's role in the planned economy. She stressed on the importance of nutrition to good health, and asserted the need for regulations in housing, from the point of view of public health. She advocated a social insurance scheme to be contributed to by the state and individual to cover disability, sickness, accidents, pregnancy and childbirth.

Professional Status of women medics

Margaret Balfour observed that women's entry into medicine was accepted as 'suitable and natural' and there was little 'sexual prejudice' in India. Once the medical woman became a success, patients came from all over. However, they were in the second rung of medical administration in the colonial period. The records hint that Freny Murzban nee Cama, (1892) who began her career in C H, seems to have fallen out with her English bosses. What the problem was remains unclear. Cama later worked in the Dufferin hospital, Patiala.

Gynaecology and obstetrics were the only specialization, and women and children, as patients, was the forte of medical women. While she performed operations of fibroid tumours of the uterus and cystic tumours of the ovary, she did not get much general surgery, and was called only for occasional amputations, setting of fractures, or for cataracts. Another facet of their position was expressed in the newspaper, *Indu Prakash*, which referred to complaints by 'female medical employees' against 'a lot of male interference and male supervision which is prejudicial to efficiency and of course dissonant with their dignity.'

Women's health was a space left to women doctors by both British and Indian male physicians, the tension in this area was between British women, who looked for niches and jobs in India and Indian women who were qualifying in increasing numbers. Even as the WMS was being contemplated, activist doctor Rani Rajwade, sent a memorial, in 1914 asking that the posts to be created, should be reserved for local graduates, without distinction of caste or creed. She pointed out that if the majority of Western women were very sensitive and found it difficult to overcome prejudice 'on the score of difference in race, tradition and religion,' it was not surprising thus that the average Indian woman, who was more sensitive, had a greater aversion to being examined by a stranger, the European male or female doctor. There was consequently greater justification for pressing the claims of Indian women doctors. Some British women doctors felt that their Indian counterparts had inadequate experience compared to them. In view

of this, the *InduPrakash* warned against ‘scandals,’ like with the Indian medical or civil services, when all sorts of ‘ingenious subtleties’ were employed to shut out Indians. When the WMS was dissolved with the IMS, in 1949, Dadabhoy and Jhirad with Hilda Lazarus presented a memorandum on behalf of the AMWI. to give proper status to the WMS officers.

As in Britain, here, too, women were far keener to become doctors than to enter any other profession. Whether in private practice or in government service, these physicians, were more readily accepted than their British counterparts, because of their familiarity with the local languages and social practices, a better sensitivity towards inhibitions and even a greater tolerance of the *dai*. Indian women physicians were indeed the vital intermediaries, between Indian women and western medicine. In her review of obstetrics, Avanbai Mehta gave credit to Dadabhoy and Jhirad, for their high standard of professional work, tact, sympathy and administrative ability and surgical skill, respectively. Their clinics were much appreciated and under their guidance the younger generation was getting equipped ‘for an independent career.’

That women doctors, guarded their space is evident. Jhirad and her colleagues protested against the move to make Lady Hardinge College the women’s medical school started in Delhi, in 1916, co-educational, in 1948. Deputations by the AMWI proved ineffective and it was only an injunction against the authorities brought by an ex-student that averted this step. Again in 1956, the Indian Medical Council tried to get the college closed and open a new coeducational college. The AMWI, under the presidency of Jhirad, strongly protested and a memorandum was sent to the President, Vice President and Prime Minister. Subsequently, the move was given up, and the Cabinet announced that Lady Hardinge would continue as a women’s college. Later male faculty, students for post graduate courses and male patients have been admitted.

Status of nursing when Adranvala trained

Indu Prakash reminded its readers that ‘alien’ nurses had been imported during the plague epidemics and were supported by the Indian taxpayer.

The paucity of Indian nurses and the discrimination practiced against them was questioned in the Bombay Legislative Council. Dr. M.D.D. Gilder a heart specialist, representing Bombay city north, in 1928. (Gilder was later Health Minister in the first post Independence provincial ministry). He showed that in the Bombay Presidency hospitals, excluding CH, there were forty-six nurses in the administrative grade, of which forty-two were Europeans and four were Indians, though it was Indians who had contributed generously to the nursing associations. When the minister was asked why lady students were not given residents’ posts the answer was that there was no accommodation. While Gilder was at the Goculdas Tejpal Hospital, he found that the sister in charge was an Anglo- Indian relying on fully qualified Indian assistants. But when she left, the post was given to an Anglo- Indian girl, who had just passed her exams, though there were three or four qualified Indians available. There is reference to a ‘colour bar’ against Indian

nurses and the hope was expressed that it would 'disappear as time goes on.' Indian nurses were made to work nine hours without a break. The grants to nursing associations in the Presidency were reduced. S.K. Bole observed that Indian nurses were not given the chance of becoming ward sisters in J.J Hospital. They were segregated in one house, while European nurses resided in a palatial building with fans and other luxuries. The Dean, KEM Hospital replied to a legislative query in 1929, stated that of fifteen sisters, five were Indian, comprising of two Hindu, one Parsi and two Indian Christians, their 'professional work was good, and do not compare unfavourably with European or Anglo Indian sisters' Their only handicap was their poor command over English. All sisters lived together but there were separate arrangements for vegetarians and non -vegetarians.

Rajwade undertook a study of the nursing profession and subsequently the resolution of the AIWC, 1941, called for encouragement to nursing through better salary, housing and more extensive training facilities.

After Independence, Tehmina Adranvala was appointed Chief Nursing Superintendent, Government of India, 1948 was a recipient of the *Kaiser-i-Hind* medal in 1943 and the Florence Nightingale medal in 1956. Adranvala joined the Trained Nurses Association of India (TNAI) in 1934 was president of TNAI from 1948 to 1954. Adranvala was on the expert committee on nursing, WHO, and attended the meeting in Geneva in 1950.

Family Planning/Birth Control

Overt and explicit statements in the copy of the advertisements were avoided. Certain products meant to enhance male potency were depicted euphemistically. There was *Apioline Chapoteaut* from Paris euphemistically termed as 'ladies' safe remedy for functional trouble, and those irregularities peculiar to the sex.' Made from parsley, it was used to prevent possible pregnancy A euphemistically worded product was the special elixir for 'ladies, hot for those with cold temperament and cold for those with hot temperament,'

In the *Journal of the Association of Medical Women in India*, Mistri wrote that 'until young people, particularly men, were given the training that would teach them to restrain their impulses and instil higher ideals,' preventive measures had to be adopted to 'control conception,' not only out of consideration for the woman's health, but also from social and economic considerations which affected the 'offspring.'

Family planning was advocated, at all India level by the AIWC, as a solution for high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Rajwade, who has been seen by Barbara Ramusack as combining medical training with feminist activism in her unflagging promotion of birth control, Rajwade's proposal to appoint a committee of medical women to recommend means of educating the public to regulate their families was defeated in the 1931 session of the AIWC. Rajwade's view was that since legislation in social matters aroused too much bitterness, she advocated that the most

effective weapon was 'voluntary and propagandist effort.' Sukthankar, while supporting a resolution on birth control at the AIWC, in 1933, noted the change in the attitudes of the delegates from the previous year, when 'we were afraid even to utter the word birth control.' She held that 'there is nothing in the shastras which injuncts people not to use birth control--- If we want our future race to be strong and sturdy, we must see that the vitality of the mother is not stopped by frequent births.'. The AIWC resolution of 1933 adopted read, 'This conference feels on account of the low physique of women, high infant mortality and increased poverty of the country married men and women should be instructed in methods of birth control in recognised clinics.'

Jhirad was not for the legalisation of abortion, but for the inculcation of 'a healthier frame of mind and a reverential and dispassionate attitude of men and women towards each other.' Her contention was that children should be educated to develop the right attitude towards sex, inculcating mastery over all passions, and this would develop a highly intellectual nation. Another solution to 'sublimate the sex impulse,' could be social service organisations to give a 'healthy outlet to pent up energies,' and to reduce the "drink evil.' Dadabhoy cited the view of the Food Enquiry Committee that for an effective solution of the 'food problem' the high rate of the increase of population had to be checked. Dadabhoy established the Family Planning Society in Bombay. Lady Cowasji Jehangir, a reformer, conceding that 'family limitation' was controversial, clarified that they were trying to advertise that, 'birth control was not the destruction of life only that spaced babies, happy families and healthy mothers; She pointed out the lack of cooperation from the BPIWS and the BMC, who had well organized and well-equipped maternity clinics but declined to include birth control on medical grounds.

The *Report of the National Planning Committee* contended that knowledge of birth control enabled a woman to limit her family and see that children are not born in conditions in which they can hardly survive. It would result in better health of women, who suffered mentally because of the constant fear of pregnancy. In a sub-section of the report, entitled 'Racial Health' it was asserted that the woman as mother of the 'race' required special protection of the state. This had to be borne in mind while chalking out a programme for the 'ensurance (sic) of a physically and mentally healthy race,' and this would aim at the gradual eradication of such diseases as caused the degeneration of the race like venereal disease, tuberculosis, leprosy and certain mental disorders. Abortion was more widespread than was commonly believed, brought about by general ill health,

Webinar 5

Distinguished Lecture on Feminist Jurisprudence and Women's Entanglement in Legal Issues

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(The lecture was delivered on 28th December 2020)

[This is a transcription of the PowerPoint presentation Dr. Das Gupta had made in WSRC's webinar held on December 28, 2020]

I have changed the title just a little, keeping of course, the theme intact that I was supposed to deal with. It has now become “Feminist Jurisprudence and Women's Entanglement in Legal Issues”. Let me begin with a broad generic sort of query. Why am I wanting to bring in jurisprudence in general and feminist jurisprudence in particular? This broad query has three components or three sub queries rather.

- What is it that I am trying to link up jurisprudence within terms of women's involvement in or handling of legal matters? I am making a distinction between women's involvement in or handling of legal matters and their handling of the same because mostly women get goaded into legal matters and they are guided by their friends, relatives, NGO functionaries, etc. etc. Very seldom we get to see that women are handling the legal matters themselves. This is a distinction that we have to make. It is very important so far as their entanglements in legal issues is concerned.
- Which social and or economic class or caste or group of women I'm referring to? I will come to that in a minute.
- What types of legal issues or problems I want to address?

Now from there I am trying to enter into the core of presentation i.e., women's entanglements in legal matters and jurisprudenc.

There is a disconnect between varied ground realities of poor, disadvantaged and marginalized women's existence in families, communities and societies and their rights and entitlements as codified in the statute books and judicial pronouncements. Again, there is a distinction between laws codified in statute books and judicial pronouncements. That is judgements. From various judgements also we get these pronouncements which are treated as laws i.e., Case laws as we call them. This disconnect becomes glaring and appears to be progressively encroaching into the mechanisms and arrangements of our justice delivery system as one positions himself or herself within the realm of legal realism. So, I am now bringing in *Legal Realism*

What is Legal Realism?

It focuses on ground realities of court practices and malpractices of court functionaries.

- Ground realities of the nature, extent and quality of professional services rendered by legal practitioners. That is the quality of lawyering.
- External, extra-legal and extraneous pressures and influences exerted upon litigating parties and their associates as well as witnesses. This is something that we get to see almost every day. Every now and then we get to watch on television how such pressures are exerted upon these entities—institutions and functionaries and professionals. Then
- Destruction, suppression, concoction, tampering and undue doctoring of evidence. This is also very important. Finally
- Approaches, attitudes and mind sets of some members of the Bench i.e., Judges We do talk about the mind sets of the judges. mind sets of the lawyers and other legal functionaries.

To appreciate the importance of Legal Realism that I just described in handling legally distressed women's issues, we must also know it's exactly opposite position i.e., Legal Positivism.

What is Legal Positivism? It implies:

- Enacted laws are the best guarantees for access to justice. Statute books are the legal bibles for the oppressed--this is what people following Legal Positivism would say.
- Law is omnipotent and omnipresent, and it ultimately delivers justice to the aggrieved. Law is really considered to be omnipotent and omnipresent by the proponents of this school of thought.

- Judiciary is the ultimate source and deliverer of all reason and social and or political wisdom. It should enjoy an exalted status of the most impartial adjudicator of all conflicting rationales of socio-political and cultural claims.

Let's give an example of Legal Realism

This comes in operation when women's or human rights lawyers and activists rise to point out that despite the existence and application of thus and such laws and sections etc. and also taking what they call 'eye wash actions of law enforcement agencies', how an accused is running scot free and terrorizing the victims and their family members and sympathizers, how political bosses are trying to support the accused and influence the prosecution, how and why the ruling dispensation are trying to give a certain political or religious colour to an incident, how evidence is being destroyed or tampered with or witnesses are being hunted and harmed.

Now let's give an example of Legal Positivism

The best example of Legal Positivism would be when irrespective of their ideological dispositions, spokespersons of all mainstream political parties are seen on television channels defending or artfully diluting charges against the accused in rape and other cases of abuse, assault and harassment of women by just saying that arrests have been made and thus and such sections of laws have been applied and the due process of law should take its own course to deliver justice. Most of them do sidetrack or gloss over the realities of horror and injustice women have to bear up with such cases. One only has to refer to what is happening in the Hathras case to realize how legal positivists do all these in abundance and absolutely, triumphantly.

From Legal Realism to Jurisprudence

We need to look into and beyond what law fails to accomplish This is where I land up almost in the problematic area that I am trying to raise this evening. There are Four Core Constituents of Jurisprudence. What is Jurisprudence? (This is really for the students).

Jurisprudence

- Seeks to analyze, explain, classify and criticize entire bodies of law
- Compares and contrasts law with other fields of knowledge and or disciplines. Like in the Sabarimala Temple entry case we really had to take into account considerations of biology, physiology and also gynecology. Like in the Ayodhya case you had law interacting with consideration of the archaeology etc. etc.

- It also seeks to reveal the historical, moral and cultural basis of particular legal concepts and focuses on such abstract questions like what law is and how do judges decide cases etc. etc.

Why do we have to think differently about Law as it applies to women?

I will have five interrelated contexts of this problematic in terms of certain 'shifting gender regimes and power relations.

- Context of Female well-being
- Context of social change and politics of accountable governance
- Context of interpersonal and family violence
- Context of intimate partner violence
- Context of neo liberal feminization of poverty and labour marginality

Perennial vulnerability of women seeking legal redress also remains integrally tied up with:

- A hugely overburdened judiciary and resource deficient judicial establishments
- Patriarchal and male chauvinistic mind sets of some members of the Bar and the Bench. (I have already talked about this. Members deeply influenced, deeply ingrained in patriarchal thinking and also in of all kinds of male chauvinistic ideas)
- Gender insensitive and community unfriendly policing
- Immunity and impunity enjoyed by the perpetrator of crimes and offences against women. (I will come to this immunity and impunity part of it later. I am really kind of listing in a just form so that we can pass on to the substantive issues very easily. So, bit of theorization is necessary. I am in that part of it now)
- Resistance and obstacles coming from the economically and political powerful patrons and collaborators of these perpetrators

This vulnerability compels women to bear the terrible brunt of: (These are the basic problems in so far as legal entitlements are concerned)

- ***The phenomenon of attrition:*** the cases getting dropped for reasons of litigants, lack of resources, proper access to professional and institutional services.
- ***Then the phenomenon of protraction of cases.*** This is absolutely important. Protraction of cases: -both systemic and tendentious. This is absolutely important. Cases go on and on.

We keep taking dates—for months/years/ for decades even. That is protraction of litigation. This could be systemic lack of establishment, related services, lack of inadequate number of judges etc. and also tendentious which would fall very heavily on the practitioner community. This is what we call tendentious protraction of cases. You keep taking dates delays for all kinds of reasons. Lawyers of one side would be in league with the other sides lawyer and they would sort of connive and keep taking dates.

- *The phenomenon of 'out of court settlements of disputes* in the pre and post litigation phases
- *The phenomenon of dilution and forced withdrawal of cases.* All these problems /hindrances remain structurally and inherently entangled with acute shortage and lack authentic and reliable evidence admissible in courts of law.

Going back to the starters listed in the second slide of this presentation and clubbing the second and third items, I will have legal entitlements of...I am referring to the second query which was ...classes and groups of women I would be referring to:

- Disadvantaged and marginalized female victims and survivors of intra family and intimate partner violence. This is one category of women that I am dealing with in this presentation.
- Disadvantaged and marginalized female victims and survivors of inter and intra state trafficking, forced prostitution and sex work taken up out of ill-informed choices. This is also a distinction that I would like to make. Sex work taken up out of ill - informed or inadequately informed choices and sex work taken up through informed choices. There is a distinction, and it is important to make that distinction.
- Employed and middle class or even upper middle class female victims and survivors of sexual abuse and harassment. The' Me too' victims ...You All know about the Me-too cases. So the upper and upper middle class female victims in the Me Too cases were very much in the news in the recent times.

What would be my purpose?

My purpose would be to consider:

- The problems regarding the availability and generation of evidence
- The problems arising out of the nature and extent of lawyering
- The problem of dealing with willful non-compliance of awards by offenders. There are awards of relief and redresses but these are not complied with. You again have to take

people to courts of law, file cases and again have to go through all the processes of legal work.

- The problem of realization of relief and redresses by the awardees themselves. You may have the award, but you may not be able to realize it for various reasons. That is also another serious issue.
- The problem of conspiratorial or routinely orchestrated politic interventions. This is also very important.

Against the backdrop of systemic and circumstantial hindrances to women's access to justice, I am bringing in here some lead considerations of one particular strand of feminist jurisprudence.

Carol Gilligan's '**Two Moral Voices of Law.**' I would restrict myself to Gilligan's view only. Gilligan talks about Women's Moral Voice of law which she calls "Ethic of Care and Responsibility" and Men's Moral Voice which she calls 'Ethic of Justice and Rights'. She says the latter i.e., Men's Voice may appear frightening to women in its potential justification of indifference and unconcern while the former i.e., Women's Voice may appear inconclusive and diffusive to men.

So here lies the possibility of an alternative Jurisprudence.

The substantive point of jurisprudential intervention here remains pregnant with the possibility of accommodating within the ambit of law-making advocacy of Mediation in contrast to Win Win Rights Adjudication. So, you have Mediation on the one hand and on the other in Win Win Rights adjudication. You tally them with the Female Moral Voice of Law and the Male Moral Voice of Law. So, the emphasis is on structuring a process of dialogue between parties and posing a fundamental challenge to the adversary legal culture. Quite an opposite stand in Feminist Jurisprudence could be found in Catharine MacKinnon's Marxist critique of Gilligan's position. I am taking up MacKinnon's views in contrast to the ones of Gilligan. MacKinnon considers 'ethic of care' to be a product of 'gender oppression' and an adopted response to relative powerlessness. She holds the view that male domination is obscure by dominant social ideas of the nature of council, normal hetero sexual relations, the family and femininity.

So, in the context of this jurisprudential dichotomy between the need to build on the culture of 'legally orchestrated efficacious mediation 'and the practice of' Win Win rights' adjudication. I would like you to ponder over new and innovative methods of court monitored alternative dispute resolutions which comes under the Arbitration and Conciliation Act 1996. Alternative Dispute Resolution would be one part of what has been provided in this Act and for resource poor and resource less entanglements in litigation of all sorts. Two crucial grey areas in this regard would be

1. Litigations involving hapless victims of trafficking and the fact of extensive and deep-seated family involvement in processes of trafficking.
2. Litigations involving victims of ‘Intra family and intimate partner violence’

The anomalies and aporias of legal action, in the adversarial system of justice in both cases ie. cases involving trafficking and cases involving violence of the two kinds get inextricably tied up with the fact of non-availability of evidence admissible in courts of law.

As I pointed out there are deep seated family involvement then who will give evidence? You can't give evidence against family people. So, there is this serious anomaly. Hence, I would like to end up with a plea for a renovated system of inquisitorial justice wherein ‘women’s lived experiences may become the critical component of the instrumentalities of investigation and examination of evidence

Webinar 6

Distinguished Lecture on

নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা: কতটা পথ পেরোলে কাঙ্ক্ষিত মুক্তি?

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(The Lecture was delivered on 29th January 2021)

ধন্যবাদ, সালামআলেইকুম, নমস্কারা সবাই নিশ্চয়ই ভালো আছেন? প্রথমেই আমি আজকের ওয়েবিনারে উপস্থিত সভাপ্রধান ডঃ কাকলী সেনগুপ্ত, সহযোগী অধ্যাপক, আন্তর্জাতিক সম্পর্ক বিভাগ, যাদবপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, আপনাকে কৃতজ্ঞতা জানাচ্ছি এবং বিশেষ ধন্যবাদ জানাচ্ছি কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়, ওম্যান স্টাডিস রিসার্চ সেন্টার ও তাঁর পরিচালক, অধ্যাপক লিপি ঘোষ ম্যাডামকে।

আমরা আজকে আলোচনার জন্য নির্ধারণ করেছি যে বিষয়বস্তুটি সেটি ইতিমধ্যেই লিপি ঘোষ ম্যাডাম বলেছেন; "নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা: কতটা পথ পেরোলে কাঙ্ক্ষিত মুক্তি?"

আমরা জানি যে, নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা অত্যন্ত পরিচিত একটি প্রপঞ্চ। কেবলমাত্র বাংলাদেশেই নয়, সমগ্র পৃথিবীব্যাপী নারীরা নানা ধরনের সহিংসতার শিকার। আমরা দেখি, সহিংসতার শিকার হয়ে বিপুলসংখ্যক নারী শারীরিক, প্রজনন ও মানসিক স্বাস্থ্যগত সমস্যায় ভোগেন। এমনকি মৃত্যুবরণও করেন। আমরা যদি UN Commission-এর নারীর অবস্থান সম্পর্কিত রিপোর্ট দেখি, তাহলে দেখতে পাবো যে তাদের রিপোর্ট অনুযায়ী বিশ্বের প্রতি তিনজন নারীর মধ্যে কমপক্ষে একজন নারী তাঁর সমগ্র জীবনে কোনও না কোনওভাবে যৌন সহিংসতা বা নির্যাতনের শিকার হন। এই যে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা, এক্ষেত্রে নানাবিধ গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা রাখে বা নানা বিষয় এখানে প্রভাবক হিসাবে কাজ করে। প্রথমতঃ তাঁর লিঙ্গীয় পরিচয়, এবং তাঁর লিঙ্গীয় পরিচয়ের পাশাপাশি, কখনও তাঁর জাতিগত পরিচয়, কখনও তাঁর ধর্মীয় পরিচয়, কখনও তাঁর বর্ণ পরিচয় তাঁর প্রতিসহিংসতা ঘটানোর ক্ষেত্রে প্রভাবক হিসাবে কাজ করে।

নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা নিয়ে যদি আমরা বিশ্লেষণ করতে যাই বা এই বিষয়টিকে বিশ্লেষণ করতে হলে, তাঁর উপর দৈহিক, মানসিক, সামাজিক ও অর্থনৈতিক, যে কোনো ধর্মের নিপীড়ণ ও নির্যাতনকে অন্তর্ভুক্ত করে আমাদের আলোচনা এগোতে হবে। পাশাপাশি, নারীর যেকোনো অধিকার হরণ করা এবং নারীর ইচ্ছার বিরুদ্ধে কোনো বিষয় চাপিয়ে দেওয়া কিংবা কোনো ব্যক্তি বা গোষ্ঠীর ইচ্ছানুসারে নারীকে কাজ করতে বাধ্য করাও নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার অন্তর্গত হবে বলে আমি মনে করছি।

অর্থাৎ যদি সামগ্রিকভাবে বলি, তাহলে বলবো, নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা হল নারীকে শারীরিক, মানসিক ও জৈবিক ভাবে আঘাতগ্রস্ত করা, হুমকি দেওয়া তাকে, তাঁর উপর বল প্রয়োগ করা এবং এই যে সকল ধর্মের আঘাত ও হুমকি যার দ্বারা নারীর স্বেচ্ছামূলক কাজ ও চলাফেরার ব্যাপারে বাধা সৃষ্টি করা এবং তাকে বঞ্চিত করা।

অর্থাৎ আমরা কি দেখতে পাচ্ছি? আমরা দেখতে পাচ্ছি, সহিংসতা একজন নারীর ব্যক্তিত্ব বিকাশে অন্তরায় সৃষ্টি করে। তাঁর শারীরিক ও মনস্তাত্ত্বিক যে অখন্ডতা, তাঁর যে স্বাধীনতা এবং সর্বোপরি, তাঁর জীবনের উপর প্রবলভাবে আঘাত করে।

সুতরাং সহিংসতা শুধু যৌন-নিপীড়ন ও শারীরিক নির্যাতনের মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ বিষয় নয়। নারীর প্রতি মানসিক নিপীড়ন ও এর আওতাভুক্ত। এটা আমাদের কাছে স্পষ্ট এবং আমরা এই বিষয়টিকে আমাদের আলোচনার মধ্যে নিয়েই এগোতে চাই।

সহিংসতার গতি-প্রকৃতি যদি আমরা লক্ষ্য করি, তাহলে আমরা দেখতে পাবো যে, নারীরা ভিন্ন দুই পরিসরে, ভিন্ন দুটি প্রক্রিয়ায় সহিংসতার শিকার হন। একটি হল, তাঁরা তাঁদের সমগ্র জীবনে প্রথমত ঘরের ভেতরে সহিংসতার শিকার হন; দ্বিতীয়ত ঘরের বাইরে ঘরের ভেতরে নারীর প্রতি যে সহিংসতার ক্ষেত্র, সেটি আবার দু'ধরণের। একটি হল পিত্রালয়ে, যেটিকে আমরা "বাবার বাড়ী" বলছি এবং আর একটি হল "স্বামীর গৃহে"।

আমরা জানি, নারীর কোনো ঘর নেই। প্রচলিত ব্যবস্থায়, নারী বিয়ের আগে বাবার বাড়ী এবং বিয়ের পর স্বশুরবাড়ীতে থাকেন।

ভীষণ পরিচিত কয়টি লাইন, আমাদের সবারই নিশ্চয়ই জানা:

"শিশুকাল আর কৌশর কাটে বাবার আশ্রয়ে,

যৌবন কাটে স্বামীর সাথে স্বশুরালয়ে;

বৃদ্ধকালে আশ্রয় নাই আর ছেলের কাছে রই,

তোমার বাড়ীকে গো নারী তোমার বাড়ীকে?"

অর্থাৎ, নারীকে তাঁর পুরো জীবন ব্যাপী অন্বেষণ করতে হয় সত্যিকার অর্থে কোন বাড়ীতে তাঁর নিজস্ব মালিকানা রয়েছে? কারণ, তাঁর বাবার বাড়ীতে এবং তাঁর স্বশুরবাড়ীতে, দুটি জায়গাতেই সারাক্ষণ তিনি বিপন্ন অবস্থায় থাকেন এবং তাকে খুঁজতে হয় সত্যিকার অর্থে সেখানে তাঁর অবস্থানটা কোথায়? সত্যিকার অর্থেই গৃহহীন এই বিপন্ন নারী পিত্রালয়ে প্রায়শই জোর পূর্বক বিবাহ, শারীরিক নির্যাতন, বাল্য বিবাহ, ইত্যাদির যের ধরে সহিংসতার শিকার হন।

অন্যদিকে, বিবাহ পরবর্তী সময়ে, "স্বামী গৃহে" নারী যৌতুকের জন্য নিপীড়ন, ইচ্ছের বিরুদ্ধে যৌন মিলনে বাধ্য হওয়ার মতো নিপীড়ন, জন্ম নিপীড়ন পদ্ধতি মাত্র নারীর উপর চাপিয়ে দেওয়ার মতো নিপীড়ন, পুত্র সন্তানের আসায় ক্রমাগত সন্তান জন্ম দানে বাধ্য করায় নিপীড়ন এবং নিজের আয় করা অর্থ স্বামীর হাতে তুলে দিতে বাধ্য করা এবং তাকে কেন্দ্র করে যে নিপীড়ন এবং সহিংসতার শিকার কিন্তু হন।

বাংলাদেশ পুলিশ সদর দপ্তর এবং বাংলাদেশ মহিলা পরিষদ এবং আইন ও সালিশ কেন্দ্র এই বিষয়টি নিয়ে সামগ্রিকভাবে বাংলাদেশে নারীদের উপর সহিংসতার চিত্রটি কেমন এবং কোন কোন ক্ষেত্রে নারীরা সহিংসতার শিকার হন, সেগুলি নিয়ে বিস্তৃত জরিপ চালানো তাদের যৌথ প্রতিবেদনে দেখা গেছে যে বাংলাদেশে পরিবারে নারী সবচেয়ে বেশি শিকার হন এবং বাইরের থেকেও পরিবারে পরিমাণটা বেশী। যদিও এখানে বলা হয় যে পরিবার শান্তির নীড় এবং পরিবারকে শান্তির নীড় হিসাবে প্রচলন থাকলেও ধনী, দরিদ্র, মধ্যবিত্ত নির্বিশেষে সকল পরিবারে নারী তাঁর জীবনে প্রথম শিকার কিন্তু হন পরিবারেই। এবং পরিবারে একজন নারী কখনো পরিবারের, সদস্যদের দ্বারা কখনো পরিবারের সাথে সংশ্লিষ্ট আত্মীয় স্বজন দ্বারা সহিংসতার শিকার হন। এবং আমরা এটাও দেখেছি যে পরিবারকে ব্যক্তিগত পরিমন্ডলও রাষ্ট্রের আইনের আওতার বাইরে ভাববার প্রবণতার কারণে বেশীরভাগ ক্ষেত্রে সহিংসতার ঘটনাগুলো গণমাধ্যম পর্যন্ত পৌঁছায় না।

আমরা এটাও দেখেছি যে, পার্শ্ববর্তী বাড়ীতে যদি কোনো নারীর উপর তাঁর পরিবারের সদস্যরা নিপীড়ণ চালায়, কেউ সেখানে প্রতিবাদ করতে যায় না, কেউ আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থাকে সেটি জানাতে চায়না, কারণ বেশীরভাগ মানুষের **understanding** টা এমন যে এটা তাঁর পারিবারিক ব্যাপার। কিন্তু কোনো নারীর প্রতি নিপীড়ন সহিংসতা কোনোভাবেই পারিবারিক ব্যাপার হতে পারে না। এটি অবশ্যই আইনের আওতার মধ্যে পরে। এই বিশ্বাসটি যেন এবং এই চর্চাটি যেন বিস্তৃত আকারে বাংলাদেশে নেই।

পাশাপাশি, অনেক সহিংসতার ঘটনা খোদ পরিবারের পক্ষ থেকেই লুকিয়ে ফেলা হয়। ফলে যে সকল **data** নিয়ে আমরা কিছুক্ষণ পরেই আলোচনা করবো, সেই **data**গুলো বা আমি আমার আলোচনা যেটা করছি, সেটা মূলত পত্রিকায় যা আসে, এবং যেসকল ঘটনার মামলা হয়েছে বা আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার **intervention** আছে, সেগুলি নিয়ে আমরা আলোচনা করবো কারণ বাংলাদেশের যে সহিংসতার ঘটনা বা নিপীড়নের ঘটনা, তাঁর অধিকাংশই পত্রিকার পাতা পর্যন্ত পৌঁছায় না, এবং অধিকাংশই মামলা পর্যন্ত যায় না। স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে সেটি মিটমাট করে ফেলা হয়। বেশীরভাগ ক্ষেত্রে দেখা যায়, পরিবারের মধ্যেই এটি লুকিয়ে ফেলা হয় বা আড়াল করা হয়, এবং স্থানীয় পর্যায়ে পরিবারের বয়ঃজেষ্ঠ্যরাই এটার সমাধান করে ফেলেন। ফলে, প্রায় বেশীরভাগ ঘটনাই, আইন প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার দোড় অন্বিপৌঁছায় না।

পরিবারে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার নানা কারণ খুঁজে পাওয়া যায় সমাজ বিজ্ঞানের নানা তাত্ত্বিক আলোচনায়ও। আমরা যদি সহিংসতার কারণ সংক্রান্ত বিখ্যাত তত্ত্ব ও মডেল সমূহ দেখি, সেগুলোর সাথেও বাংলাদেশের যে সকল ঘটনা বা ঘটনা প্রবাহ এবং পরিবারিক জীবনে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা এবং বাইরের জীবনে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতাতাঁর একটা মিল খুঁজে পাওয়া যাবে।

আমরা জানি যে সহিংসতা নিয়ে নানা ধরনের মডেল এবং তত্ত্ব প্রচলিত রয়েছে। যেমন সাইক্রিয়াটিক মডেল বা বিকার-তত্ত্বীয় মডেল রয়েছে, রয়েছে সোসাল-সাইকোলজিক্যাল মডেল বা সামাজিক মনস্তাত্ত্বিক মডেল, রয়েছে সোসিও-কালচারাল মডেল বা সামাজিক-সংস্কৃতিক মডেল এবং তাঁর অন্তর্ভুক্ত রয়েছে রিসোসিওরী, সিস্টেম থিওরী, সোসাললার্নিং থিওরী, এক্সচেঞ্জ থিওরী এবং প্যাট্রিআর্কাল থিওরী। এই যে তত্ত্বগুলো, এগুলো দেখে আমরা বুঝতে পারবো যে নারীর প্রতি পারিবারিক সহিংসতাকে, বাংলাদেশে বিশেষ করে এবং তাঁর কিছুটা ভারতবর্ষের ক্ষেত্রেও খাটে, যে এইখানে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতাকে কোনো একক মডেলের মাধ্যমে ব্যাখ্যা করা সম্ভব না। অনেক সময় দেখা যায়, কোনো কোনো পারিবারিক সহিংসতার ঘটনায় একটি বিশেষ তত্ত্বের আংশিক প্রয়োগ সম্ভবপর হলেও, সামগ্রিক ঘটনার বিশ্লেষণে তত্ত্বটির ত্রুটি ধরা পরছে। ফলে একটি বিশেষ কোনো তত্ত্ব

দিয়ে এটি বোঝা যায় না। তবে বাংলাদেশের নানান নারী নির্যাতনের ঘটনাগুলোকে আমরা যদি বিশ্লেষণ করি, কোনো কোনো তত্ত্বের আলোকে সেটাকে বিশ্লেষণ করা সম্ভব।

যেমন ধারণা, পারস্পারিক সম্পর্ককে যখন স্বার্থের ভিত্তিতে বিবেচনা করা হয় এবং সেই স্বার্থ বিনষ্টের সম্ভাবনা তৈরী হলে যখন নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার সৃষ্টি হয়, সেটিকে আমরা এক্সচেঞ্জ থিওরীর আওতাভুক্ত করে আলোচনা করতে পারি (যেমন বাংলাদেশে, অনেকেংশে ভারতবর্ষের নিশ্চয়ই রয়েছে যৌতুকের ঘটনা)। এটিকে কিন্তু exchange theory এর আওতাভুক্ত আলোচনা করতে পারি কারণ যৌতুক প্রাপ্তির প্রত্যাশায় একজন স্বামী বা একজন পুরুষ যখন একজন স্ত্রীর কাছে বিয়ের পর প্রত্যাশা করে যে সে তাঁর বাবার বাড়ী থেকে অনেক সম্পদ নিয়ে আসবে, সেটি কিন্তু দাম্পত্য শুরু হওয়ার পর তাদের এই আর্থিক লেনদেন অনেক বড় মুখ্য একটি বিষয় হয়ে ওঠে এবং যখন এই আর্থিক লেনদেনটি মুখ্য হয়েওঠে, তখন একজন পুরুষ কিংবা একজন স্বামী, তাঁর স্ত্রীর উপর সেই সুবিধা প্রাপ্তির জন্য তাকে বাধ্য করতে থাকে এবং তাঁর সাথে সহিংস আচরণ করতে থাকে এবং বাংলাদেশে এই যৌতুক-কেন্দ্রিক নির্যাতনের সংখ্যা ব্যাপক। এবং দেখা যায় অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রে গ্রামাঞ্চলে এবং অনেক ক্ষেত্রে শহরেও যৌতুককে খুব নর্মলাইজ করা হয়। যৌতুক কখনও জোর করে আদায় করা হয়, কখনও বা উপহার সামগ্রির আদলে এটি করা হয়। ফলে এখানে যৌতুক-কেন্দ্রিক সহিংসতা এখানে অন্যতম একটি জায়গা জুড়ে আছে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার ক্ষেত্রে।

এরপর যদি আমরা দেখি সোসাল-লার্নিং থিওরী (Social Learning Theory), যেটি অনুসারে পরিবারের সদস্যদের মধ্যে কেউ একজন যদি সহিংস আচরণ করে, তখন কিন্তু পরিবারের অন্য সদস্য সেখান থেকে অনুপ্রাণিত হতে পারে কারণ পরিবারের একজনের সহিংস আচরণ দেখে, অন্যরাও বিশেষ করে বয়ঃ জেষ্ঠ্যদের সহিংস আচরণ দেখে যারা অনুজ, তারা অনেক সময় সহিংসতা রপ্ত করতে থাকে এবং কেবলমাত্র পুরুষের ক্ষেত্রে নয়, এই চর্চার ফলে একজন নারী, অন্য একজন নারীর প্রতিও সহিংস আচরণ করতে পারে। তবে এই সোসাল-লার্নিং থিওরীটি বা তত্ত্বটি সবসময় কাজ করে না। অর্থাৎ সবসময় পরিবারের বয়ঃজেষ্ঠ্যনারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ করলেই যে অনুজরাও সেটি করবে, সেটি ঘটে না। তবে কখনও কখনও ঘটে। তবে আমাদের এই যে পুরুষতান্ত্রিক সমাজ, বিশেষ করে বাংলাদেশের যে সমাজ-বাস্তবতা সেখানে কিন্তু সোসাল-লার্নিং থিওরী টি খুব ভালোভাবেই নানান পরিবারে কয়েম হতে দেখা যায়।

এরপর যদি আমরা প্যাট্রিআর্কাল থিওরীটি (Patriarchal Theory) আলোচনা করি, বাংলাদেশে সেটিও খুব ভালোভাবে খাটো পারিবারিক অনুশাষণ অনেক ক্ষেত্রে এখানে সহিংসতার ক্ষেত্র তৈরী করে। যেমন পুরুষতান্ত্রিক দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি এবং পারিবারিক প্রথার নামে এখানে প্রতিনিয়ত নারীর উপর আধিপত্য বিস্তার করে নারীকে অধঃস্তন করে তোলা হয়। এবং এটা নারীর স্বাভাবিক বিকাশে বাধা প্রদান করে। আমাদের Teaching profession-এ থাকার কারণে প্রায়শইঃ আমরা দেখেছি যে, একটি স্বতঃস্ফূর্ত নারী, বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে প্রথম জীবনে তাঁর যখন অনুপ্রবেশ ঘটে, তাঁর যে স্বতঃস্ফূর্ততা এবং পাশ করার পর তিনি যখন একটি দাম্পত্য জীবনে প্রবেশ করেন, তাঁর যে ব্যক্তিত্ব, তাঁর যে জীবনযাপন পদ্ধতি, সেখানে আকাশ-পাতাল ব্যবধান। এখানে পারিবারিক অনুশাষণের নামে তাঁর উপর নানান কিছু চাপিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। এবং নতুন একটি পার্সোনালিটি তৈরী করা হয়, যেই পার্সোনালিটি cases যদি দেখে, সে নিজেই চিনতে পারবে না। অর্থাৎ এই যে প্যাট্রিআর্কাল থিওরী, তাঁর মূল কথা যেটি, যে পুরুষতান্ত্রিক অনুশাষণ এবং প্রথা, যেটি কখনও ধর্মের নামে, কখনও সংস্কৃতির নামে নারীর পৃথিবীকে সীমাবদ্ধ করে ফেলে, সেটি

পুরোপুরি খাটে বাংলাদেশের সমাজ ব্যস্তবতায়। এখানে ধর্মের নামে, প্রথার নামে, Practice এর নামে কিন্তু বারবার নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা ঘটানো হয়। নারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ করা হয়।

এরপরে আমরা ফিরে যেতে চাই Wood এর কাছে, যিনি Resource Theory দিয়েছেন এবং সেখানে তিনি বলেছেন যে, "একজন স্বামীর তুলনায় শিক্ষা, চাকরী এবং দক্ষতায় যখন স্ত্রী এগিয়ে থাকে, অনেক ক্ষেত্রে যদি স্বামীটি কর্তৃত্বপরায়ণ হয়, যদি স্বামীটি পুরুষতান্ত্রিক মনোভাবপন্ন হয়, তাহলে তাঁর স্বামীর এই যে কর্তৃত্বপরায়ণ হওয়ার যে আকাজীমনোভাব সেটি স্বামী-স্ত্রীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ করতে সহযোগিতা করতে পারে।"

এই তত্ত্বটি সবসময় বাংলাদেশে খাটে না, কারণ বাংলাদেশে এটিও দেখেছি যে, যে সংসারে দারিদ্রতা নেই, যে সংসার অর্থনৈতিক বিচারে উচ্চবিত্ত, সেখানেও নারীর প্রতি নিপীড়ণ ও সহিংসতার ঘটনা প্রতিনিয়ত ঘটেছে। ফলে সবসময় এই থিওরীটি এখানে খাটেছে না।

যে তত্ত্বগুলো আলোচনা করলাম, সেগুলো ছাড়াও পুরুষ নারীর প্রতি কিন্তু সহিংস আচরণ করতে পারে। সহিংসতার কারণ হিসেবে Ti-Grace Atkinson বলেছেন যে, যখন পুরুষ নিরাপত্তাহীনতা ও হতাশায় ভোগে, তখন অন্যকে নির্যাতন করে সে তাঁর উত্তরণ ঘটাতে চায়। এবং আমাদের যে সমাজ-বাস্তবতা, এখানে প্রায়শই শুধুমাত্র পুরুষ নয়, সমাজের প্রতিটি সদস্যই নানান নিরাপত্তাহীনতা এবং হতাশায় ভোগে। এছাড়া যখন ধর্ষণকামী মানুষের মধ্যে (বলেছেন Ti-Grace) যখন মুখরোচক যৌনালাপ হয়, তাঁর বিকারগ্রস্থতা এবং তাঁর পরিবারের জীবন থেকে পাওয়া যে দৃষ্টিভঙ্গি এবং তাঁর পরিবারে চর্চিত যে অসাম্যের চর্চা, ইত্যাদিও অনেকসময় নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার অনুকূলে কাজ করতে পারে।" এটিকে ফেলা হচ্ছে সামাজিক সাংস্কৃতিক মডেলের মধ্যে। অর্থাৎ এটিও কিন্তু বাংলাদেশের বাস্তবতায় খুব ভালোভাবে কাজ করে।

এই যে একজন নারী নানান ভাবে পরিবার এবং পরিবারের বাইরে সহিংসতার শিকার হন, সেগুলি নারীকে নানানভাবে বিপর্যস্ত করে। তাঁর নানান ধরণের নিরাপত্তাহীনতা, বিপর্যস্ততা তৈরী করে, যেটি তাকে সঠিকভাবে বেড়ে উঠতে দেয় না, তাঁর ব্যক্তিত্ব বিকাশ করতে দেয় না, এবং নারীর যে যোগ্যতাসেই অনুপাতে সে বিকশিত হতে পারে না। এবং তাঁর জীবনকে একেবারেই ধ্বংসাত্মক পরিস্থিতির দিকে নিয়ে যেতে পারে। যেমন, আমরা যদি দেখি নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার যে ঘটনাগুলো বাংলাদেশে ঘটে সেগুলির ফলে নারীর নানা ধরণের নিরাপত্তাহীনতা তৈরী হয়। যেমন মনস্তাত্ত্বিক নিরাপত্তাহীনতা। যেমন এখানে গ্রামাঞ্চলে দেখা যায়, যারা পরিবারে আয় করেন না, "উপার্জন করেন না", (কারণ আমাদের গার্হস্থ্যকর্মের যে কর্ম, সেটাকে রাষ্ট্র count করে না)। সেই হিসাবে বলছি, যারা চাকুরী করেন না, তারা প্রায়শই তালাকের হুমকি, বহুবিবাহ এবং অর্থনৈতিক পরনির্ভরতা নিয়ে অনিশ্চয়তা বোধ করে। এবং প্রায়শই তারা স্বামীর সহিংস আচরণ মেনে নেয়। আমি আমার গবেষণায় দেখেছি, গ্রামাঞ্চলে (আমি কয়েকটি গ্রামের উপর Case study করেছি। এবং সেখানে দেখেছি যে) স্বামী নিয়মিত স্ত্রীকে থাপ্পর দেন, তাকে চুল ধরে টানেন, এবং মাঝেমাঝেই খুব সামান্য কারণে মারধর করেন। এবং সেটিকে তারা সহিংসতা বলে মনেই করেন না। তারা মনে করেন এটি স্বাভাবিক একটি ব্যাপার। কারণ যিনি আয় করেন, উপার্জন করেন, তাঁর মাথা মাঝে মাঝে গরম হতেই পারে, তিনি

মাঝে মাঝে ক্রোধে ফাটতেই পারেনা এ ধরনের মনস্তত্ত্ব আমি এখানে অনেক নারীর মধ্যে দেখেছি। আবার এখানে অসম্ভব প্রগতিশীল মানসিকতার নারীও বয়েছেন। নানান ধরনের মিথোক্রিয়া বাংলাদেশের সমাজব্যবস্থায় দেখা যায়।

আর একটি দেখিছি যে, নারীর প্রতি ক্রমাগত সহিংসতার ফলে নারী অর্থনৈতিক নিরাপত্তাহীনতায় ভোগে। এই সহিংস আচরণ সে মেনে নেয় এই ভেবে যে, তিনি যদি মেনে না নেন, তাঁর ভরণপোষণ কে করবে? এবং প্রায়শই নিজস্ব আয় সম্পর্কিত অনিশ্চয়তা এবং সে "দেন-মোহর" পাবে না জানে। দেন-মোহর আমাদের রাষ্ট্রীয় sharia (শরিয়ত) আইনে রয়েছে সেটির প্রয়োগতা নেই, ফলে, একজন নারী, তাঁর পরিবার জীবনে তাঁর প্রতি যে সহিংস আচরণ হয় সেগুলো মুখ বুজে খুব সহজেই মেনে নেন, এই অর্থনৈতিক নিরাপত্তাহীনতার থেকেও।

এছাড়াও সামাজিক নিরাপত্তাহীনতা রয়েছে।

মর্যাদাগত অবনতিও দেখা যায়। একজন ডিভোর্স নারীকে আমাদের সমাজ বাস্তবতায় অতটা ভাল দৃষ্টিভঙ্গিতে দেখা হয় না। ফলে সামাজিক নানান অবনয়নের কথা চিন্তা করেও নারীরা নিরাপত্তাহীনতায় ভোগে এবং সহিংস আচরণ মেনে নেয়।

নারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ কি শুধুমাত্র পরিবারেই ঘটে? না। পরিবারের বাইরেও ঘটে। আমি প্রথমেই পরিবারটিকে স্পষ্ট করে নিলাম এ কারণে যে, এটা দিয়ে আমাদের বাংলাদেশের পারিবারিক বাস্তবতাটা বোঝা যাবে, যেটা অনেকাংশে ভারতবর্ষের সাথেও মেলে। কিন্তু কেবলমাত্র পরিবারেই নয়, নারীরা পরিবারের বাইরেও নানা ধরনের শারীরিক নির্যাতন, মানসিক নির্যাতন, যৌন সহিংসতা, অর্থনৈতিক প্রবঞ্চনা, সামাজিক রীতি নীতির দোহাই দিয়ে নিপীড়ন এবং ধর্ষণের মতো পাশবিকতার শিকার হন।

নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা নিয়ে যখন আমরা আলোচনা করতে যাবো, তখন এর মধ্যে এতো কিছু অন্তর্ভুক্ত হবে, যেটা একটি session এ পুরোপুরি সম্পর্ক করা সম্ভব নয়। সেকারণে মূল focus রাখছি, পারিবারিক জীবনে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা, এবং কিছুটা focus রাখছি ধর্ষণের উপর, যেটি সম্প্রতি অত্যন্ত মারাত্মক আকার ধারণ করেছে, এবং অনেক পরিমাণে বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে, সেই দিকটা বিবেচনা রেখে। তাছাড়া, নানান বিষয় সহিংসতার অন্তর্ভুক্ত রয়েছে। আমরা যখন সহিংসতা নিয়ে আলোচনা করবো, তখন কেবলমাত্র নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা নিয়ে আলোচনাকরলে সহিংসতার আলোচনা পরিপূর্ণতা পাবে না। এখানে প্রান্তিক নারীর প্রতি একধরনের চিত্র | উচ্চবিত্ত নারীর ক্ষেত্রে আরেক ধরনের চিত্র | যিনি garments শ্রমিক, তাঁর ক্ষেত্রে আরেক ধরনের চিত্র। যিনি হিজরা, তাঁর ক্ষেত্রে নির্যাতনের, সহিংসতার আরেক ধরনের চিত্র। কেবলমাত্র নারী পুরুষের সহিংসতা কে নিয়ে সহিংসতাকে পরিপূর্ণ একটি আদল দেওয়া যায় না বা বোঝা যায় না। এখানে নারী-পুরুষ ছাড়াও কত ধরনের মানুষ আমাদের মধ্যে রয়েছে। তাদের প্রতি সহিংসতাও কিন্তু আলোচনা করার দাবী রাখোকিন্তু যেহেতু আমি আমার আলোচনাকে আজকে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার মধ্যে সীমাবদ্ধ রেখেছি, ফলে আমি অন্যদিকে যাচ্ছি না।

বাংলাদেশের গ্রামে নারীর প্রতি মৌখিক গালিগালাজ, চর-থাপ্পর, এগুলি খুবই common একটি ব্যাপার। সেটি তো খানিক আলোচনা করলাম। এবার আমি সাম্প্রতিক সময়ে বাংলাদেশে নারীর প্রতি যে সব চাইতে ভয়াবহ ঘটনাটি ঘটছে, 'ধর্ষণ' তাঁর উপর আলোচনা করতে চাই।

বাংলাদেশের সমাজ বাস্তবতায় দেখা যায় যে ধর্ষণ কখনও পরিবারের ভেতরে এবং কখনও কখনও পরিবারের বাইরেও ঘটছে। এবং যেহেতু স্বামী কর্তৃক স্ত্রীকে ধর্ষণের বিষয়, অর্থাৎ **marital rape** নিয়ে বাংলাদেশে তেমন আলোচনা শোনা যায় না, কারণ বিবাহিত সম্পর্ক থেকে ধর্ষণের কারণে আইনের দ্বারস্থ হয়েছেন, এমন নজির আমাদের দেশে দেখি না। আমার জানা নেই বা কোনো গবেষণা পত্রের দেখিনি ফলে সে বিষয়টি নিয়ে আলোচনা করছি না কিন্তু **marital rape** ছাড়া অন্যান্য যে ধর্ষণের ঘটনা রয়েছে, সেগুলোর দিকে একটু **focus** করতে চাই।

আমি আমার একটি গবেষণায় দেখিয়েছিলাম যে, ২০১০ সালে, বাংলাদেশে 535 টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা পত্রিকার পাতায় উঠেছিলো। এটি আমি করেছিলাম নানান পত্রিকার **report** দেখে এবং নানান সংস্থাগুলো যে **report** গুলি করেছিলো তাঁর **report** এর উপর ভিত্তি করে। কারণ যেগুলো পত্রিকার পাতায় পৌঁছায় না, যেগুলি জানা আমাদের পক্ষে অধিকাংশ ক্ষেত্রেই সম্ভবপর হয়ে উঠে না। এই যে, 2010 সালে 535 টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটেছিলো, নিশ্চিতভাবে আপনারা জানবেন যে, সংখ্যা আরও কয়েকগুণ বেশী কারণ আমাদের যে সমাজ-বাস্তবতা, সেখানে অধিকাংশ ঘটনাই খামাচাপা দেওয়া হয়। কিছু আমরা পত্রিকার পাতাকেই (এখানে অসংখ্য দৈনিক পত্রিকা আছে) সেগুলিকে **reference** হিসেবে নিয়ে উল্লেখ করতে চাই, 2010 সালে 535 টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটেছিলো এর 2020 সালে দেখা যাচ্ছে, সেই সংখ্যা দাড়িয়েছে 1627টি।

ধর্ষণের পর হত্যা করা হয়েছে 53 জনকে এবং আত্মহত্যা করেছেন 14 জন নারী। লক্ষ্যণীয়, ধর্ষণের সংখ্যা এই 10 বছরে তিনগুণ বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে। আপনারা নিশ্চয়ই জানেন পাশ্চাত্য দেশে হিসাবে যে, বাংলাদেশে শিক্ষার হার কিন্তু বেশ ভালো। নারী শিক্ষার হারেও বাংলাদেশ অনেক এগিয়ে আছে। কিন্তু সমাজ বাস্তবতা আমাদের অনেক সময় দিখাশিত করে যে, "কোথায় আসল সংকট?" কোন্ পদ্ধতিতে বাকিভাবে পথ পেড়োলে আমরা এখান থেকে মুক্তি পাবো? কারণ শুধুমাত্র শিক্ষিত হওয়া বা ব্যক্তির শোধরানো কিন্তু এক্ষেত্রে তেমন কোনো ভূমিকা রাখছে না। এটি একটি গড় ক্ষেত্র।

আমি একটু সংখ্যাাত্ত্বিক আলোচনায় যেতে চাই। দেখা যাচ্ছে 2010 সালে ধর্ষণের চেষ্টা করা হয়েছিলো (এক বছরের হিসাব আমি দিচ্ছি) 91 জনকে। এর মধ্যে 6 বছরের নীচেও ছিলো 6 জন। গণধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে এক বছরে 219 টি।

ঢাকার পার্শ্ববর্তী এলাকায় একটি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা উল্লেখ করতে চাই, যেখানে পাশের ঘরে বাবা ধর্ষণ করছে মাকে এবং তাঁরই পাশের ঘরে ছেলে ধর্ষণ করছে 13 বছর বয়সী মেয়েকে। অর্থাৎ অত্যন্ত জটিল এবং ঘৃণ্য পরিস্থিতির আভাস এখানে আমরা পাই। এবং দেখা গেছে যে, 2010 সালে মোট 626 টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটে। আমরা যদি 2020 সালে চলে আসি মাঝখানের সময়টাকে বাদ দিয়ে তাহলে দেখা যাচ্ছে 2020 সালে (শুধুমাত্র **rape** এর ঘটনা উল্লেখ করছি। অন্যান্য সহিংসতার ঘটনা আমি এখানে উল্লেখ করছি না) একক **rape** ঘটেছে 1302 টি এবং **gang-rape** 317 টি। সবমিলিয়ে 1627 টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে। অর্থাৎ ব্যাপকভাবে এই সংখ্যা বৃদ্ধি পেয়েছে। বাংলাদেশে সালিস এবং ফতোয়ার মধ্যে দিয়ে (এবিষয়ে ভারতবর্ষের অবস্থা সম্বন্ধে আমার কোনো ধারণা নেই) নিপীড়নের ঘটনা আগে ব্যাপক ছিলো যা আইন-প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার হস্তক্ষেপে অনেকটা কমেছে। 2020 সালে ৮টি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে, যেখানে ফতোয়াকে কেন্দ্র করে সালিসের মধ্যে নারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণের ঘটনা ঘটেছে।

এই সহিংস আচরণের কারণগুলো ছিলো love relationship, pre-marital pregnancy, character assassination (নারীর চরিত্র হনন ইত্যাদি) ইত্যাদি বিষয়কে কাজে লাগিয়ে ৮টি ভয়ঙ্কর সহিংস ঘটনা 2020 সালেই ঘটেছে। এই যে সহিংস পরিবেশ ও ধর্ষণ ছাড়াও যদি অন্যান্য দিকেও তাকাই, 2020 সালে আত্মহত্যার ঘটনা ঘটেছে 14 টি, সব মিলিয়ে injured হয়েছে, murder হয়েছে, assault হয়েছে, school থেকে drop-out হয়েছে (Stalker দের উদ্বেগের কারণে) 307 টি। ফলে এই যে নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা, সেটি কিন্তু কোনও ভাবেই কমছে না। এবং domestic violence-ও কিন্তু বাংলাদেশে ব্যাপক আকার ধারণ করেছে, যা ইতিপূর্বেও ছিলো। এখন সেটা মাত্রা ছাড়িয়ে গেছে দেখা গেছে স্বামী কর্তৃক নির্যাতিত হয়েছেন (একটি জরিপ বলছে 2020 সালে) 45জন এবং স্বামীর পরিবার কর্তৃক নির্যাতিত হয়েছেন 17জন এবং স্বামী কর্তৃক 2020 সালে মার্ডার হয়েছেন 240 জন। স্বামীর পরিবারের সদস্যদের দ্বারা হত্যা করা হয়েছে 71 জন নারীকে। নিজের পরিবার দ্বারা 56 জন নারীকে খুন করা হয়েছে। সব মিলিয়ে দেখা যাচ্ছে, এই সংখ্যাটি দাঁড়ালো 554 টি।

অর্থাৎ যে সময়ে বাংলাদেশের শিক্ষার হার এগিয়ে গেছে এবং রাজনৈতিক ব্যবস্থায় নারী এতটা এগিয়ে গেছে পাশ্চাত্য অন্যান্য দেশের তুলনায় সেখানে কিন্তু নারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ কোনোভাবেই কমছে না।

সুতরাং, যদি আমরা দেখি, নারীর প্রতি পরিবার এবং পরিবারের বাইরের লোকের সহিংসতা তাঁর নানান কারণ বাংলাদেশে দেখা যায়। এবং তাঁর মূল কারণ হিসেবে আমি এখানে উল্লেখ করতে চাই (যদিও যারা পৃথিবীর ক্ষেত্রেও এটি খাটে) যে, পুরুষ তাঁর ক্ষমতা প্রদর্শনের জন্য নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা ঘটায়। এটি যেহেতু পুরোপুরি একটি Patriarchal Society, সেই কারণে এই quote করা কথাটি "পুরুষের ক্ষমতা প্রদর্শনের জন্য নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা ঘটায়" পুরোপুরি খেটে যায়। বাংলাদেশ রাষ্ট্রের যখন জন্ম হয়েছিল তখন কিন্তু পাকিস্তান হানাদার বাহিনী এই একই কাজটি করেছে।

আমরা প্রত্যক্ষ করি যে, 1971 সালে মুক্তিযুদ্ধের ইতিহাস যদি আমরা দেখি, সেখানে দেখবো যে, পাক বাহিনী, বাঙালিদের ঘায়েল করতে, তাদের মানসিকভাবে ভেঙে দিতে এবং তাদের প্রতি ক্ষমতা প্রদর্শনের জন্য যুদ্ধকালীন সময় নারীর প্রতি নিপীড়ণ, সহিংসতা ও যৌন-নির্যাতন, বিশেষ করে ধর্ষণের মতো পাশবিক নিপীড়ণ চালিয়েছে। মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় বাংলাদেশের নারীদের প্রতি ধর্ষণ, পাকিস্তানী বাহিনীর ছিল একটি পরিকল্পিত কৌশল। তখন বাংলাদেশের নারীরা ধর্ষিত হয়েছেন অন্যদেশের হানাদার বাহিনীর দ্বারা, এখন নিজেদের স্বাধীন দেশের নাগরিকদের দ্বারাই ধর্ষণের শিকার হচ্ছেন। অর্থাৎ ধর্ষণ সবসময় একটি ঘৃণ্য কৌশল। সেটি যুদ্ধের সময় হোক কিংবা স্বাধীন দেশে হোক, এবং 71 এর মুক্তিযুদ্ধেও পাক বাহিনী এই ঘৃণ্য কৌশল ব্যবহার করেছে।

আমরা যদি দেখি, 1971 সালের মুক্তিযুদ্ধে নারীর প্রতি ধর্ষণের অন্যতম কারণ ছিলো যেটি সেটি একটু উল্লেখ করতে চাই। এটি আমাদের খুব আলোচিত একটি বিষয় এবং আপনাদের সাথে অনেক Connection ও আছে। বাংলাদেশের মুক্তিযুদ্ধের ইতিহাসের সেইজন্য উল্লেখ করছি। পাকিস্তানের জাতীয়তাবাদ প্রতিষ্ঠানের জন্য, পাকিস্তানী পুরুষতান্ত্রিক মতাদর্শ প্রতিষ্ঠানের জন্য, এবং তাদের যে ধর্ম-ভিত্তিক রাজনীতি, তাঁর বীজ বপন করার জন্য মূলত নারীর উপর ধর্ষণের মতো পাশবিক ঘটনা ঘটানো হয়েছিলো। এটি আমি পূর্বেও উল্লেখ করেছি যে, নারীর ধর্মীয় পরিচয় বর্ণ-পরিচয়, জাতিগত পরিচয়ের নামেও কিন্তু নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা চালানো হয় এবং 1971 এর সময় এখানে তাঁর ধর্মীয় পরিচয়টি তাঁর প্রতি সহিংসতার ক্ষেত্রে অনেক বড়ো কারণ

হিসাবে কাজ করেছে। অর্থাৎ পাকিস্তানের শাসক গোষ্ঠী ধর্ম-নিরপেক্ষ বাঙালী সংস্কৃতিকে কখনওই মেনে নিতে পারে না। তারা মনে করতো এদেশের মুসলমানরা হিন্দু ধর্মের আচার দ্বারা প্রভাবিত।

তারা বাঙালী জনগণের ধুতি-পড়া, নারীদের টিপ্ পড়া, রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীত প্রীতি-ইত্যাদিকে বিষয়কে পাকিস্তানীরা মনে করতো যে এটি হিন্দু-আয়না বাংলাদেশের মুসলমানদের তারা পৃথিবীর অন্যান্য দেশের মুসলমানদের সাথে মিলাতে পারতো না। এবং এদেশের মুসলমানদেরকে তারা তচ্ছিন্ন করতো। তারা মনে করতো "সাচ্ছা মুসলমান আমাদের তৈরী করতে হবে"। এবং সেই সাচ্ছা মুসলমান তৈরির নামে তারা ধর্ষণের মতো পাশবিক নিপীড়ন চালিয়েছে। এখানে ধর্ম একটি প্রধান factor হিসেবে কাজ করেছে।

আমরা '71 থেকে সাম্প্রতিক সময়ে একটু আসতে চাই। আমরা যদি ধর্ষণের কারণ অন্বেষণ করতে চাই, তাহলে আন্তর্জাতিক পরিস্থিতিতে আমাদের বিবেচনায় রাখতে হবে, এবং সেটিকেই বাংলাদেশের প্রেক্ষাপটে বিশ্লেষণ করতে হবে। বাংলাদেশের ধর্ষণের কারণ অন্বেষণ করতে আমি Susan Brown miller কাছে যেতে চাই, যিনি 1975 সালে তাঁর গ্রন্থ "Against our Will: Men, Women and Rape"-এ লিখেছেন যে "ভীতি সঞ্চার করার জন্য এবং নিজের পুরুষাঙ্গকে একটি অস্ত্র হিসাবে আবিষ্কার, নিঃসন্দেহে পুরুষের সবচেয়ে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ আবিষ্কারের একটি"। অর্থাৎ নারীকে ভীত-সন্ত্রস্ত করা, নারীর ব্যক্তিত্বকে আঘাতগ্রস্ত করা, নারীকে কাবু করা, শারীরিকভাবে, মানসিকভাবে এটি কিন্তু ধর্ষণের পেছনে প্রেরণা হিসেবে কাজ করে। সুসান তাঁর গ্রন্থে এটি উল্লেখ করেছেন এবং তিনি তাঁর গ্রন্থে ধর্ষণ ও ধর্ষণ culture নিয়ে নানা বক্তব্যকে উপস্থাপন করেছেন। এবং আমরা জানি যে তাঁর আলোচনার প্রেক্ষিতে আমেরিকা marital rape কে আইনের আওতায় আনা হয়েছে। আমরা তাঁর কাছে অনেক ঋণী।

তিনি তাঁর গ্রন্থটিতে এটিও দেখিয়েছেন যে কেন ধর্ষণ হয়? ধর্ষণের জন্য কে বা কী দায়ী? সমাজ দায়ী? না কি পরিবার দায়ী? এবং সুসানের বক্তব্য গুলোকে যদি আমরা আলোচনায় নিই, তাহলে বুঝতে পারবো যে, আসলেই কতটা পথ পেরোলে কাঙ্ক্ষিত মুক্তি? তিনি বলেছেন যে, আসলে মুক্তি নেই কারণ ধর্ষণ কোনো ব্যক্তিগত সমস্যা না। ধর্ষণ একটি সুচিন্তিত আর্থ-সামাজিক সংস্কৃতি অতএব এ সমস্যা নির্মূলে শুধুমাত্র ব্যক্তিগত আচরণ বা কড়া আইন প্রণয়ন করলেই এটি সামাধান করা যাবে না। উনি বলেছেন যে, যেদিন পৃথিবী থেকে ধর্ষণ উঠে যাবে, সেদিন কি হবে? পুরুষরা যেমন রাস্তায় নিরাপদে ঘোরাঘুরি করেন, তাঁরকাজ করে তাঁরা নিশ্চিন্তে কর্মক্ষেত্র থেকে ফিরে আসেন, এই যে, পুরুষের authority, এই যে পুরুষের power, সেই authority নারীরাও যদি পায়, তাহলে পুরুষের সেই power এবং authority অনেকটাই সংকুচিত হবে যা পুরুষরা কখনওই চাইবে না। ফলে, তাঁর power এবং authority automatically অনেকটাই নষ্ট বা সংকীর্ণ হয়ে যাবে। সেটি তিনি চাইবেন না। এবং সমাজের অর্ধাংশ যেহেতু পুরুষ, এবং তারা যদি সামগ্রিকভাবে এটি না চায়, সাংস্কৃতিক বিপ্লব যদি এক্ষেত্রে ঘটানো না যায়, তাহলে আমি সত্যই জানি না যে, করতটা পথ পেরোলে, আমাদের কাঙ্ক্ষিত মুক্তি অর্জন সম্ভব।

আমি আরও একটু আলোচনা করতে চাই যে, কেন পুরুষ চায় না যে নারী তাঁর সমান তালে চলুন, নারীর প্রতি নিপীড়ন বন্ধ হোক কিংবা অনেকক্ষেত্রে নারীরাও কেন পুরুষদের মতো role play করে? নারীরাও কেন পুরুষ প্রদত্ত যে authority সেটা দিয়ে নারী, নারীর প্রতি নিপীড়ন করে?

আসলে, আমরা জানি যে, আমরা যদি নারীবাদী সমাজতাত্ত্বিক পুরুষ David Hull কাছে যাই, তারা বলেছেন, পুরুষতাত্ত্বিক সমাজে কী প্রত্যাশা করা হয়? প্রত্যাশা করা হয় যে, সহধর্মিণী হবে বয়সে ছোট, বিশেষ করে নির্ভরশীল এবং শিশু স্বরূপা এবং স্বামী হবে তাঁর পথ-প্রদর্শক ও পরিচালক। অর্থাৎ এই বিষয়টি যখন তারা পায় না, বা পার্শ্ববর্তী ক্ষেত্রে দেখে না, তখন তাদের মধ্যে অনেক বেশী হিংসাত্মক প্রবণতা দেখা যায়। এবং সেটি নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার কারণ। ফলে পুরুষের এই চাওয়া কে ভাঙতে হবে।

নারীবাদী তাত্ত্বিকরা নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা এবং ধর্ষণের জন্য এই যে নারী-পুরুষের মধ্যে ক্ষমতার ভারসাম্যহীনতা, পুরুষের একচ্ছত্র ক্ষমতা, নারীর এইক্ষমতাহীনতা, এগুলিকে প্রধান কারণ হিসেবে উল্লেখ করেছেন। ধর্ষণের ক্ষেত্রে যৌনতার চেয়েও ক্ষমতার বিষয়টি বেশী সম্পর্কিত বলে তাত্ত্বিকরা উল্লেখ করেছেন। এবং আমি পুরুষ, আমার কাছে ক্ষমতা আছে, যে কোনো সময়ে যেকোনো নারীকে ভোগ করতে পারি, কিংবা আমার শারীরিক শক্তি বেশী; এই যে মানসিকতা এটি কিন্তু ধর্ষণের জন্য অনেক ক্ষেত্রে কাজ করে এবং প্রেরণা যোগায়।

আমরা জানি যে, ধর্ষণ যৌন নির্যাতনের চরম পর্যায়। বাংলাদেশের একজন নৃবিজ্ঞানী মেঘনা গুহ ঠাকুরতা, তাঁর "বাংলাদেশের নারী নিপীড়ন, রাষ্ট্রের ভূমিকা" গ্রন্থে বলেছেন, যে ধর্ষণকে নারীর প্রতি চরম সহিংসতার প্রদর্শনের নামান্তর বলে পুরুষরা ভাবে। তিনি বলেছেন যে, ধর্ষণ আঘাত হানে নারীর দেহে, তাঁর সত্তায়, তাঁর আত্মপ্রত্যয়ে ও তাঁর নিরাপত্তা জ্ঞানো এবং পুরুষ খুব ভালো করেই জানে যে ধর্ষণের মধ্য দিয়েই নারীর আত্ম-পরিচিতিকে একেবারেই ধূলোয় মিশিয়ে দেওয়া সম্ভব। ফলে ধর্ষণের মতো পাশবিক নিপীড়ণ যে ঘটায় নারীর আত্ম পরিচয়কে একেবারে ধূলোয় মিশিয়ে দেওয়ার জন্য আমাদের মনে রাখতে হবে যে একজন কর্মজীবী নারীর অভিজ্ঞতা একধরণের, যিনি house wife তাঁর গৃহ ব্যবস্থাপনা আছে। তাঁর অভিজ্ঞতা একধরণের। যিনি যৌনকর্মী, তাঁর একধরণের অভিজ্ঞতা। মনে রাখা দরকার, একজন যৌন কর্মীর অধিকার আছে, তিনি কার সঙ্গে যৌন কাজ করবেন? বা করা সঙ্গে করবেন না। আমাদের আলোচনায় কিন্তু যৌন কর্মীর সহিংসতা নিয়েও আলোচনা থাকা উচিত ছিল।

একজন স্ত্রীরও অধিকার আছে যে তিনি আজ তাঁর স্বামীর সাথে যৌন সম্পর্কে যেতে চান বা চান না। এগুলো হল দুজনের সম্মতির ব্যাপার। এছাড়া সম্মতি বিহীন নানা ধরণের যৌন-সহিংসতা তো রয়েছেই। নারীর সাথে জোর করে যৌনসম্পর্ক স্থাপন করা যে যায় না এবং নারীর শরীর যে তাঁর নিজের এবং তাঁর প্রতি যে সম্মান প্রদর্শন সেটির চর্চা আসলে খুবই জরুরী। সেক্ষেত্রে সাংস্কৃতিক যে চিন্তা, তাঁরও পরিবর্তন দরকার। এবং স্ত্রীর ইচ্ছার সম্মান না দিয়ে জোর পূর্বক যদি একজন পুরুষ সহবাস করে, সেটি যে ধর্ষণ বলে গণ্য হবে এই চিন্তাই বাংলাদেশের সমাজব্যবস্থায়, অধিকাংশ পুরুষদের নেই। বাংলাদেশের সমাজব্যবস্থায় একজন husband মনে করেন যে, তাঁর সাথে তাঁর স্ত্রীর বিবাহিত সম্পর্ক রয়েছে এবং বিবাহিত সম্পর্ক মানেই তাঁর সাথে তাঁর যৌন সম্পর্ক স্থাপন করার অধিকার রয়েছে, এবং সন্তান জন্মানের অধিকার রয়েছে। ফলে এখানে স্ত্রীর মতামত খুব বেশী গুরুত্বপূর্ণ নয়।

এবং অনেকক্ষেত্রে স্ত্রীরাও মনে করেন যে, স্বামীর অধিকার আছে- 'হক' আছে যে, তাঁর প্রতি সে জোর করতে পারে। ফলে এই সামাজিক বাস্তবতায় নারীরা কিন্তু ধর্ষণ ওনানান ধরনের নিপীড়নের শিকার হতেই পারে।

বাংলাদেশের সমাজ বাস্তবতায় দেখা যায় (এটি ভারতবর্ষের ক্ষেত্রেও ঘটে) যেখানে নারীর প্রতি সহিংস আচরণ, ধর্ষণের হার এতো বেশী কেন? কেন নারীরা নিশ্চুপ বা কেন তারা আইন-প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার কাছে যায় না? কারণ আমরা দেখতে পাই যে, ধর্ষণের ঘটনায় নারীকেই প্রমাণ করতে হয়, তিনি ধর্ষণের শিকার হয়েছেন। ধর্ষণের পরীক্ষায় 2-finger test নিয়ে, এতো এতো আলোচনার পরেও সেই test টি বন্ধ হয়নি। তবে আমরা আশার আলো দেখতে পাচ্ছি, বর্তমানে বাংলাদেশে ধর্ষণের শিকার হয়ে অনেকেই সাহস করে মামলা করেছেন। অনেক legal prosecution হওয়ার ফলে প্রশাসনের মধ্যেও সদিচ্ছা তৈরী হয়েছে, এবং ধর্ষণের শাস্তি নিশ্চিত করার জন্য তৎপরতা অনেক বেড়েছে।

এবং বাংলাদেশে, বর্তমানে ধর্ষণের সংখ্যা একদিকে যেমন ব্যপক হারে বেড়েছে, এবং বিভিন্ন সংবাদ মাধ্যমের সাহায্যে কিংবা গণমাধ্যম বা টেলিভিশনের মাধ্যমেও অনেক ঘটনাও আমরা জানতে পারি, অনেক পরিবার ঘটনা ধামাচাপা দিতে চাইলেও সাংবাদিকরা সেই ঘটনা বের করে ফেলছেন, ন্যায্যতার জন্য তারা fight করছে, মানবাধিকার সংস্থা ও কর্মীরাও এখানে গুরুত্বপূর্ণ ভূমিকা রাখোকিন্তু আশ্চর্য ঘটনা এটাই যে, একটি ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটান সাথে সাথেই Facebook যে প্রতিবাদের ঝড় দেখা যায়, সেটি দুদিন পর সব ভুলিয়ে দেয়। সেই প্রতিবাদ দীর্ঘস্থায়ী হয়না। ফলে একজন ধর্ষিত নারী, যখন সাহস নিয়ে এগিয়ে যায়, আইন-প্রয়োগকারী সংস্থার কাছে যায়, এবং তাঁর 'ইনসারফ' পাওয়ার যে পথ-পরিক্রমা সেটি বেশ দীর্ঘ। প্রথম দিনে তাঁর সাথে থাকলেও, এই দীর্ঘ পথটা নারীকে পেরোতে হয় একা। ফলে সে নারীও জানে না যে, কতটা পথ পেরোলে আসলে সত্যিকার অর্থে তিনি ন্যায্যতা পাবেন?

এই দীর্ঘ পথ-পরিক্রমা যখন তাকে একা একা হাটতে হয়, সেই সাহসটি না থাকার কারণেও কিন্তু নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার ক্ষেত্রে অনেক নারী প্রতিবাদ করেন না। ফলে কতটা পথ পেরোলে আসলে মুক্তি সম্ভব, সেটি আসলে খুব জটিল পরিস্থিতি বাংলাদেশের সমাজ বাস্তবতায়। আবার দেখা যায় যে ধর্ষককে দৃষ্টান্তমূলক সাজার আওতায় আনতে হলে 2003 সালের যে সংশোধিত নারী ও শিশু নির্যাতন দমন আইন আছে, সেখানে ধর্ষণের বিচারে যে সময় নির্ধারণ করা আছে, সেই সময়ের মধ্যেই তা শেষ করতে হবে, এই আইনের বিধিমালা নিয়ম প্রয়োগ করাও কিন্তু জরুরী। এবং নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতা বন্ধ করতে, ধর্ষণ সহ অন্যান্য যে সহিংসতারয়েছে, সেগুলি বন্ধ করতে এবং তাঁর সমানাধিকার প্রতিষ্ঠা করতে কিন্তু এই বাংলাদেশের পিতৃতান্ত্রিক ব্যবস্থার যে চক্র বা কুপমন্ডুক ধর্মীয় মৌলবাদীদের যে চক্র, সেখান থেকে বাংলাদেশকে বেড়িয়ে আসতে হবে। রাষ্ট্রীয় ও উচ্চপর্যায়ে যারা রয়েছেন, যারা রাষ্ট্রের নীতি-নির্ধারণ পথটিতে রয়েছেন, তাদেরকে এবং যারা activism এ রয়েছেন, যারা কর্মকাণ্ডে সম্পর্কিত আছেন তাদের মধ্যে একটি সেতু নির্মান করতে হবে। যেন নারীর প্রতি সহিংসতার ঘটনায় তারা যুক্তবদ্ধভাবে কাজ করতে পারে।

এবং এর ফলে যেন নারীরা বিশ্বাস করতে শেখে যে বিরাজমানে যে সহিংস পরিস্থিতি, যে বৈষম্য সেটি সঠিক নয়, সেটি প্রকৃত প্রদত্ত নয় এবং নারীদের সমানাধিকার প্রাপ্তি, সহিংসতামুক্ত একটি পরিস্থিতি প্রাপ্তি সম্ভব। এবং নারীর মনে যখন এ ধারণার বিশ্বাস

জাগবে তখন নারীও তাঁর প্রতি সহিংসতার ঘটনায় আরও বেশী আকারে প্রতিরোধ গড়ে তুলবে এবং নারী ব্যক্তি যখন প্রতিরোধ গড়ে তুলবে, তখন কিন্তু এই বিষয়টি মার্য পর্যায়ে আরও বেশী আলোচিত হবে এবং নীতি-নির্ধারণের স্বার্থে যদি তাঁর একটা মেলবন্ধন করা সম্ভব হয়, তাহলে নারীর প্রতি যে সহিংসতা, তাঁর পথে কিছুটা মুক্তি আলো আমরা নিয়ে আসতে পারবো। তবে আমি সত্যই জানিনা যে, সে আলো কতটা প্রকট হবে? এবং কতটা অন্ধকারের পথ পেরোলে সে আলোর পথে আমরা এগোতে পারবো? ধন্যবাদ, যদি আপনাদের কারও কোনো প্রশ্ন থাকে করতে পরানে। আমি উত্তর দেওয়ার চেষ্টা করবো।

Webinar 7

Distinguished Lecture on

Women and struggles for ‘Free’ Natural Resources

Alka Parikh

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(The lecture was delivered on 26th February 2021)

Today, I am going to talk about the struggles of women for ‘free’ - the so called free natural resources. I want to show you some pictures. The first picture shows a beautiful colony with a beautiful swimming pool in the middle: the dream house for anyone who would be staying in a society with a swimming pool in the middle. Is it not something which all of us would envy others for? And wish that one day we would also have this. But there is something else which I want to show you — just one kilometre down the lane from here we see women standing in a line. Each woman is carrying one vessel in her hands. It may be a *ghara* (an earthen pot) or a bucket or whatever. But the point is that everybody is carrying just one vessel because that is all that they will be allowed to carry. Just one vessel and with that they have to manage their drinking needs, bathing and cleaning needs. When I say cleaning I mean cleaning of vessels, cleaning of the house, cleaning of vessels, cleaning of their own bodies and washing clothes, etc. It is not that this is something that happens every day but in Mumbai, most of the slums have a public tap. We find a lot of people crowding around public taps in Mumbai slum areas trying to get access to this water which comes at very low pressure and comes hardly for one and one and a half hours in the morning. They have to get up early in the morning to fill water and collect it for all their requirements. You have to collect all your requirements from that. This is a very different scenario from a posh colony with a swimming pool. What I want to show here is that the posh colonies of Mumbai have enough water so that they can even fill their swimming pools which is a luxury and not a necessity at all and in the same city there is not enough drinking water for people living in slums. Inequality can often be this ugly.

We had done a survey of slums with the slum dwellers of Mumbai. When we were doing that survey we found that water was fetched from the public taps and at times the pressure was so low that someone from the family would have to go to far off areas to get water. They often went on cycles to get water. The situation is so worse that some of these poor people also had to buy

water. All of these are another reality of Mumbai. Mumbai has beautiful posh colonies and Mumbai also has people who struggle for water every single day.

This is another reality that I wanted to share with you. Here is a picture that shows women collecting water from water supply pipes. In most parts of India, we will find women going to fetch water, we do not see men doing that. Collecting water is generally supposed to be the responsibility of the woman. In cities like Mumbai or Ahmedabad, I have seen that men do help out. It is generally, primarily the responsibility of the woman as far as India and Indian culture is concerned. In this picture, we see that women are trying to access water from the water pipes. Mumbai High Court had actually made a ruling saying that regular drinking water was a fundamental right, and it was unfortunate that people still do not have access to drinking water and if the government cannot provide water to these people and if this is the hardship, they had to go through then the authorities cannot tell them not to take water from supply pipes. They are doing this because they have been denied the fundamental right of access to drinking water. They were left with no choice. So, these are really some sad realities as far as urban India is concerned.

Now, let us look at rural India. In rural India, the responsibility of fetching water had been laid on the women's heads for centuries. Imagine carrying a ghara (an earthen pot) filled with water on your head. These women carry such gharas on their heads for several kilometres. You could understand how difficult it is. How painful it is. It is drudgery for them. And most of them carry two gharas on their heads and these two gharas are not going to be enough for their house so they have to make more such trips to fetch water. Now, in the rural areas, hand pumps are being dug. But still, in many parts of India, we find that women are still carrying water sometimes from short distances, sometimes from as far as 2-3 km.

There was a report in Hindustan Times on 24th August 2014. It said that "every second woman in rural India (the exact percentage was something like 54%) walked on an average 173 kilometres just to fetch potable water in 2012. What they are reporting was that her trek was 25 kilometres longer than what it was in 2004. By the time we go to 2025, it might be 200 kilometres. What that means is that every single day the women have to walk, walk and walk to reach a place that will give some water and then with those heavy vessels they have to walk back. In spite of all these struggles, all these drudgeries at the end of the day they do not have even 50 litres of water per person per day which is supposed to be the bare minimum requirement for water for any decent living conditions. In fact, as far as Europe is concerned, they say it should be 100 litres per person per day. In India, we say 50 litres/person/day, but we are not being able to provide to our population even that.

I was doing a survey for food security and a woman in the Marathawada region of Maharashtra reported that she spends at least three to four hours every day in fetching water. She told that she gets up around six in the morning for fetching water and she comes back by ten

thirty, sometimes eleven. It depends on what time she is able to start. But by the time she comes back the day for hired labourer has already started. She cannot go for any other work. Her day is gone for fetching water for the family every day. The family is not a well to do family and so they actually need two people to work because she had three children—three very small children. But the thing was she did not have the choice to even work because she had the responsibility of fetching water. So, this is the economic impact of wanting to fetch water or need to fetch water from a distance. The economic impact is they become poorer because they cannot go for work because they get late.

In the same area, when I was doing the survey, I found that every single day there were quarrels over water. Another woman told me that ‘my day begins with quarrels; my day begins with trekking so how is it possible for me to be happy.’ When I was talking to women about quarrels—absolutely bitter quarrels that happened every single day and for those one and a half hours they were constantly fighting to get as much water as they can from that the public tap, they told that in the morning even when we are doing other things our minds are so full of all those quarrels and we feel very bad and thus we are not happy. We are generally very angry with our children; we are very angry with everybody. What I am trying to say here is that one—there is the economic impact and two— there is physical/health impact. Physical/health impact means that when the women are fetching water in very heavy vessels on their heads for a very long period of time their back is going to be affected. Their spinal cord somewhere gets hurt a lot. So, these women will be facing a lot of health issues with this. As if that is not enough, as I just explained with the second point —mental health. They cannot be happy because they are constantly quarrelling every single day for this just bare necessity of having water. These are the things what I meant by saying struggles for free natural resources. Water is supposed to be free but see what is happening. I also wanted to point out that studies have shown that water struggles have resulted in withdrawing the girl child from school. She either goes with the mother if the family is big and you require more than one hand to fetch enough water for the entire family or she remains at home and looks after the siblings when mother has gone looking for water for three to four hours sometimes. So, this is one more impact. The female child is denied the right to education because water is becoming more and more scarce.

Here is another picture of an ‘All Women Panchayat’. What is an All Women Panchayat? An all women panchayat is something that Maharashtra started having in 2016. What they did was they said that only women will contest for panchayat elections and no man will contest. In some villages, they even said that there would be no opposition. All women will be elected unopposed so that we will have an all women panchayat. There were villages in Maharashtra which have tried this out and some of them were pretty successful. I found something very interesting when I was reading studies about All Women Panchayats. I found that all without exception—all women Panchayats decided that the first thing that they will do is to concentrate on the provision of water in whichever way they can. It can be tap water. It can be harvesting of water. It can be

deepening of water tank. Whatever was required, whatever was the source of water for that particular village, all of these women panchayats decided to do work on improving access to water. Note my point. This is not always the case when men are Sarpanch's. But the moment the women came to power and if all of them are women it is their voice only which carries only their voice. It shows how much women are affected by water issues. If we give all the authority in the hands of women, they are going to solve the water problem first.

Now let's look at what can be done? First, let me explain as to why water is becoming more and more of an issue. The main source of irrigation in India is groundwater. That is because almost 60-65% of Indian land is semi-arid in nature. May it be Maharashtra, may it be Gujarat, may it be Madhya Pradesh, may it be Karnataka, or Andhra Pradesh. All these states are semi-arid which means that they don't have that many rivers. So, the farmers have to depend on groundwater. That means that they keep pumping out water for irrigation. Now, over a period of time, for the entire India, the recharge rate is much lesser than the extraction rate. So, we withdraw a lot of water from the soil and then what goes in and thus the water that remains in the earth is becoming lesser and lesser. This is the reason why water table is going down. There is one very interesting thing that I want to tell you. I was surveying some villages in Gujarat. These villages are close to the Narmada Canal and women there told me that they are not able to get enough water in the vicinity and they have to go to a tube well which is almost one and a half km away to fetch water. I asked them that they have a Canal right here, so why can't they get the water from there. They told me that it is illegal to get water from the Canals. That means, the canals carry water for irrigation only. and it is not allowed to use canal water for drinking purposes or other household uses. I agree this is a very difficult problem where you are saying food vs water. What a horrible choice. But at the same time, it is a question worth asking that how much water would they need for drinking and cleaning vessels and things like that. As opposed to that how much water is going to be used as far as irrigation is concerned. So, can't we give water the first priority and then every other need will be taken care of. We have to go for irrigation technologies which do not require too much water so that we can give water for purposes of drinking, for purposes of cleaning and for health and hygiene.

Jal Jeevan Abhiyan is a very important scheme of the Government of India. The government is trying to provide 100% tap connections to all the rural areas of India. This is the goal with which the government working. But if we look at the data what we find is that only 35% of the rural households in India have tap connections which means 65% don't have tap connections. This means that 100% tap connection will take time. We will have to look for some other means through which water could be made available in the vicinity. For this, the emphasis needs to be on water harvesting and managing water locally.

The second thing, that I just wanted to highlight is the struggle to get the fuelwood. Statistics say that women spend up to two hours a day for collecting fuelwood. Now, think about it. Women take two to three hours per day to fetch water and now add to two hours a day for

collecting fuelwood. Once again carrying a lot of loads on their head and walking with it. Collecting fuel wood is more strenuous because they have to cut wood first and after that they carry that on their heads which means more drudgery. Deforestation and shrinking wastelands have made the collection far tougher. Mainly what has happened is that now women depend on the trees which are on the roadside. They do not always get suitable wood which is the reason why they have to spend more time for collecting the fuelwood. We can say that Ujjwala Yojana has been successful, and it is reported that almost more than 90% of the rural households in India today now have Ujjwala connection. What we are finding out as time goes by is that though Ujjwala Yojana has helped everyone to acquire LPG connection, the refill rate is much lesser and the people in rural areas rarely use LPG for cooking. They continue using chulha (an earthen stove in which wood or cow dung cake is used as fuel). The LPG and the gas stove are generally more for a show rather than for use. This I have found in Panchmahal in Gujarat which is a tribal village. This is what I found even in Arunachal which is also a tribal region. In many places which are really very poor what I found is that they have LPG, but they do not use it much. What is the reason? Price is one issue. They are not always getting subsidies. It means they have to shell out about Rs. 700 per LPG cylinder which they are not being able to give. That is the reason why they are not getting it refilled. Delivery time is another thing. In all these tribal regions, wherever I visited, and this includes Maharashtra Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh I found that delivery time is often one month, two months, two and half months. So, they have no other option but to get back to old chulas and collecting fuelwood which means once again the entire burden falls on the woman. There are some NGOs which are saying that maybe the mindset is such as they are used to using the chulha. Mindsets for using chulha is so strong that maybe they are not comfortable using the gas. It is quite possible, but I think price and delivery time are some reasons they are also playing their parts. Thus, the struggle for fuelwood continues. So, does the drudgery.

The last thing that I want to talk about is the struggle which is happening because of the shrinking of wastelands. Women used to collect fuelwood and some kinds of fruits from wastelands but when the wasteland started shrinking, they could not get these things. Then, someone came up with the idea of rejuvenating wastelands with the help of these women. There was a movement to involve women in rejuvenating the wastelands. This was done by some NGOs in Maharashtra. This was also done in Gujarat by some NGOS which were actually working to uplift the masses and improve their livelihood. But everywhere what they found that even that has not worked very well because cooperation is very necessary, which was lacking. It was seen that after a point of time because of quarrels it kind of fell through. Fuelwood problem is still continuing in spite of LPG, in spite of using wastelands for growing fuelwood. There is still much more that needs to be done.

The purpose of this talk is to make all here empathize with the pains and struggles that woman of rural India have to go through to get the resources that are provided free by nature. With this, I end my talk.

Thank you very much.

Webinar 8

Distinguished Lecture on Beyond Westernise Theorising Feminism in the Indian Context

Chandrakala Padia

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advisory Board of Education, MHRD, New Delhi**

(The Lecture was delivered on 30th March 2021)

At the outset, I would like to thank Prof. Lipi Ghosh for inviting me to deliver a lecture under this 'Distinguished Lecture Series' and the subject of my discourse today is "Beyond Westernise Theorising Feminism in the Indian Context." Before I start dealing with my paper, I would like to say that there is a great difference between Indian thought and Indian practice. This subject is too wide to cover all aspects of it but today I would be mainly focussing on how the Indian scholars and many of the Western scholars also have misunderstood our Indian texts. They have come out with a very distorted and mystified image of our entire condition. That is what I am going to speak about today. I don't know how far I am going to satisfy you.

In the present paper, I am trying to project how due to Ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases present in Western Feminist discourse, an Indian Theory of Feminism could not be evolved though there is no dearth of literary and sociological writings in both classical and modern languages of India. I am also trying to uncover the misreading of our ancient texts by many Western and Indian scholars. How these scholars have misunderstood the conceptual foundations of these texts and have distorted the meaning of '*Parampara*' in the Indian world view resulting into false representations of Indian and Third World women. How their limited understanding of the Sanskrit language led to wrong translations of Indian texts leading to justifications of many unhealthy practices in Indian society.

Scholars have studied and analysed the Indian reality through some borrowed Western models. This has come in the way of constructing an Indian theory of feminism. It is really unfortunate that in spite of the rich corpus of literary and sociological writings in our languages, both classical and modern, on issues related to women, there has been no concerted attempt to

construct an Indian theory of feminism. There exists Black Feminism, American or French School of Feminism but no Indian School of Feminism. The reason lies in the fact that Indian academia has either ignored the Indian tradition and relied on western epistemological models or has relied on their interpretations of Indian texts and conditions. To me, this blanket following of the West, colonial mindset and little attention to our own traditions and cultures have led to misreading's of our Indian texts, misrepresentation of their conceptual foundations, distortion of the meaning of *Parampara*, collapse of ethical reference, identification of modernity with westernisation and progress and construction of several binaries. Within such a framework, women are supposed to be emancipated only through western economic rationality where there is no place for historically informed and culturally specific analyses. Such a notion of women's emancipation has some serious implications. There have emerged three false representations of Third World Women.

- a) In the first representation, western feminists have subconsciously internalised the demeaning images of Indian and Third World cultures to the total neglect of their positive aspects. There are numerous examples of such representations. Cynthia Enloe in her work 'Bananas, Beaches and Bases Making Feminist Sense of International Politics' writes about veiled Third World women as, I quote, "mindless members of a haram preoccupied with petty domestic rivalries rather than with artistic and political affairs of their times." In this presentation, the public-private dichotomy is projected in the same way as that of the West but within the double standard of colonial hierarchy. Western women are deemed superior while Third World women are being treated as oblivious to the real world and as inferior to western women because western women do not wear a veil. That is why Leila Ahmed in her magnum opus work entitled 'Women and Gender in Islam' argues that westerners analyse the social construction of women in the non-western context. They use feminism, women and even gender as unqualified terms, for example, veiling is always represented as an oppressive practice, but the veil is both a marker of autonomy, individuality and identity as well as a marker of inequality and sexist oppression.
- b) In the second representation, Third World women are shown as sex objects. This representation is exemplified in Malek Alloula's 'The Colonial Harem' and Rana Kabbani's 'Europe's Myths of Orient: Devise and Rule.' In both the books, women of the Third World are asked to be civilised through their contact with the colonisers. In both images, the Third World women are not allowed to speak and are deeply in shadow. Colonisation is justified as a benign and paternalistic attitude of the coloniser rather than a subjugating and exploiting practice.
- c) In the third representation, western feminist and feminist writings often portray Third World women as victims. These feminists claim to know the shared and gendered oppression of women. In so doing, they misrepresent the varied interest of different women by homogenising the experiences and conditions of western women across time

and culture. Chandra Mohanty argues that such a monolithic and singular portrayal of Third World women as victims of modernisation of undifferentiated patriarchy and of male domination produce reductive understandings of Third World women's multiple realities.

In all the three representations, Third World women are discursively created separate and distinct, distant from the historical, socio-political and lived material realities of their existence. They share the implicit assumption that Third World women are traditional, non-liberated and need to be civilised and developed more like western women. Further, there has been no effort to understand Indian reality in a socio-historical, cultural context. To illustrate, the forms of violence against the Third World women such as dowry murders get represented in the West as instances of death by culture. While analogist forms of violence in the western context such as domestic brutality and murders have been regarded as merely episodic. Tran Duc Thao, the great Vietnamese thinker, has pointed out that such an approach fails to be sympathetic to cultural differences and so tends to prescribe a kind of apartheid policy of separate development which may be put thus: keep your way of life and ethnic values within the borders of your homeland. Such a misreading of culture arises out of the fact that most of the western scholars have adopted anthropological perspectives to culture. This way of looking rests on the analysis of cultures merely on the basis of outward modes of living such as dress and food habits and it is precisely this perspective which shaped most feminist approaches to the Third World today. As a result, speaking of culture in general, western culture either totally excludes or marginalises Third World culture or is unsympathetic to other cultures as it has always based its understanding of these cultures not on what they really are but only on their representations replete with unduly negative stereotypes and imputations of cultural inferiority. This is ridiculous. On the one hand, they prefer to adopt condescendingly a benevolent attitude by taking special care to insist that third world women be represented in feminist writings and the other, they exhibit a strong tendency to visualise all women merely on the basis of the feminine figure and other external features ignoring the unseen and essential difference of value sense and cultural traditions. This is the reason that many third world feminist scholars argue that if their women are to be liberated, they would have to raise their voice against the essentialist constructions of the third world women, universalist assumptions of sexist oppressions across different cultures and binary constructions of modern universal tradition.

In the Indian context, no importance is accorded to the learning of Sanskrit (this is the second point) as a key to the understanding of one's sociological texts resulting in misrepresentation of these texts both by the Western and Indian scholars. It needs to be elaborated how this has led the people of both north and south to have a distorted and fabricated understanding of our texts.

I would like to cite a few examples. One of the most glaring examples is that one of the verses of Rigveda (1/10:18.7). When in September 1987, an 18 year old woman Roop Kanwar immolated herself in the name of Sati many of our Indian writers claimed that this *Sati Pratha*

had the sanction of the Vedas. In support of this claim, they cited a hymn from the Rigveda which they say requires the widow to sit within the fire that burns dead husband's body. I would like to quote that verse,

imā nārīravīdhavāḥ supatnīrāñjanena sarpiṣā sam viśantu |

anaśravo'namīvāḥ suratnā ā rohantu janayo yonimagre || (Rig Veda 10.18.07).

This verse has been misread as 'May these very good and holy women who are devoted to their husbands enter into the fire together with the body of the husband'. But Vedic scholars later proved that this reading of the Hymn is based on an orthographic mistake. The significant word here is 'agre' which means in front and not 'agne' or 'agni'. Even if we accept the reading 'agne' it would never mean 'into the fire' for the word would still be in the vocative case and signify that agni was being addressed. The sense of into the fire would be yielded only if the word were in the dative case which would be 'agnaye'. P.V. Kane claims that the verse had been presented in the corrupt form because the interpreter probably read the last quarter of the Rig Veda 10.18.07 *asārohantu jalayonim-agre* (let them ascend the watery seat or origin, O fire!) meaning 'may fire be to them as cool as water.' All other verses make it clear either the Hymn directs the widow to sit facing her dead husband or that this mantra was not addressed to a widow at all but to ladies of the deceased man's household whose husbands were living. Such a view has been availed of in Grhyasutra of Asvalayana. However, the point that the disputed Rig Veda verse can never be interpreted as requiring the widow to die with the husband because it is all the more clear when one reads the very next verse. Here, the wife is directed to quietly accept her loving husband's death, arise from her husband's side and resume her place in the world. That is again Rigveda mandal 10.18.8,

udīrśva naryābhi jīvalokam gatāsum etam upaśeṣa hi |

hasta grabhāsya didhiṣaos tavedam patyur janitvam abhisambabhūtha ||

(Meaning Rise! Come unto the world of life O woman! Come, he is lifeless by whose side you lie. As far as your married life to the one who seized your hand and wooed you as a lover is concerned - you have lived it out completely).

In order to construct an Indian theory of feminism, it is imperative to understand the Indian worldview. India's intellectual tradition accepts man and woman as equals. The RigVeda accepts a common source of all living beings, i.e. "One Will manifesting itself in many forms including the male and the female in the **Nasadiya Sukta**. The same viewpoint has been endorsed in the Kaṭhapaniṣad. Even Manu smṛiti also subscribes to the same viewpoint. It says,

dvidhā kṛtvā'tmano dehamardhena puruṣo'bhavat |

ardhena nārī tasyāṃ sa virājamasṛjat prabhuh ||

(Meaning having divided his body into two halves, with the one half, the Lord became Male, and with the other half, Female; from her he produced Virāj).

Kaṭhōpaniṣad always speaks of human beings not of men as opposed to women. Kaṭhōpaniṣad visualises the self said thought in the form of a beautiful image. It says,

ātmānam̐ rathitaṃ viddhi śarīraṃ rathameva tu |

buddhiṃ tu sārathiṃ viddhi manaḥ pragrahameva ca || (1.3.3)

meaning the body is the chariot, the mind is the reigns, and the atman is the driver which directs the chariot and keeps it running in the direction of *moksha*.

This passage from the Kaṭhōpaniṣad makes itself evident that Vedānta makes no discrimination between man and woman. It throughout declares that there is one atman in everyone. Both man and women are extension of that *atman*- the Divine Self. In fact, the woman has been treated as the source of power. There is a beautiful quote from Saundarya Lahari Verse 1,

sivah saktya yukto yadi bhavati saktah prabhavitum

na ced evam devo nakhalu kusalah spanditum api

atastvam aradhyam hari hara virincadhibhir api

pranantum stotum va katham akrtapunyah prabhavati

This concept of Shakti is unique to Indian philosophy. It may have been the tradition in the West to naturally equate power with the masculine. But the Indian worldview offers a radically different approach in the concept of Shakti where one discovers the concept of the feminine as being the very manifestation of power itself.

The various schools of Vedic philosophy such as Darshana also took this principle quite seriously. For the Vedānta School, Shakti was conceived as the activity of the cause revealing itself in the shape of an effector. The Nyāka logicians attempted to explain Shakti in terms of being the function or property of a cause. Here every woman is said to be a manifestation of the Divine Shakti. The power of Shakti is believed to be directly present in Creation in the form of our mothers, sisters, daughters and wives. In this context, contemporary feminist scholar **Alinar Gadden** comments “the approach of the Goddess is the mystery of our being. She is the dynamic force within. Her form is invaded in our collective psyche part of what it is to be human. She is dance of Life and her song is Eros-the Energy of Creation. That said, however, because the menstrual form of feminine bravery has been so marginalised throughout Western civilisation in

the West, there must be extra responsibility placed on male authors of the heroic to come to terms with their more than half of the distortion and pathology of inherent heroism, narcissism”.

In this background, **Alinar Gadden** admits that western-oriented religions have a dearth of female-oriented imagery and symbolism in contrast to eastern religions, especially in Hinduism. Unlike Western literature, Indian literature is full of accounts of heroic, strong and brave women. For example, Draupadi in Mahabharata is depicted as a brave and iron-willed woman. Kunti as the mother of Pandavas is a lady of immense courage who keeps her honour and faith intact despite a life full of tragedies. In the Ramayana, Sita emerges as a very strong woman who chooses her own husband and breaks the most powerful Dhanusha Mahadev and accompanies Rama to the forest against the will of her in-laws and thus exhibits her strength throughout. There are also living historical records of India where women have historically easily risen to heights of power within various holistic and religious hierarchical structures parallels of which have been unheard of in western religions and society until very recently. Fred Morales, one of the great feminist thinkers of the West has throughout emphasised on this point.

Klaus Klostermaier the famous historian in his article ‘Stridharma’ claims that in the earlier Vedic era women were awarded the sacred threads of priests. One text of the Rigveda mentions that there was a female rishi, a vealer of sacred truth and was known as *Visvavara*. There were also women philosophers such as Vachaknavi who debated with Yajnavalkya of Upanishadic fame. The famous grammarian Panini observed that the distinction in the Sanskrit language between Acharini and Achariya was indicative of the fact that women were accepted as spiritual teachers. Women saints like Andal and Mirabai were leaders of the devotional bhakti movements that initiated the religious progression of women and were largely promoted and supported by women devotees. Women have continued this ancient tradition as leaders of various Hindu communities till this day. Such examples can be found in the forms Gurumayi Chidvilasananda, Amritanandamayi, and Meera ma among many others. Considering that Indian culture has invariably been a culture in which religion has always been the most important social institution in society. It is no small accomplishment for women to have risen to such height in the Hindu leadership. Such respect for the feminine has not unfortunately been as readily visible in the history of the western world. The western religions Christianity, Judaism and Islam have not had the same abundant number of examples of women in leadership throughout their respective histories. To this day, for example, women are barred from priesthood in the Roman Catholic Church. It is in the latter third of the 20th century that the emergence of the feminine has begun to take place in European and American societies.

There has been generated a false belief about women having a subservient status in Indian sociological texts. Most of the scholars have adopted an alien methodology which resulted in projecting the complex, inter-related and multiple realities of India as a simple fact undermining the significance of the Indian world view and its distinctiveness in comparison to Western

worldview. An in-depth analysis of Indian worldview gives an answer to the Ethnocentric and Euro-centric nature of western feminism.

I think it would be appropriate to discuss them one by one.

Simone de Beauvoir in her seminal work 'The Second Sex' claims that it is the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in society. She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. What Simone de Beauvoir claims in her work is true only with reference to western feminism. In the Indian context, women enjoy the freedom to choose their carrier be it 'Brahmcharinis' or 'Grihastha' women. They were never treated as incidental, inessential or have never been defined with reference to man. Rather, it is the name of a woman which always comes first, for example, Sita Ram, Radhe Krishna, Lakshmi Ganesh, etc. Women were not only equal to men but were accorded superior positions. The ancient texts are full of such verses. In Rig Veda 5.61.6, it is stated, "Yea, many a woman is more firm and better than the man who turns away from Gods and offers not." The Vashistha Dharmasutra heightened the emphasis even more by observing that a woman was hundred times superior to a man in instructing and alleviating a child. Parashar Smriti declares that a wife is a refuge of her husband in times of trouble and therefore she should not be made a victim of exploitation and oppression by him. Manu smriti unequivocally assigns to women the status of presiding deities in the home. According to Manu, "there is no difference whatsoever between wives who are destined to bear children and who provide the blessings of love and caring and in those idols that are put in the houses of men for worship as symbols of good fortune and holiness." (Chapter 9, verse 26)

Mahabharata looks at women as a pre-eminent source of families' happiness. What is more, Mahabharata looks at a woman as an anchor not only of the family life but of the social organism. The very future of a country is said to depend on women essentially because it is they who beget and nurture children and impart the right Samskaras to them.

I would also like to quote some other utterances from some sacred texts. Every one of us must have read Durga Saptashati during Durga Puja. The Argala Stotra of Durga Saptashati says "wives can alleviate man from the mundane world."

Patnīm manoramām dehi; manovrttā-nusārinīm

Tārinīm durga-samsāra; Sāgarasya kulodhbhavām | (verse 24 of Argala Stotra)

Manu in Manusmriti says one Acharya surpasses ten ordinary teachers. One father surpasses one hundred Acharya and above all one mother surpasses a thousand fathers. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir refers to many great western thinkers who have assigned women a derogatory status. Plato in his works declares that a woman is by nature inclined to be secretive and crafty because

of her intrinsic weakness and that “her natural potential for virtue is inferior to a man’s.” Aristotle outdoes even Plato in denigrating women. He turns the thesis of the comparative inferiority of a woman into a justification of her general domination by men. Aristotle’s theory of reality believes that each individual’s growth is determined by its final cause, i.e., by what it is to become an end. A seed develops into a tree and a child into a grown-up human being. Likewise, a girl realises the full significance as a female in becoming a mother that is by participating in the function of reproduction. But in so doing a woman, according to Aristotle, is only a passive recipient. What is important here is to note that what he says, is said by no other thinkers of Vedas or Upanishads. According to him, she only provides matter to the process of reproduction and the imprint of human personality on this matter is provided by the father. Man is the active agent that is why he should be regarded as superior to a woman. I would like to quote Aristotle here. He says, “virtues and actions are nobler, when they proceed from those who are naturally worthier, for instance, from a man rather than from a woman. “Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s attitude to a woman is just uncharitable, which is surprising, because he is supposed to place a great deal of emphasis on equality. He defines a woman’s nature in terms of a function. I would like to quote him(which is a very derogatory quote) from Rousseau, “It is not enough that a woman should remain faithful; her husband, along with his friends and neighbours, must believe in her fidelity. Nature herself has decreed that woman both for herself and her children should be at the mercy of a man’s judgement. Worth alone will not suffice. A woman must be thought worthy. Not beauty, she must be admired. Not virtue, she must be respected. What will people think is the grave of a man’s virtue and the throne of a woman. “Unfortunately, even a great philosopher like Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel is not able to see the possibility of exceptional qualities in women. Hegel develops a similar argument in his book and there he comes to the point where he says that women are totally incapable of reasoning.

One can discover the contrast between Western view of women and the Indian view of women. It is really unfortunate that we have had so much knowledge about Western feminism, but we have never read our own texts seriously. When I went through all the Upanishads, and the Vedas which are our foundational texts, I found something which I never heard in the books. I would like to substantiate this point.

Several references from the Vedas and Upanishads can be given whether verses of gender equality are found in volumes. For example, if Atharva-Veda (8/5/4) regards man as Ojaswyanthen Yajurveda regards women as Ojaswati. If Atharvaveda (242) regards man as Sahasravira then same Atharvaveda calls woman as Sahasravirya (1326). If Rigveda titles man as Sahiyam then Atharvaveda titles woman as Sahiyasi. If Rig Veda calls man as Samrat then the same Rigveda calls woman as Samragyi. Similarly, if man is Manishi in Rigveda then woman is Manisha in Rigveda. If man is Sabhasad in Atharvaveda, then in the same Atharvaveda woman is Sabhasada. Since both man and woman are treated as equal beings, both of them have to follow the path of Dharma which lies in moving from the physical to the spiritual and from the

mundane to the Divine. In this journey, there is hardly any ground for preferring man to woman for genius abides in the soul and not in the bodily frame. Rajshekhara's Kavyamimamsa has categorically mentioned it "Soul is neither man nor woman and that is why soul abides both in woman and man. Soul is the same in both man and woman." The underlying idea that resonates most clearly in our basic philosophical tradition is that a person is not only an individual among other individuals but is in principle knit insolubly with the family, the community and ultimately with the whole human race. This is the reason why we have never looked beyond society as a mere aggregate of individuals but rather as a living organism where everyone is a compliment of the other and should, therefore, help in creating, sustaining and reinforcing an evolved social order.

The question arises that what are the ways in which we can differentiate Indian feminism from Western feminism. To my mind, Indian feminism is different from Western feminism in several ways.

First, Indian feminism does not believe in the dominant masculinist view of nationality, the sharp dysfunction between reason and feeling, the equation of rationality with personality, of justice with abstract impartiality and of equality with uniformity.

Second, Indian feminism recognises concrete modes of difference in indigenous knowledge and local expertise.

Thirdly, Indian feminism criticises Western feminist discourses for presenting a monolithic category of women, universalist assumptions of sexist oppression across cultures and finally, colonist intentions of such discourse.

Fourthly, Indian feminism never looks at society as a mere aggregate of individuals but rather as a living organism.

Fifth, Indian feminism does not believe in normative dualism. This is a very important point. Different roles are assigned to different persons in accordance with their individual natures and aptitudes. There is no place here for the utopia of a wholly independent and self-sufficing individual. The dominant emphasis has always been on collective social inter-dependence. Superficially, this may seem to be oppressive, undemocratic but in practice, such a view makes for the promotion of social coherence and stability and overall improvement in the quality of life. In the hierarchy of the social structure so conceived, the so-called subordinates and superiors have been both allotted specific and socially helpful functions. The former gets a chance to cultivate deference, loyalty and obedience reasonably and the latter to develop the attitudes of nurturance and concern in such a way that the subordinate's capacity for self-effort may not be harmed.

Sixth, Indian feminism derives its basic premises from the faith that cultural tradition which advocates an integrated working of the body, mind and spirit without which attainment of the ultimate end of life is not possible. It is quite different from the predominantly material civilisation of the West today. By and large, the emphasis has been on the need to rise upto a fuller vision of the eternal by following the dictates of the conscience, morality and dharma and higher psychological practices. Our social system in principle is directed to this end. This is to be seen not only in our most ancient scriptures and books of knowledge and Shastras like the Vedas and the Upanishads but even in the Smritis. ManusmritiChapter12, Verse 118— “let man discriminate between right and wrong, good and evil, true and false, real and unreal and thus discriminating let him yet one-pointedly ever behold everything in the self—the transitory as well as that which abides. He who beholds all in the self **never turns his mind towards wrong.**” Further, the conceptual foundation of Indian feminism is rooted in the belief that culture is the major determinant of consciousness. Any community is not a mere semblance of the past but those out of a long development of institutions and practices of the rule of law, of rules of equal respect, of habits of common deliberation, of common association, of cultural development and so on. Cultures are psychological creations of their relevant communities and products of their unique historical experiences as discussed and interpreted over centuries by their unique interpretations. This is what we mean by *Parampara*. Indian feminism, therefore, draws its source from the idea that our life is part of a larger cosmic order and not one of unencumbered pure self-defining subjectivity. It believes in collective, communicative, effective spiritual orientation than in individualistic, calculative, contractarian values. It believes in substantive rationality not in formal or technological rationality. Freedom can never be a core value of Indian feminism. It does not believe in liberating oneself from the ties of family, community and nation. It believes in cooperation and not in competition, inter-dependence and not in autonomy and in sustaining nature and not in dominating. This is the reason that Indian feminism believes in the concept of *Ardhana Ishvara* and *Sahadharmani*.

What steps should be taken to construct an Indian theory of Feminism?

The first and foremost need is to oppose monolithic and singular portrayal of Indian women as victims of modernisation of undifferentiated patriarchy and of reductive understanding of multiple realities of Indian women, the rejection of the implicit assumptions of the feminist schools in the West that Indian women were traditional, on-liberated and need to be civilised and developed like Western women. The words of Sen and Crown can be quoted here to substantiate the above argument, “Feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals and strategies since it constitutes the political expressions of the concerns of women from different regions, classes, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women and defined by them for themselves. This diversity builds on a common opposition of gender oppression and hierarchy.”

Secondly, Indian feminists should be critical of not only homogenising universalism but also of homogenising differentialism. There is a need to challenge false understanding of experience, subjectivity, identity and consciousness. The scholars should adopt a methodology which tries to analyse every thesis on the basis of three parameters.

- First, what is the status of the speaker?
- Second, in whose name is the argument from the culture is being advanced?
- Third, what is the degree of participation in culture formation of the social groups primarily affected by the cultural practice in question?

It is only then it will be possible to counter the Eurocentric nature of feminist thought. It will be pertinent to remember what Bell Hooks, the famous African thinker said, “In 20th century political discourse the term woman is synonymous with white woman. The term Black is synonymous with Black men. The Third World women should not forget that their lived experiences shape their consciousness in such a way that their worldview differs from those who have a degree of privilege. They must recognise that their marginality gives them a special vantage point which they can use to criticise the dominant racist and sexist hegemony as well as to risen and create a counter-hegemony.”

To conclude, on the basis of the quotes and verses in India’s ancient texts, which I have mentioned, no gender discrimination is present in Indian thought because if the genius abides in the soul and not in the bodily frame. So, there is no ground for preferring man to woman. As against western feminism it rejects the dominant masculinist view of nationality, the sharp distinction between reason and feeling, identification of equality with uniformity, Indian feminism believes in the concept of *Ardhanarishvara* and *Sahadharmani*. An in-depth reading of the Indian texts not only dispels our doubts about the equal status of man and woman but also draws a road map for constructing an Indian theory of feminism.

Some of the cardinal features of Indian feminism can be enumerated as:

- a. It opposes the monolithic and singular portrayal of the Indian women.
- b. It is critical of both homogenising universalism and homogenising differentialism.
- c. It opposes any kind of value hierarchy such as a man being referred in terms of culture mind and reason and a woman being referred in terms of nature, body and emotion.
- d. It believes that the theory of feminism should be based on understanding rather than on justification, verification and control.
- e. It believes in methodology which tries to analyse every fact on the basis of three parameters which I have just mentioned.

The lived experiences of a woman in different cultures shape their consciousness in such a way that their worldview differs from those who have a degree of privilege.

In the end, I would like to comment that the present reality, that is why in the very beginning I have said that there is a difference between traditional thought and traditional practice. Why the social movement and women's movement started there because there the women were subjugated and treated as second-grade citizens by thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Hegel and so many others, whereas in our ancient texts, women were given a very high status. We have never adopted that. We have followed all those features, all those norms which are very derogatory to women. But there is a need we should try to understand the ancient texts and should try to translate that into practice

Webinar 9

Distinguished Lecture on The Stylist Regents: Refashioning Thai Female Sartorial Styles by Queen Saovabha Phongsri and Queen Sirikit

M.L. Pattaratorn Chirapravati

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(The Lecture was delivered on 23rd April 2021)

I am going to focus my talk on two Queens of Siam and Thailand. Actually Queen Saovabha was the Queen when Thailand was known as Siam and Queen Sirikit became Queen when the Tai name changed to Thailand. Today my topic is on **“The Stylist Regents: Refashioning the Female Sartorial Styles by Queen Saovabha Phongsri and Queen Sirikit.”**

I had delivered a lecture on “Refashioning identities: Politics of Dress in Pre-Modern Southeast Asia” in California. Many of us don’t think that cloth is that important besides making us look good. But when clothing and politics are utilized together you will see how powerful it becomes. It becomes an important tool for reinventing national identity. So hybrid dress style that combine ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ elements were used as political tools in reaction to intense cultural interactions and colonial expansion in Southeast Asia by the West (the British, Dutch and French).

I am going to show one Queen who created this hybrid style during the time of colonisation period of Southeast Asia and then go into another Queen who think that why are we doing that? We are going to come up with our own style. My talk today focuses on two female Regents.

I should explain to you the word Regent. Traditionally in Thailand a high-ranking male royal member would be appointed by the king as a Regent during the period of the king’s absence. However Queen Saovabha Phongsri (1878-1910) i, a Queen of King Chulalongkorn became the

first female Regent for seven years during the time that the king, also known as King Rama V, visited Europe in 1907. This is the time when King Rama V negotiated on behalf of Siam with the West. Queen Saovabha Phongsri was referred to as the Queen Regent. King Chulalongkorn ruled Siam between 1868-1910

The second female Regent was Queen Sirikit in 1956 who was the Queen of King Adulayadj also known as King Rama IX. He ruled Thailand from 1946-2016. He passed away five years ago. Currently we have King Rama X.

While Queen Saovabha Phongsri used hybrid dress styles that combined traditional and western styles as political tools in reaction to intense cultural interactions and colonial expansion in Southeast Asia by the West. Queen Sirikit, on the other hand, reinvented traditional Thai costumes to showcase Thai cultural identity --the only country in SE Asia that has never been colonised to show that it is equal to the West.

I would like to start with Queen Saovabha Phongsri.

After his second trip to Europe in 1907 King Chulalongkorn, royal members and high officials adopted western sartorial styles as well as European styles military uniform. Dress styles were hybridised. Traditional Indian and Siamese and modern styles were used as political tools in colonial and post-colonial period in reaction to the cultural interaction and colonial expansion as well as the global cosmopolitan influence of the western way of life. Queen Saovabha Phongsri was the first one to receive the Regalia of the Seven Levels of Royal Umbrella. As you know when somebody appears officially, they are going to be placed next to regalia and one of the regalia items is Umbrella— '*Chatra*' in Sanskrit. She has got the highest one which has seven levels.

This is Queen Saovabha Phongsri in mid 1890s. This is going to be most popular choice of clothing that she had decided for her. It has some kind of mixed combination between the West—**it is called** leg o' mutton (leg-of-mutton sleeved blouse) and then the wrap cloth—the skirt and then the mixture of the East and West. We will come back to talk about it in details.

She is also refashioning her hair because traditional Thai hair is cut very short So this becomes the kind of hairstyle that is worn by all female royal members.

This is the picture of Queen Saovabha Phongsri and King Chulalongkorn taken in 1901 that was sent out to all countries in Europe as a gift exchange. After the king came back from his trip in Europe he redesigned everyday outfits for court ladies. While the king himself adopted a contemporary English fashion--the Victorian and Edwardian style costume for official events with foreigners, the Queen and other high ranking female royalty created hybrid costume that combined traditional textiles such as handprinted Indian cotton and silk brocade and Chinese silk. There were long period of exchange. They preferred Indian hand printed cotton from the

south-the Coromandel Coast. Those became the most desirable type of clothes worn for over 200 years.

So this is going to be different because the new royal garment that they were even they looked like the old styles, actually they are silk that were made in Europe or in England for trading around the world.

Traditionally Thai women in general you can see that they don't really cover their bodies at all until King Rama IV reign. Then they started covering themselves so they may use only *Saba* which covered part of the body. The hair is cropped very short. *Chong kraben* was worn with a western style long sleeved jacket

You are going to see that this is going to start—they covered themselves this came from mural temple mural painting **at Wat Suwannaram in Thailand.**

This is Queen Thepsirindra (1834-1861), Queen of king Mongkut. King Mongkut is Rama IV. In a famous movie, King and I where you can see she cropped her hair very short with her royal regalia dressing in beautiful pleated *phanungnanang* (hip wrapper worn in front pleated skirt style). She wore *sabai* (shoulder cloth). That cover indicates her rank. These are kind of high ends--- very expensive golden thread cloth that they wear. So *phanung* was worn with a brocade shoulder cloth. The length of women's hair in his reign was also longer than previous reign. Rama V would make women wear longer hair.

The female court costume from the early 1880s to the end of King Rama V reign consisted of high neck blouse trimmed with lace with *sabai* worn over it as a decorative shawl --a plain silk *chongkraben*, European stocking and high heel shoes. It is important to point out here that during King Rama V reign, royal silk cloth for *phanung* were made with cloth imported from Europe. They were not made locally in Siam nor imported from India as was the previous practice in the early part of the reign.

This is the first female concubine when the king wanted women to start wearing long hair. She volunteered to do it. But she is the only one wearing the long hair. Besides **Chao Chommana Phae**, there is one concubine who was the princess from Shan State. But she was the only one and the other court ladies refused to do that. So, they did short hair-do like Queen Saovabha Phongsri.

For special occasion and photographic session court ladies wore a brocade silk cloth instead of a plain *Chong Kraben*. You can see that she wears this wrapped cloth and both men and women wear *Chong Kraben* like this. A more elaborated **blouse with leg o'mutton sleeves** was normally brought from Belgium to Thailand and they wear that. Western jewellery became very popular. Especially King Rama V bought a lot of Fabergé. the Russian jewellery designs. Court

ladies were given as gift after he came back and there were many Fabergé pins **and you could see them decorated** that drape out that gave the ranking of each female members.

In the early 1900 blouses became even more elaborately decorated with frills and large puffed sleeves as you can see here. This puffed sleeves is called leg o' mutton blouse. It is a style that was made popular by Queen Alexandra of Denmark in 19th century. She passed away in 1925. So King Chulalongkorn brought back from Europe jewellery such as ear rings, bracelets and necklace for his family. So she wears some kind of western style jewellery.

This is **photograph shows that** she has decided to wear *chongkraben*. She wears wrapped cloth, her cropped hair and jewellery. This was when she started wearing this four kind of costume that she designed.

This is the one in Europe in Denmark. -You can see -the leg o' mutton sleeved blouse that was very popularly worn in Europe. The hair do was not adopted by the Queen because she preferred short hair. As you can imagine in Siam which is hot and humid and in the olden days, we know the problem of heat lies on top of that. So, people liked to crop their hair very short by that time.

This became kind of royal fashion that Queen Saovabha Phongsri decided for court ladies. This is the members of the Bunnag family- there is five of them who became concubine of King Rama V. They wear *chongkraben* with stocking and high heel shoes. This became a kind of hybrid clothing--mixture of Siamese traditional outfit with Western style blouse, lace, jewellery, cropped hair. All of them wear the same hair do.

This is also very interesting that Victorian dress was used only when the Queens were in audience with European high officials. Her Majesty Queen Saovabha Phongsri dressed in Victorian costume only during the important trip when they accompanied King Chulalongkorn to Singapore and Java. This is the trip that Queen Saovabha Phongsri and her sister Queen Suan Wattana travelled to Java. King Rama V was very fond of Balinese and Japanese batik. He collected over 500 of them. There was just an exhibition of batik cloth in his collection at Queen Sirikit Museum in Bangkok. You can see she dressed completely in Victorian outfit with hat all those but with leg o' mutton sleeve.

According to the memoir of Queen Saovabha Phongsri—the Lady in waiting--the Queen formed four styles of female costumes depending on the occasion and types of activities namely traditional casual dress that I showed you earlier *chongkraben* and then modern casual dress, then the formal or court dress, and the formal dress for the order of Chulalongkorn. She had her portrait taken showcasing the official traditional costume as well as the hybrid style that she shows for the concubine. This painting is very important because as you can see King Rama V and Queen Saovabha Phongsri. And Queen Saovabha Phongsri is seated in a kind of semi **reclining** pose and at the same time she is looking away as the one who has clear vision with her two sons who became King Rama VI and King Rama VII of Siam. King Rama VI

ruled when Siam was an absolute monarchy country. Rama VII started of that way, but the country changed from absolute monarchy into democracy in 1932 with the Prime minister and the King actually left and went and he died in the UK.

The portraits of king Chulalongkorn and Queen Saovabha Phongsri were publicised in various European newspapers such as the German *Die Gartenlaube* and the French *Je Sais Tout* and *Le Petite Journal*. This is the one that circled round with the image of the King and Queen in Europe. In fact, *Le Petit Journal* had many covers of their magazine with the image of the King and the Queen and you can see this is like the top part the King adopted Victorian or Edwardian jacket and then with traditional Thai wrap around *chongkraben* and stocking and shoes. She wears hybrid dress.

Mathew Philips remarked in his article, “Re-ordering the Cold War Cosmos: King Bhumibol’s 1960 US Tour,” as follows

“Siamese kings adopted selected aspects of European culture and technology and used them to enhance their prestige and demonstrate their wisdom. This was once a means of a certain equal standing with European monarchs and of reasserting moral authority over their sceptics by incorporating foreign architecture, dress and etiquette into the royal court, they both confirm their legitimacy abroad and elevated standing at home.”

This enormous painting is done in Italy for the new modern looking Town Hall in the Grand Palace. That is also refashioning identity of using hybrid structure of- traditional Thai and European which is also very interesting.

Queen Sirikit.

Before the majesty’s world tour in 1960, her Majesty Queen Sirikit of Thailand appointed an advisory team that included historians, court advisers, designers and dress makers to create costumes for her first official state trip. As a result, an entirely new version of Thai female national dress that infused historic court dress with modern western tailor was created. Want to point out that the Queen was born on August 12, 1932. It became Thai Mother’s Day and every year we celebrate it as Thai Mothers’ Day. She was a consort of King Bhumipol-king Rama IX of Thailand. Rama IX died in 2016. He ruled from 1946-2016. The Queen became Regent during King Bhumipol’s monkhood for 15 days. In Thailand when a man attains the age of twenty, you have to ordain as a monk be it for one day. Some people do it for funeral purpose for the deceased parent for one day or they do it for three months during Buddhist lent. This started in July. The King ordained as the monk for fifteen days in 1956 at Wat Bowaniwet in Bangkok. The Prime minister of Thailand at that point changed from absolute monarchy from Rama VII ‘s reign. Rama VIII died shortly. Rama IX -Phibunsongkram was the Prime minister and appointed Queen Sirikit as the Queen Regent on 18th October 1956.

This is when the King and Queen became King and Queen and King Bhumibol was ordained as a monk.

Here you see the day when Queen Sirikit was appointed the Regent and the Queen is reading and accepting to become the Regent at that point.

Her Majesty Queen Sirikit after her trip remarked that she had no desire to copy directly, ‘ the strange look of our half Western half Thai national dress.’ Thus, this became **the core**concept of the newlook of the national dress during the reign of King Bhumibol. The look of the national dress was designed to honour the past while conveying a practical and modern Thai identity.

I am showing some photographs of the trip when King Bhumibol and Queen Sirikit travelled around the world. This is when they reached the US in 1960. How beautiful her outfit is. There is no longer a blouse with leg-of-mutton sleeves that we see during Queen Saovabha’s period.

Here the Queen in Thai Chakraphat outfit during the world tour in 1960. These were all designed during her period----formal and evening attire.

Queen Sirikit specially requested photographs of former Queen following a thorough review of textile in the national museum and private collections. Queen Sirikit appointed Somsri Sukumolanna, head of textile department at Bangkok Technical College to design more than a dozen dresses for her. Over the course of a year, Queen Sirikit tried wearing them and adjusting them. As a result, five distinctive styles were developed based on traditional Thai wrap and drape clothing but constructed as western cut and tailored garment. Instead of loose clothes it is very fit to her body and that becomes very interesting because the designer is not a Thai.

At first for the world tour, she has five costumes that were designed for her. After world tour three more styles were created. Additional developments came from French designer Pierre Balmain and his friend Maison Lesage who specialised in detail in textiles. While Balmain signed dresses, Lesage developed a hybrid style of surface embellishment. They often used Thai traditional patterns arranged in a non-traditional way.

This is very interesting. If you go to Thailand, you will see many people wearing **Ruen Ton** which is common that anybody can wear. Additionally, Thai Chakri is the part of any kind of royal activities or ceremony for royal members to attain like more recently is that procession on the ceremonial of the funeral of King Rama IX and then the coronation of King Rama X. In funeral you use totally black outfit. Traditionally in the past they used only white for mourning but from Rama VII reign they started using black for mourning. So, this is the one the Thai used ...

Thai Amarinis a little bit fashionable in a way they use much more elaborate metal thread brocade. Most people in general would use **Thai Ruen Ton**.

The other five one was used by the Queen first but then you can see that these days when you go to Thai wedding in Bangkok you can see people can choose Thai Chakri, Thai Dusit, Thai Boromphimon, Thai Siwalai and Thai Chakra pat and this one is very ornate.

The name of this Thai Chakri came from Chakri building --The name of the mansion that I mentioned has the modern looking Town hall. Thai Dusit is another building in the Grand Palace, Boromphimanis another building in the royal palace Siwalai and Chakraphat are also names of important buildings in the Grand Palace in Bangkok.

How beautiful the Queen is. Mathew Philips remarked in his article "" in preparation for the trip Queen Sirikit had hired French designer Pierre Balmain to decide an original and modern wardrobe ensuring she drew the gaze of the Crown. While in official engagement she remained subservient to the King and routinely stuck to a newly conceived Thai national dress. The Centre row of the Queen elsewhere served to update the image of an Asian monarch in the American imagination.

I am going to show the eight styles actually known in Thailand as *Phra Rajaniyom*. Thai eight styles continue to be used to the present not only by the royal family members but also by general Thai people.

These costumes are generally made of Thai silk and brocade.

Let's look at the Queen Thai costume. This one is worn for royal ceremony or formal day or evening function. She is posed for a picture that was sent out. She is chewing beetle nut. For royal members when they get their rank elevated, they would get different levels of beetle nut sets. The highest one would be made of gold.

So, Queen Sirikit wore Thai Chakri and posed at the Grand Palace. It was worn for royal ceremony but brides-to-be may wear it for daytime engagement or wedding ceremony. If you are rich, you wear a lot of gold jewellery, and the belt (you can see) is also made of diamond. This one is less ornate. It is a showcase wrap-around cloth that were made very ornate ones and actually done for the queen. It had royal decoration. Diamond she loves wearing--a kind of choker a short diamond necklace that she is wearing

Thai Dusit is a formal evening attire and is made of gold brocade and embedded bodice which is very tight to the body and wearing jewellery. The Queen prefers long hair and wear it in a small **chignon** similar to tiara made of diamond. She wears bracelet. This is the royal decoration. Yellow represents the highest rank. If you see people wearing with this yellow decoration it indicates the highest rank

This is Thai Dusit designed by Pierre Balman when she was making the world tour. It is very ornate designed by Balman and Lasage. It is in Thai pattern. It was done by a French person and a Thai team. The design is very beautiful. These are commonly seen in temple painting in Thailand—a wrap-around decoration.

Thai Chakraphat is a formal evening attire. It features a metal thread. It is a brocade skirt with front pleat. It is a wrap-around skirt with very beautiful ornate textile. It was worn for formal banquets and official dinner. Also during the State visit, you will see the Queen wear this very beautiful outfit. There is painting of the King and Queen on the walls on the walls.

Thai Amarin is worn for welcoming parties or Royal processions. It has very distinct make like that. It is very popular in the present day when Thai want to wear Thai outfit. They will wear Thai Amarin. A wrap around cloth .She wears her hair without any jewellery because this is supposed to be for welcoming party. It does not have to be so glamorous like when she receives other royalty to dinner gala

Thai Boromophiman- similar neck worn for formal events and official ceremonies. It can be worn by royal bride.

This picture was taken when she was sixty years, old. She started going back to wear *chongkraben* again, --hybrid dress in Rama V reign style. This is like going back when she is old. She wears the same style of Thai Boromophiman, Thai Amarin neck ...and hybrid with *chongkraben*. This is one is combination of one of the old style combined with new kind of style she adopted when she was sixty /seventy years old.

Queen Sirikit is now 88 years old. We have not seen her very much. She is in hospital.

This is called Thai Ruean Ton

It is a popular attire for Thai women attending religious ceremony and wedding. It is like everyday wear. The difference between Thai Ruean Ton and Thai Boromophiman is only the neckline. Otherwise, they are the same way.

The queen started the wrap around skirt. It is actually the cloth that was brought from the north-Chiang Mai area. She started using a lot of textiles that were brought from different regions of Thailand. She tried textiles and re-inventing kind of outfit.

She designed silk ikat from northeastern Thailand. She tried to promote textiles from all regions of Thailand--not only from the central area but from around everywhere. Because of the Queen many women started to copy the Queen. She started bringing ikat textiles **from Isan**, textiles from the south and promoted them into her **foundations--Sai Tai Thai**. The money came in support of all weavers in whole Thailand. She brought people to **Chitlada** Palace where the

King and Queen used to reside. She had them there. They started teaching people—the younger generation to weave traditional silk ikat cloth, not in Thai cloth.

This is the Queen. She is not only wearing the traditional eight styles that she did but in promotion

of silk from the for the silk from the northeastern region she had dinner outfit done by Balman.

Sister and I were attending the coronation ceremony in 2017 and you can see that the colour they wanted us to wear was yellow. Yellow is associated with Monday. Tuesday is pink, Wednesday is green, Thursday is orange. Friday is blue. Saturday is purple Sunday is red. These are worn differently so King Rama X was born on Monday like his father. So yellow becomes the colour used as the colour of his reign. We have to dress up properly to attend the coronation ceremony.

I want to show you how at present it has become very popular for Thais to dress in Thai style clothing when attending any event such as Buddhist ceremonies and weddings. I was walking near the Grand Palace and that was the time when the celebration of the King's birthday. You can see that general people dress in Thai costume. In the olden days only, the Queen would use it for dinner or official kind of ceremony. But Thai people walking around wearing traditional outfits not only women but men only. The man in the picture wearing hybrid dress like King Rama V.

Webinar 10

Distinguished Lecture

Looking at the Pandemic through a Gender Lens

Rekha Pande

**Director of SEED, Society for Empowerment through Environment Development,
Hyderabad**

(The Lecture was delivered on 21st May 2021)

What I am going to do today is I am going to look at the whole pandemic through a gender lens.

All of us have seen that for the past one and a half year our world has turned topsy *turvy*. We are really forced to relearn and adapt many new ways in our dealings, associations and mingling with people. The reason is well known to all of us. It is a new virus, which was found in Wuhan, Province of Hubei. As of 31 December 2019, this was first mentioned to China's WHO Country Office.

The disease eventually spread to more and more Chinese provinces, and to the rest of the world. All of us have seen how much havoc it caused leading to a lot of deaths, breaking of the infrastructures of the hospitals and the crumbling of the economies. This is now declared a pandemic by the WHO. The virus was named SARS-CoV-2, and the disease is called COVID-19. It is an infectious disease, affecting mainly the lungs.

The novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has already affected over 6.9 million people, claiming more than 400,000 lives in over 200 nations all over the world. As of June 9, 2020, most of the cases were reported from the United States of America, Brazil, and Russia. While some nations (like China and South Korea) have successfully been able to flatten the pandemic curve, other nations are finding it difficult to achieve the same. We have still not come across any definite therapy against COVID-19, the resilience of the healthcare infrastructure and health professionals is being put on a lot of hardship all over the world.

When we look at India, the first case of COVID-19 was reported on January 30, 2020, and the index patient was a student who had returned from Wuhan. Thereafter, there were only 2 more cases reported in February. Subsequently, more cases came to the forefront in the month of March and there has been a surge in the number of cases since the latter half of April 2020. The

government devised new ways. There was Janata Curfew. After a 14-hour “Janata Curfew” test run, India went into full lockdown on March 24, 2020; at the time, India had just 500 confirmed COVID-19 cases and fewer than 10 deaths. Then there was a sudden lockdown announced and it impacted millions of low-income migrant workers and daily-wage labourers. With no savings and little guidance or financial help from the government, these workers and their families faced food insecurity and hardships that led many to walk back to their hometowns. What happened was we became a little lax from September to December and we have now witnessed the second wave of the COVID pandemic. All of us are witness to it.

The second wave of COVID-19 in India was much more deadly and has been devastating, with a catastrophic rise in the numbers of new infections in recent weeks. The country has now recorded over 18.7 million cases and over 208,000 deaths. The outbreak of the coronavirus is overwhelming for all healthcare providers. Healthcare facilities and staff across the country are struggling to cope with the surge in cases. Our healthcare facilities have suffered a lot. Overall reports describe hospitals are experiencing a crippling shortage of hospital beds for people with severe cases, a shortage of oxygen supplies, and shortages of medicines being used to treat mild, moderate and severe forms of COVID-19.

Overall access to healthcare is currently compromised. In Mumbai, care for COVID-19 patients is organized in dedicated hospitals, but care for non-COVID-19 patients is under stress, as the whole health system is dealing with this crisis. Now, we are witnessing something like a mutant variety. It has crippled the whole economy. Our healthcare facility has really suffered a lot and is under a lot of stress.

What we found is from October 2020 to mid-February 2021, India witnessed a decline in new confirmed COVID-19 infections. Public health experts think that this led people to believe in a very false sense of security and we became lax. People started ignoring measures such as wearing masks and maintaining a physical distance. We had a lot of super-spreader events, like rallies and social events which are also likely to have played a key role. In addition, in India, we have a very high density of population, especially in a city like Mumbai, where it becomes difficult to follow required measures for COVID in public places. There is not enough evidence to confirm the role that variants of SARS-CoV-2 and how they have contributed to the sudden exponential spread of COVID-19. Now, we have a mutant variety that has come up.

All of us know that most people infected with the COVID-19 virus develop mild to moderate respiratory diseases and while some recover others do not, and no known cure is available. Older people and those with underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and cancer are more likely to experience serious illness. Now, the experts are saying that a third wave will come that will affect children much more. Social distancing, regular hand wash, no handshakes, wearing of masks, lockdowns and work from

home became the new norm. This coronavirus epidemic is both an economic and a medical one and its impact will be global and prolonged.

It is clear by now that the ongoing coronavirus is a pandemic because it has affected nearly four million people and has devastated societies and economies across the globe. It has had a much more lasting impact. As historians, we know that we had some kind of epidemic or pandemic in the past like the Spanish Flu, the Plague. These also had quite an impact on our lives. They brought a lot of changes in our behaviour, attitude and we find that any pandemic brings a paradigm shift. When we look at the world today, our world is already very unequal in terms of gender and this pandemic has reinforced it. If we look at the gender variables in the World, we find that for the past 50 years, 85 states have had no female head of state. In terms of economic participation, the gender gap will take 257 years to close (compared to 202 years in the 2019 report). Globally, only 55% of women (aged 15-64) are engaged in the labour market as opposed to 78% of men. In more than 72 countries, women are barred from opening bank accounts or obtaining credit. There is no country where men spend the same amount of time on unpaid work as women. In countries where the ratio is lowest, it is still 2:1. So, we already had a world that was unequal, and this pandemic has added to it.

The best way to understand this is to look at the Global Gender Gap Index. The Global Gender Gap Index was first introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006 as a framework for capturing the magnitude of gender-based disparities and the index became a benchmark for looking at national gender gaps and tracking their progress over time. The index benchmarks took up four criteria. These were economic, education, health and political criteria. The Global Gender Gap divides the whole world into eight broad geographical regions: East Asia and the Pacific; Eastern Europe and Central Asia; Latin America and the Caribbean; the Middle East and North Africa; North America; South Asia; Sub-Saharan Africa; and Western Europe because it is not possible to look at each country individually. What does the Gender Gap Report talk about South Asia? It says that the South Asia region is home to 860 million women, three fourths of whom live in India. Among the eight regions of the world, South Asia's gender gap is the second largest after the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA region), where only 61% of the gender gap has been closed.

Since 2006, South Asia is the region that has progressed the most, gaining six percentage points. If the rate of progress of the past 15 years was to continue—a very strong hypothesis indeed—it will take 71 years to close the region's gender gap.

Bangladesh has done much better than us (overall score of 72.6%). It is the only one of the seven South Asian countries to feature in the top 100 of the Global Gender Gap Index. We find that India ranks 112th (66.8%) in this report.

When we look at Health and Political index, our ranking is low at 150th on the Health and Survival sub-index (94.4), as a result of the skewed sex ratio at birth, there are 91 girls born per 100 boys born. Therefore, the ratio is well below the natural one. It also talks about violence, forced marriage and discrimination in access to health. It also talks about how the situation in terms of the gender gap.

The situation and the trend are not very positive in terms of gender gaps in education. From primary to tertiary education, the share of women attending school is systematically larger than the share of men. But a large difference persists for literacy rate; only two-thirds of women are literate compared with 82% of men. However, the gap has been narrowing in the past decade, because the literacy rate has significantly increased among women (66%) and slightly decreased among men to 79%.

The only place where we have scored well in this report is in political empowerment. India ranks 18th (it is 41.1%) on the Political Empowerment sub-index. Of the past 50 years, the country was headed by a woman for 20 years (4th) which largely explains this strong performance. But today, female political representation is low: women make up only 14.4% of the parliament (122nd) and 23% of the cabinet (69th). But in other areas, there are lots of gaps.

The "*Global Gender Gap Report*" of the *World Economic Forum 2020*, points out that unless women are actively involved and it leads to greater well-being and better functioning of the economic system and of the labour market, we cannot have a good economic system or a labour market. We need more and more women to enter the labour market to reduce the gender gap. Indeed, the growth of the female employment rate and the reduction of the gender gap, in the current world context, can represent a very strong stimulus to GDP growth.

The health and economic crisis due to the COVID-19 emergency is putting the entire world economic system to the test. It disrupted the whole world economic system and affected India too. In fact, even prior to COVID-19, there was a lot of neglect in our country –the gender gap was very much there and this gap has only increased because of coronavirus. Today, more than ever, there is a need to rebuild a sustainable market system capable of generating value positive impact and profit at the same time and this pandemic gives an opportunity to do the same. Indeed, also in response to the current COVID-19 crisis, companies, even prior to the legislator, shall recognize this need, as well as its competitive advantage, to create specific business strategies aimed at reducing the gap between men and women.

Now, if you look at the data, it tells us that the exposure of individuals differs greatly due to a lot of factors. The data indicates that the exposure of individuals differs greatly with factors such as place of residence, income and race. However, there is also a gendered impact of this epidemic. Though the crisis is impacting women and men in different ways, and not necessarily

in the same direction, it impacts women much more because of the social constructs in our society.

The top country for gender parity remained Iceland (for the 11th year running). The most improved countries were Albania, Ethiopia, Mali, Mexico and Spain who are also impacted by the virus but in India, none of us will see gender parity in our lifetimes, and nor likely will many of our children. That's the sobering finding of the Global Gender Gap Report 2020, which reveals that gender parity will not be attained for 99.5 years. This is the situation that Corona has further impacted.

Gender parity has a fundamental bearing on whether or not economies and societies thrive. Developing and deploying one-half of the world's available talent have a huge bearing on the growth, competitiveness and future readiness of economies and businesses worldwide. The index's rankings offer an effective means to benchmark progress. They are designed to create global awareness of the challenges that gender gaps pose, as well as the opportunities that emerge when action is taken to reduce them.

The language of the epidemic policy is sadly gendered in India. We always come across words like war and battle, which evoke the masculine world of revenge, bravery, victory, violence and decision making, which is again in the control of men. In fact, right across the spectrum all our political leaders and bureaucracy always describe the current situation in very masculine terms. When the Head of the State, imagines the nation as a family, he is not referring to the family as one where there is warmth, where there is care which is expected in familial relationships, but the whole image of the family is the patriarchal family which suggests the concentration of power of decision-making in male hands.

We are often given examples from Ramayana and Mahabharata. We are always reminded of the 18-days of the Mahabharata war, and the famous Laxman Rekha that Sita violated to disastrous effect. This Laxman Rekha is the threshold of everyone's house, the symbolic borderline of the domestic zone. This also helped rekindle the idealized womanhood constructed through a very selective representation of the ancient myths, epics and a very patriarchal ethos.

Today, when we talk of Laxman Rekha — the Laxman Rekha has always been for women—the division between the public and the private spheres. It may be easily recognized that not violating the domestic zone could be a new experience for men, historically and culturally, but not so for women. But what is important is that men are also experiencing this. In fact, it was since the 19th century onwards that we have the emergence of the universal model of housewife or the mother which was confined to millions of women across the globe to their houses, and somehow made housework as being something very important for women. This is something that women are experiencing day in and day out. That is why ordinary Indian women are openly asking in casual conversations how the restrictions constitute any new experience for them.

Another impact of the pandemic has been that there has been loss of jobs. According to some rough statistics, 40 per cent of working women have lost their jobs. They were working part-time, or full time and as opposed to this only 13 per cent of men have lost their jobs

Women are more likely to be the lower earners in heterosexual relationships, and if there is pressure in the household women always have to give up their jobs, meaning their jobs are deemed a lower priority when disruptions occur and it is the men who become the bread earners.

Around the same time, school closures and household alienation shift from the paid economy has impacted women much more than men. Nurseries, schools, colleges or day care centres were all shut and thus women had no helping hand and they had to take care of all. In fact, we find that many women are single parents. They are always juggling in between household jobs and caring for their children, educating and cooking for children at home and with the closure of all facilities, the entire burden came on them. This has become much more evident. There have been too many studies to show that worldwide lockdowns or self-quarantine have increased the workload of women. In fact, when many people are homebound for an extended period of time, then the responsibilities of women increase. All this care, the unpaid caring labour, falls heavier on women owing to the current social structure.

If we look at data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), it indicates that every day, Indian women do nearly six hours of unpaid work in contrast to Indian men who spend less than an hour on unpaid work. Globally, women do 76.2 percent of overall unpaid care work. According to UNESCO, due to the ongoing virus epidemic, 300 million children are missing out on school worldwide, increasing women's obligations because men were not very involved with childcare. There is a very important study from Oxfam which is called "Time to Care". It shows that women and girls invest 3.26 billion hours of unpaid care work each and every day across the world, adding to the Indian economy more than Rs. 19 lakh crore per year, which equals to 20 times India's entire education budget. We don't even recognise this unpaid work which women are doing.

During the crisis, childcare poses a further threat to working parents. Childcare becomes the responsibility of the mother. In the times of COVID, we are not allowing older parents to take care because of their health issues due to the possibility of virus exposure, schools and day-care centres are closed, the maids are also on leave. It leaves parenting duties entirely on parents and more on the woman. During coronavirus-related school closures, the stay-at-home parent, usually the mother, is likely to assume primary childcare duties in two-parent households where only one parent operates on the formal labour market. Dual-earner couples would have to determine how to split the growing demands for childcare. Major responsibilities come to women. Childcare has become an additional burden for women. Mothers already conduct about 60 percent of childcare among these couples, men do 7.2 hours of childcare a week compared to 10.3 hours for women

Another major impact of the virus has been that today we are witnessing more and more of domestic violence. In fact, all over the world, there has been an increased risk of intimate partner abuse. Due to heightened pressures in the home, women and girls are at increased risk of intimate partner abuse and other forms of domestic violence. We say stay home, stay safe. But unfortunately, home isn't a safe place for every woman. We have come across several heart-rendering tales during the period of self-quarantine.

One of the self-quarantine's most heart-rending adverse effects has been that many women are trapped with violent husbands at home. With the liquor shops being closed and men not getting to drink, violence increased. What is violence? After all gender violence is due to the power relationship in a family. When there is an outbreak of a pandemic like this, men are housebound, women are at home besides depression violence also increases.

In India too, since the national lockdown started, the National Commission for Women (NCW) has raised an alarm. When the first wave of COVID started, NCW raised an alarm saying that domestic violence will increase, and women would need help. NCW came up with how many cases of violence were reported by women. Many online helplines that help women are getting more and more calls of women reporting domestic abuse and so is the police reporting this.

If we look at men and lockdown, we find that many men are stuck at home, they have lost their jobs and we find that the situation is much worse in the informal sector. Men are losing jobs or being closely monitored on various tech platforms by their bosses. Many of these men do not have jobs. Many of them have small shops or sell on carts or do odd jobs earning a living day by day. Since most of them are forced to stay at home, they are very worried about their food, their daily security especially people living in slums. The man who would take all the decisions in the house is now forced to stretch his hand to take food from someone who delivers it to the slums. It may be from an NGO or any charity organization. The man lies idle all day, hopelessly wondering how to run the house and when he will be able to go to work, and if there will be any work left once all this is over. It has affected men and there has been an outburst in the form of domestic violence.

Lockdown has also affected women because there is a violent relationship. On a normal day, a woman in a violent relationship could wait for the man to leave the house and run for help if it's too much to take, or just regenerate herself in the time that her husband is away and earlier she was not stuck with the abuse day in and day out. But this has become the norm when both of them are stuck at home. Today, she is unable to seek any support.

Globally, one in three women experience gender-based violence and most of this is intimate partner violence and it is proven that this violence only increases during a crisis. By mid-March, many countries like Australia, Brazil and China have reported an increase in domestic violence and intimate partner abuse. One police station in China had 162 reports in February of intimate

partner violence. An NGO from Bangalore named Parihar who runs the Vanita Sahaya Vani had pointed out that every day it receives 30-40 calls of violence from March onwards. The National Commission said that it has seen a 100 per cent increase in its helpline 181 with issues of domestic violence. In fact, NCW came up with a WhatsApp number saying that one can report domestic violence on this and there was an increase in this. The immediate need is to have huge awareness campaigns to build knowledge on what is identified as domestic violence and what are the immediate steps to take and spread helpline details. NGOs and activists should advocate for swift action by police and the law. While the pandemic caused by the virus continues to play havoc, the pandemic that is going viral inside the households should be controlled.

Lockdown has also affected children. Many children are silent sufferers during this global pandemic. When they see violence in the family, they experience abuse and deal with trauma all alone. On a normal day, they would easily escape all these by running away to school or by playing with friends. When children see a lot of violence in the families, it brings out the trauma very close to them. The situation is much worse in slum areas. There are very congested places, there is no proper healthcare. There have been cases in slums and rural India that I have personally heard from children, where parents have felt that the child is anyway not in school and hence it is best for her to be married. At least there will be one mouth less to feed.

The overall facilities are not there, and they are all stuck over there. UNICEF estimates that more than seven out of ten need psychological care in the age group of two to fourteen. Among them, many girls face a lot of violence which includes forced intercourse and during the time of crisis this violence has increased. One in 10 girls under 18 experience forced intercourse. All this increases during crisis again. Childline came up with a helpline number (1098) and it reported that over 1,000 cases a week are reported about violence with three in five cases coming for girls and the rest for boys. The Makkala Sahayavani, a community initiative in Bengaluru for the protection of children and their rights, has received double the calls during the lockdown than usual (all data available in the public domain). Thus, the lockdown has affected not only men, women but also children.

When we look at professional women, there have been various reports that point out that in days of lockdown the overall productivity of professional women, in terms of research and publication has gone down with more and more women being burdened with household works. There have been a lot of studies which I have looked at, the number of articles which were submitted in pre-corona period and the post-corona period, the output of women has really declined because women are not submitting as many articles as they were doing earlier. This is explained with the increase in workload and the pressure on women. The effects of lockdowns on the division of labour at home have been particularly detrimental to the research activity of women. Many women had to learn the technologies of online classes, meeting through webinars and zoom. This also created more anxiety and stress among women.

The pandemic has posed a lot of risks for women and girls, especially in areas which are already conflict affected. Look at Israel. Look at Palestine. Look at others. The COVID-19 pandemic poses devastating risks for women and girls in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. There has already been a disruption in critical health, humanitarian and development programmes. If we look at the UNICEF report it says that more than 50 per cent of all maternal deaths occur from complications in pregnancy and childbirth in countries affected by fragility. The coronavirus further has an impact on the health sector and is likely to drive this number up even further. In settings across the conflict landscape, women – be they displaced, refugee, rural, poor or otherwise marginalized –are affected much more. The pandemic has worsened the situation. They face isolation due to the concerted spread of misinformation and a lack of access to critical technologies.

The first wave of the COVID-19 did not hit us so much but in the second wave, we all witnessed the kind of impact it had on public health workers. Most of the nurses are women, most of the health care workers, frontline workers are women. It put so much pressure on healthcare — the rising demand for oxygen, the demand for ventilators. Everything came up. Health pandemics can make it more difficult for women and girls to receive treatment and health services. This is compounded by multiple or intersecting inequalities, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, race, geographic location and sexual orientation, among others which influence access and decision-making to critical health services and information about COVID-19. COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that our public healthcare system needs to be improved, and women's mental health needs to be a priority this time around. Globally, women make up 70 percent of the health workforce and are more likely to be frontline health workers, especially nurses, midwives and community health workers. The same thing is true for India too — whether you look at community health workers, nurses, midwives by and large they are women. They are also the majority of health facility service staff such as cleaners, laundry, catering and thus they are more likely to be exposed to the virus. I

COVID-19 has impacted the mental health of older women even more profoundly. There is so much insecurity. Especially women who are from underprivileged backgrounds have had a lot of burden. When livelihood is a burden for themselves, many economically underprivileged families find the older people at home to be an added burden. Older people being more risk-prone and the need of giving them greater protection intensifies the worries of several families irrespective of economic status. On the other hand, being identified as more vulnerable to COVID-19, and being told that they are very vulnerable, can be extremely frightening for the elderly.

At the University of Hyderabad, I am doing a project from the ICSSR (Prof. Rekha Pande, from the Centre for Women's Studies Dr. Padmaja from Health Psychology, and Dr. Anupama from the Medical centre), where we were looking at health issues of women. The study is titled *Women, Aging and Health - A framework for Action and Policy Formulations- Looking at*

Health Issues. We had started our work in the pre-pandemic period in January. We were taking up four states of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana in South and, Uttar Pradesh and Uttrakhand in North India and we were looking at women staying in old age homes and in families. As the data collection work had to come to a halt due to the pandemic, we switched on to the online mode and prompted a lot more questions on how coronavirus is impacting these women. Now, we are in the process of analysing data and in the process of writing a report. We have seen that the pandemic has had a lot more impact on the mental health of women. Mental health is an area on which we generally do not talk much. Our phone conversations showed us an increase in the psychological impact for women including anxiety and feeling stressed or angry. There was a feeling of further isolation and neglect and also worries about their health. Some did not have the support systems to care for them, particularly in terms of their medical needs. There is a need to focus on the mental health of the women too who are vulnerable due to their age.

All of us have seen on television when there was migration taking place. Men and women from the unorganised sectors started migrating from the urban areas back to their homes. Lack of transportation saw these people on roads and while both men and women were affected for wanting to reach their homes. However, women have more problems which men don't face menses, the need for toilets, among others. We also witnessed that among these women who were walking back to their homes, there were some who were pregnant too. We can imagine the hardships that they must have gone through. The same thing happened in the second phase of COVID. All these impacted women much more than men.

All of us know the kind of virus and how it has impacted schools. More than 157 crore students, across 191 countries were severely impacted by the closure of educational institutions due to coronavirus. An UNESCO study has said, in India, over 32 crore students were hit by COVID-19 as schools and colleges were shut. The report notes that students from classes 9 to 12 were most severely impacted by this lockdown. They have much more mental pressure because they don't know what is going to happen. More than 13 crore children fall in this bracket in India, which is also the level at which students write the board exams.

Another sector where we see the impact on women is schools. We know that in schools teachers are mostly women and as schools are shut teachers had to suddenly upgrade themselves so that they can teach students in virtual mode. None of us was prepared for this. Coronavirus hit us so suddenly; all the teachers had to learn new ways. The fear of contagion and the necessity of social distancing have rendered traditional classroom teaching impossible. Within a split of a second, they had to learn how to start teaching online, how to communicate, how to distribute e-notes, etc. If we look at technologies, we are not so advanced. Definitely, it has impacted women much more. Over the last two months, the higher education sector has shifted from classrooms and campuses to online conferencing applications and discussion forums. Teachers, taking the initiative on their own, have started conducting classes over online broadcasting platforms, distributing notes and materials through email and instant messages. Now, communicating with

students over phone calls and voice messages is the new normal. This technological adaptation is perhaps keeping the educational sector up and running through the current crisis.

I had already pointed out that out of the total population of students enrolled in education globally, UNESCO estimates that over 89 per cent are currently out of school because of COVID-19 closures. This represents 1.54 billion children and youth enrolled in school or university, including nearly 743 million girls. When girls are not going to school, there will be a lot of pressure to marry them especially in developing and under-developed countries. The dropout rate was already at a dismal pace earlier. This is something which has increased. Over 111 million of these girls are living in the world's least developed countries where getting an education is already a struggle. As COVID-19 forces 743 million girls out of school in 185 countries, there is a fear that rising drop-out rates will disproportionately affect adolescent girls. This will only exacerbate gender gaps in education and lead to increased risk of sexual exploitation, early and unintended pregnancy, and child, early and forced marriages. The government and higher educational institutions quickly announced that online teaching would be conducted by the faculty. But this is easily said than done. While some of the rich private universities promptly announced online teaching. But what happened in the first phase? The state-run public universities have faced immense practical problems in implementing the decision. I saw in Hyderabad, most of the government schools just closed. Now, in the second phase what the teachers are doing is that through WhatsApp they just send their notes. Many of the students don't have smartphones. Those who have are trying to learn. It is a very sorrow state of affairs. The students get so much written material on their WhatsApp and half of them don't even open it. It has really impacted the quality of education.

If you look at different disciplines –how do you go about online teaching on different disciplines? Earlier disciplines when needed went online but now everyone is forced to conduct online classes. How do you conduct practical classes and especially for technical courses?

Some of the additional problems encountered by public higher educational institutions are in disciplines like Languages, Humanities and Social Sciences where good quality reading material has not been prepared by a large number of teachers who still rely on traditional methods of classroom teaching. The situation may be true in many science-related disciplines too, barring technical education.

How would meaningful online teaching be carried out in such situations if the closure of institutions continues for a longer spell? In the second phase, how can online methods be followed for the conduct of practical classes in disciplines where it is absolutely necessary when students have moved out of campus.

In the absence of the conduct of practical classes, the conduct of online education would fall flat. In the case of technical courses as well as in commerce and management disciplines, where

students are required to have some internship, some knowledge of the industry. How can they do internships with industry as part of course requirements through the online method? How would students be fruitfully able to undergo internships when academic institutions and industries are closed due to lockdown. Some industries may reopen in course of time, but would they be able to comply with internship requirements, concerned as they are with productivity and sales. This is a big problem that has come up at this point of time.

Marginalized students are most affected. It is very difficult for these students to access online teaching, they do not have stable internet access, no/shared smartphone devices, etc., and many of the homes do not have adequate space for learning. Again, the teachers also have to face a lot of challenges with teaching effectively in online mode. They were not prepared for online teaching. Courses were not designed for online teaching. Therefore, the pandemic has hit government schools much harder than private schools.

The pandemic hit fast and hard, and schools simply did not have enough time to train teachers and students for this new reality. The sudden shift to online learning without any planning, especially in countries like India where the backbone for online learning was not ready and the curriculum was not designed for such a format, has created the risk of most of our students becoming passive learners and they seem to be losing interest due to low levels of attention span. There are other problems that teachers are facing while teaching online and there are not many solutions for such kinds of problems. Many students mute the teacher and show themselves as present whereas they are not listening to the teacher. They are not learning anything. This is not possible in face-to-face learning. Thus, online education can't match classroom teaching.

We are now beginning to realize that online learning could be dull as it is creating a new set of passive learners which can pose new challenges. Online learning is a special kind of methodology and not all teachers are good at it or at least not all of them were ready for this sudden transition from face-to-face learning to online learning. Thus, most of the teachers are just conducting lectures on video platforms such as Zoom which may not be real online learning in the absence of a dedicated online platform specifically designed for the purpose. There is a risk that in such a situation, learning outcomes may not be achieved and it may be only resulting in engaging the students. Universities and colleges will shift to a model of blended learning where both face-to-face deliveries along with an online model will become a norm. This will require all teachers to become more technology savvy and go through some training to bring themselves to the level that would be required. We have been talking about virtual classrooms and various online tools today allow us to make the engagement between the teacher and students as close to real.

Having said that there are advantages in these gloomy times. The greatest advantage of such a system is education can become international. Advance institutes like IITs and NITs have

globalised online education. Fundamental structural changes came up in the curriculum/syllabi and we find that skill development should be part of the curriculum in engineering and science degree programmes. We should make our country strong digitally now. There have been many efforts to digitally connect every area of the country.

Faculties at higher education institutions need to change their mundane teaching methods and adapt to evolving technology-centred teaching. The faculty should establish themselves as “competent” individuals who can deliver what the students expect. Faculty should be active in research and research collaborations. Research collaboration can go online and can be internationalized. Research publications can go online, and we can gain experience/skills in online teaching. In a way, the learning institutes can become virtual institutes. Every student’s home will become his/her institute. This will reduce the demand for the infrastructure of the institute. However, research labs should function as usual to support research. Despite these problems, there can be an opportunity for India once we strengthen the internet connection in rural areas. Once every village area is digitally connected, we will be able to approach the students much better. Every village and town in India should be digitally connected for better interaction between the students and teachers. Institutes like IITs have “a sort” of infrastructure to connect students but the experience shows that not all students had good interaction due to various reasons. We need to learn the new Pedagogy in digital education. There is an important link between course content, educationists, technology and course-takers. These three have to come together now. Earlier we never bothered. It was the teacher who was addressing the students. Now, the democratization of technology is an important issue, comprising internet connectivity, telecom infrastructure, affordability of online system, availability of laptop/desktop, software, educational tools, online assessment tools, etc.

It is a fact that technology-based education is more transparent and does not make difference in front vs backbenchers or girls vs boys. Some state governments have reacted quickly to find solutions for their students, including leveraging the support of civil society organizations. Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, and Jharkhand are states that are already working towards school transformation swiftly in this direction. Many schools have formed WhatsApp groups to help parents and students transition to a Ghar Pe School model. It is a new model that has come up. These states are supporting their schools with daily calendars mapped to student learning competencies, and guidelines for structured, weekly phone interactions between teachers and students. Recognizing that home digital access is often limited, some states are also adding other mediums like TV and radio.

The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) has, therefore, taken the lead to create this platform wherein the member Indian Universities can share the e-content, approaches and strategies adopted by them for delivery of online content to prevent academic loss. AIU invites suggestions, comments, inputs, sharing of best practices and even the concerns and difficulties faced by the Vice-Chancellors, Directors, Professors to minimise the impact of COVID-19 on

the Indian Higher Education space through technology intervention so that we can minimise the impact.

Higher education has its own challenges. It cannot switch to online mode immediately. In a place like the University of Hyderabad when the first wave of Corona came, we did an online survey to find out how well students were connected to the internet. Some 4000 students participated in the survey. We have students coming from corners of Assam, from districts of Kerala and other places of Rajasthan. Many of the students said they did not have smartphones; they did not a proper stable internet connection. We were located in a highly digitised place. But for the students, it was very difficult. Keeping a track of attendance is a major issue with many universities. Many of our courses require 75% attendance. We have to deal away with it.

We have to take a lot of initiatives which are being taken up by schools and colleges. Looking at this challenge of colleges and schools being shut, the Government of India, as well as the state governments and private players have regularly been publishing information on various initiatives undertaken by ministries like the Ministry of Education, the Department of Technical Education, NCERT and others to support and benefit youth/students. A few of the initiatives are SWAYAM online courses for teachers, UG/PG Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) for non-technology courses, e-PG Path Shala or e-content containing modules on social science, arts, fine arts, natural and mathematical science. If you are interested in learning, then it is possible. The students and teachers also have to train themselves. Many noteworthy initiatives have been taken up like Spoken Tutorial, Free and Open Source Software for Education (FOSSEE), e-Yantra, Google Classroom and so on CEC-UGC YouTube channel, Vidwan – a database of experts who provide information to peers and prospective collaborators, NEAT – an initiative by AICTE based on the PPP model to enhance the employability skill among students, in collaboration with Education Technology Companies and National Digital Library (NDL), a repository of learning resources with single window facility. You have the National Knowledge Network (NKN) which is a project to enhance technology. There are also National Project on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL), National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology (NMEICT), National Academic Depository (NAD), among others. All these enhance our ability to connect easily with institutions and enhance our access to learning resources. For instance, NKN provides high-speed network backbone to educational institutes in India.

While the reduction in spending on higher education may be justified by the powers as of now. However, in the long-run, the government should earmark the much-promised 6% of the GDP on higher education. and equally importantly, increase the budgetary allocation for healthcare. Another important issue that is faced by higher education institutes is how would they make up for the loss of time on account of the closure of institutions due to COVID-19. Assuming the mandatory 75% attendance requirement of classes is waived, what would happen to the internal assessment tests and viva voice examinations, which are part of the requirements

under the semester system in operation. The physical infrastructure of academic institutions will have less impact on the quality of education and thus directly on the cost of education. Review meetings, parent-teacher meetings, subject conferences will be location agnostic. The real vision of the new education policy for liberal education will get executed.

It is possible that in times to come, a student may be allowed to carry out courses from any College/ University based on the quality of teacher and fees for the course irrespective of his location and finally will get a degree from the home university where he/she got registered or from the university where he has taken maximum courses, resulting in a balance of economics of good education. A drastic change in thought process is required among the policymakers, authorities, students and specially educationists. Faculty selection should gradually be linked to technology friendliness and keenness for technology adoption. Similarly, accreditation parameters, criteria need reconsideration.

The risk of losing students is so high that they will need to re-look at their admission practices, admission criteria and the overall recruitment process itself which will include, new methods of outreach and application process itself. A great opportunity will open up for those companies that have been developing and strengthening learning management systems for use by universities and colleges. This has the potential to grow at a very fast pace but will have to be priced appropriately for use by all institutions.

There is a great opportunity for universities and colleges to start improving the quality of the learning material that is used in the teaching and learning process. Since blended learning will be the new format of learning there will be a push to find new ways to design and deliver quality content especially due to the fact that the use of learning management systems will bring about more openness and transparency in academics. The teaching community to a large extent has been very insulated and more so in a country like India. There is a new opportunity where collaborative teaching and learning can take on new forms and can even be monetised. Faculty members/ teachers can deliver online courses to even students of competing institutions. Collaborations can also happen among faculty/teachers across the nation to benefit from each other.

A pandemic amplifies and heightens all existing inequalities. These inequalities in turn shape who is affected, the severity of that impact, and our efforts to recover. The COVID-19 pandemic and its social and economic impacts have created a global crisis unparalleled in the history of the world—and one which requires a whole-of-society response to match its sheer scale and complexity. Thus, when we look at the future in this pandemic –we started with baby steps. It was like a nursery type. We did not use technology so rampantly but slowly we got used to it. The very fact that I am addressing you remotely from behind a laptop is because of the impact of the pandemic. We can also use it for our own advantage. The future will definitely not be the

same. We have to take steps to strengthen our country's digital learning and infrastructure in the long run. This is the biggest lesson from COVID-19.

The form of student recruitment has changed. How do we recruit students? Each and every college are recruiting students. These are issues which are coming up. We have to learn a new management system. This is the new norm. We have to develop new learning material and we have to learn to work in collaboration across the nation and across the world.

I would like to conclude that as it is our world, and it was a world of unequals. We have so much inequality and the pandemic has amplified and heightened these existing inequalities. The covid pandemic has shown that it has a social impact. It has an economic impact. It has created a crisis that is unparalleled in the world. How can we develop a new kind of future? There must be an attempt for including women and women's organisations at the heart of Covid response. Women have been impacted by it much more. We have to transform inequalities of unpaid care work into a new inclusive care economy that works for everyone. We have to design new socio-economic plans with an international focus and we have to put women and girls at the centre of them. Putting women and girls at the centre of economies will fundamentally drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all, support more rapid recovery and place us back on a footing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

The UNICEF prioritizes five core programmatic and advocacy actions that recognize the public health, social and economic consequences of this pandemic:

1. Care for caregivers at this time.
2. Prepare for increases in gender-based violence throughout the COVID-19 outbreak.
3. Maintain core health and education services and systems.
4. Engage women's and youth rights networks to support connectivity and the flow of vital information.
5. Ensure gender data are available, analyzed and actionable. We did not have gender-segregated data initially.

Thus, the new need of the hour is we have to come together as a civil society. We need to act collectively. Combinations of interventions are required like immediate relief support like dry rations for families and livelihood options for women who are stuck in the houses. Tele-counselling and city-wide helplines are important to provide needed support to the women during this time. Legal counselling and training of front-end staff to identify cases are also important. We cannot blame the government and civil society. As bystanders, as a society, each of us has a role to play. We should be together in sisterhood or human hood, as you choose. It's important to check on families on phone, reach out to people who we recognize as vulnerable and offer support – of hearing them out at least. What we could do is make it a point to call up two people we know every day, just to check on them and assure support. Universities and colleges worldwide are facing a major risk in the area of student recruitment and retention. There

is a need to work on this. Every COVID-19 response plan, and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, need to address the gender impacts of this pandemic.

Webinar 11

Distinguished Lecture on Women and Land Rights

Meera Velayudhan

**Policy Analyst and the former President, Indian Association for Women Studies, Kochi,
India**

(The Lecture was delivered on 24th June 2021)

I was very happy when Prof. Ishita asked me to deliver this lecture. I am thankful to Dr. Lipi for giving me this opportunity. Calcutta University and Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) have a very long history of association from the beginning itself. Calcutta University Women's Studies Centre and IAWS are a part of a journey of Women's Study and Women's movement. With Ishita we have a common journey at many levels. I am very happy to present on Women and Land Rights. There are so many issues which are coming up now. There have been a lot of activities and research and new debates, and it has grown quite a bit. This presentation is also for students and researchers on how we look at women's rights to land and land-based resource rights. How do we approach it? What are the kinds of studies that have taken place? What are the movements that have taken place? I am going to speak about this in detail.

I must acknowledge that four years back, I was settled in Gujarat, and I was living for a decade there and working on women's ownership to land. There was a network of 23 organisations. We started in 2003 and I must acknowledge that my presentation has also its roots in this intervention in Gujarat and then from there we went to different States and did networking. It is from that many of these studies and dialogues have emerged. I must thank the Working Group for Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO) in Gujarat and Bina Aggarwal who was also associated with the work from its inception in 2002-2003. I must acknowledge them and of course IAWS for being able to present dialogue in different forums.

The significance of women's land and resource rights was raised by women's movements in the 1970s. In India, of course, in the context of a lot of land struggles that took place in different parts of India, including Bengal. 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 in 1975. One of the popular slogans among them was “women do 65 per cent of the world’s work, earn 5 per cent of the world income and own 1 per cent of the world’s property.” So, the whole thing of resource rights was raised there in Mexico.

In India, the report of the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI) came out in the middle of the 1970s (1975) when India was facing a crisis – both political and economic. At that time, they noted a sharp decrease in the numbers of female cultivators and there was an increase in the number of female agricultural labour in India. It also meant that agrarian changes were taking place where women from being cultivators were becoming agricultural labourers. The CSWI also identified land reforms as a key measure to improve the condition of rural women.

There were different kinds of dialogues which went on in the 1980s and 1990s, both in civil society and academia. Livelihood perspectives emerged following debates among academicians and disciplines, development workers, multi-lateral and bilateral agencies, representatives of diverse grassroots organisations and policymakers about the nature of agrarian change, particularly in post-colonial societies of the developing countries. Thus, one of the major approaches was the need to look at the varied aspects of rural life as being integrated, located within specific contexts, cross sectors and informed by field action and engagement. To what extent these various intersections in gender were taking place in rural life?

The gender analysis which emerged in the livelihood approach was very important. It highlighted gender relations in agriculture and inter-linkages with broader processes of change and brought to the fore:

- a) How the households opened up (if one looked at in a homogenous manner, there were different kinds of households-) and how they link up with broader economic and political structures.
- b) A new way of looking at rural markets as social, political and unequal; and
- c) What role did the institutions play — be it state, market or communities which were diverse in managing natural resources and that these institutions were not gender neutral.

It was also in this background that women’s entitlements to land and other land-based resources began to be addressed since the mid-1990s.

The study focuses on why entitlements to land really matter.

Studies have shown that a key factor linked with rural poverty is land. There are many oral histories which talk about the green fields, and this is the land which can save us. There have been many studies from the ground. Arable land has been analysed as the most valued form of property, for economic, political and symbolic significance. Arable land is livelihood sustaining asset. In regions where agriculture dominates livelihoods (in most of India) land is also important for women for reducing the risk of poverty and enhancing food security. This is what the studies

brought out. Women who own land or control assets are better positioned to improve their lives and cope in the face of the crisis. By owning land and homes women directly gain from the benefits of using land, earning income and also have a secure place to live. Research has shown that individuals who own land generate much higher rural non-farm earnings from self-employment than people without land. This is because they have something to fall back on. In many cases woman can also use the land as collateral for credit during crisis or for investing in other income generating work. Property and asset ownership by mothers have led to better outcomes for survival, education and health of children than assets owned by fathers. For women it is the survival of the household. For them education and health of the children take priority rather than going for cash crops. Also, their priority, studies have shown, is maintenance of the household and members of the household.

A study of marginal farmer households in Kerala have shown that the mother's cultivation of a home garden (the output of which she controlled) had a consistently positive effect on child nutrition. Access to and control over productive assets such as land can strengthen women's ability to manage economic shocks and social risks. Land is a particularly critical resource for women when the household breaks down in critical situations such as male migration, war, abandonment, violence, divorce, polygamous relationships, illness, e.g., HIV/AIDS or even deaths.

In regions facing hunger and chronic under-nutrition women often are the main food growers. I had earlier said that their priority is to grow food crops. Rural women are often responsible for half of the world's food production and in developing countries they produce 60-80 per cent of the food. Studies have found a clear link between secure land tenure and increased agricultural productivity and land improvement. In some of the interventions in Gujarat, we saw that if they were given other kinds of support, secure land tenure and productivity and land improvement with different kinds of support for agriculture including from the State, then productivity can improve from self-employment for people without land. This is a critical productive asset and source of livelihood for rural poor women. Women are majority of tillers and agricultural workers and play a major role in household subsistence. I would like to say that women are farmers in varied ways— not only those who have their own land but also who are leasing out land, leasing in land, working on their family farms. So, women need to be considered as farmers.

A large percentage of households estimated to be between 20-35 per cent in India are *de facto* female headed. Female headed households could be due to conflict or migration. It could be when land degradation takes place or may be land acquisition takes place and they are made landless. For widows and different categories of single women, elderly in particular, ownership of land also creates possibilities for women to stand on their own feet and even for drawing support from relatives. We get a better insight into gender when we consider women and land. Land titles also serve as collaterals in assessing the benefits of development programmes such as

production credits for farmers. For example, in crop failures there is a need of credit. Land titles and entitlements are significant for them in such situations. In regions with high male migration and where women are the principal farmers such support is critical for their households. Many of our studies have shown that women themselves are left behind and they are taking care of their land. There is a need for other kinds of support from the State, from various institutions and agencies.

How do they access land in varied ways? There are different categories through which they can have access to ownership of land. One is of course, inheritance, kinship and lineage. Then, there are group rights such as usufruct rights in village commons, pastures, forests, coastal areas. These are significant. Access to such common lands take varied forms and is also linked to different forms of land tenure systems. In each of the States the land tenures are very different, and access takes different kinds of forms in different States. These serve as sources of livelihood and subsistence to rural poor and landless as they provide firewood, fodder, medicinal plants, food products, etc. Then, there is State and government land distribution which is actually a policy. Then, one can purchase directly from the market. There is individual ownership. If there is Individual ownership what is the extent of freedom the woman has to lease out, lease in, mortgage, sell, and bequeath. How much freedom can a woman has to lease out, lease in or mortgage or sell land? This freedom category is also a Constitutional category and also very important category when we talk about access to land and resource rights. One has to consider that this Constitutional category of freedom can mean different things for different categories or sections. It can mean freedom from the forests; can mean freedom from the lands or coastal areas — fishing communities. This is important when we consider land rights. Studies have shown that at all these junctures women face more obstacles than men.

Women in many regions, community, tribes may have access to land and other assets through informal arrangements or traditional methods of household or community decision-making. They may be allowed to have access. But such processes vary from region to region and community to community. In most of South Asia women traditionally do not own property since land is inherited through male family line. That is a very important aspect. Among many communities, customary law, often related to marriage bar women from obtaining primary rights to land. Rather, they only have use rights through their fathers, husbands and brothers. So, we have different ways of access through marital or through the family. Customary laws, informal practices, or traditional practices in different regions vary.

A very key debate that goes on is where the Customary laws interface with varied legal systems. In Nagaland, women work on the land, but Tribal Councils parcel out land to members and traditionally Nagaland women never had any say in any of the Tribal Councils. They are not part of any tribal Council. All India Government laws are there to support agriculture or land related activities then they need individual titles to access these. Therefore, a sort of competition takes place in terms of customary laws where women did not have any say in the Tribal Council

and there was a lot of opposition in having a certain percentage of them as elected members. They still not have that right. Therefore, customary laws can also clash with varied legal systems. How do they interface with each other?

Women have access to land and related resources through a father, brother and husband depending on a community's lineage system. However, access is not ownership. Women's secondary rights become weaker when norms of social protection/kinship support diminish through land alienation or migration takes place and those secondary rights through family relations or through Tribal Councils become weaker. Even with formal ownership, as in matrilineal communities, women's control over land is not ensured. Many of the Northeast studies have shown how these practices are changing on the ground.

Women may have a higher status because they have access or ownership, but they are still not equal to men in the household or community. Customary laws interface with varied legal systems at different stages. There are different Constitutional Schedules, such as Dimasas of Assam and Garo of Meghalaya come under Sixth Schedule which recognise community ownership of Common Property Resources (CPRs) yet they have to interact with individual-based formal ownership laws. For some areas the 6th schedule is not applied, for example, the 6th Schedule does not apply to the Aka of Arunachal Pradesh. Constitutional Schedules are different for different communities. Transition is also taking place in many of these societies from the norms of a matrilineal society to that of a patrilineal society because of the wider changes that are taking place, because of the new laws that are coming and because of the different centralised programmes that are coming in different states. A lot of economic changes are taking place in cultivation practices or migration and cultural changes such as upward mobility, urbanisation influences, etc. Studies have shown that for women from Haryana in the Green Revolution areas there was an upward mobility in households. They would withdraw women from agriculture and women would do lot of food processing or crop processing within the household. This is a sign of upward mobility. That is also a kind of sign of honour and status for the household that women do not go out to work.

Article 371A recognises the customary laws of Angami of Nagaland but interpretation of these laws has been done by men. No women have been historically part of any Tribal Council. So, this interface with modernity is in whose favour? Movements are posing these questions. The Meghalaya Self Acquired Act 1984 allows parents to give priority to son or daughter according to their will. Attitudes are changing.

The National Legislation did not uphold community ownership rights to land. Land is perceived as the State's property with power to alienate land from traditional communities. This impacted the land use patterns which varied not only within villages but also between tribes leading to resource crisis and huge social impact. That's why there was the debate on land

acquisition. There were debates by women's land rights groups on different forms of ownership rights or should land be the only property of the state?

Studies have shown there is social power and control over resources by men and not individual ownership. Studies have shown that more of individual control means more of male ownership. With State encouraging commercial crops and loans being given to individual farmers and heads of household, the process of change to individual male ownership also takes place with these kinds of changes in commercialisation of agriculture.

Governance is a very key issue in land. There are a lot of international studies and documents and debates on this. There is link between customary laws, 6th Schedule and fixed territory and land as identity. Thus, threat of alienation of land to non-tribals is a big issue in tribal /Adivasi areas. Not being able to maintain the land and its cultivation owing to varied factors such as poverty and other kind of vulnerabilities, there is the threat of land alienation to non-tribals. How does land alienation take place from tribals to non-tribals? There is a debate on customary laws, 6th Schedule and fixed land territory and land as identity. There is a lot of conflicts. State recognition of individual ownership as legal prepares the ground for land alienation, particularly where community ownerships and Schedules are there. Individual ownership gives rise to different types of struggles and prepares environment for land alienation. Individuals can do whatever they like with land which communities or tribal councils would have taken.

Many territories do not have just a single tribal group. Thus, there is potential for conflict. In Northeast this has taken place in many areas. Colonials actually form these boundaries. Some tribes are driven to one area and some to another. Conflicts are also related to these resource raids which we might see as insurgencies or some kind of underground movements. A lot of it had got to do with resources and the way the territories were divided, and this is also colonial heritage.

When the customary law is changing, when it is dynamic and diverse, then how do we codify it? We want it as a law. There is the threat of imposing uniform customary law in the name of unity or national integration. Even at this level of land and resource rights this whole question of codification is very complex. There are different kind of layers. We also need to look at the live situations on the ground — how customary law is being practiced and in specific contexts in terms of access, ownership, control of land and other land-based resources. Different kind of studies of this nature be it region-wise studies, micro studies, etc., are taking place. They are very important.

Intersectionality is a very important aspect. Women's land rights intersect with other problems such as discriminatory inheritance patterns, privatisation of community and indigenous land as well as gendered control over economic resources and the right to work. All these are linked with each other. Gender is at the centre of these intersections. We see a lot of honour

killings in Haryana — it has very much to do with land rights and inheritance. Even in the Constituent Assembly why the Hindu Code Bill could not be passed which Baba Saheb Ambedkar had put forward was due to opposition particularly from Punjab and Northern States of women's rights to property and resource rights. Therefore, these regions still continue some of those kinship and feudal kind of attitudes and practices. This is continuing in terms of women's rights. Thus, there were varied aspects of women's lives that are also linked with this kind of inheritance practices and privatisation takes place in forest lands, in common lands. Our economic resources and rights to land are also gendered. These intersections are very important when we study women's rights to land resources. I will quickly go through the conceptual shifts in policy – Five Year Plans (government documents).

In the 1980s, I was a student, but I had also started my work in the Centre for Development Studies. The Centre for Women's Development Studies was very much involved in bringing gender chapter in the Five-year plans. It is very important to see how the State's thinking has changed. Conceptual shifts have taken place in the Five-Year Plans and now we do not have any of these planning at all. These conceptual shifts are there, and they also inform a lot of the Government programmes. In fact, very significant was the intervention of the women's movement and women's study is all about women's economic independence. In the Sixth Plan (1980-85), it was mentioned "economic independence would accelerate the improvement of the status of women. Government would endeavour to give joint titles to husband and wife in all development activities involving transfer of assets. This would be taken up for implementation to start within programmes like distribution of land and house sites and beneficiary oriented economic units" (para 27.9 of the Sixth Plan). Now, there is discussion about bhagidari meaning more as co-partner, i.e., not just a joint title. If the husband gives away one part of the land, then one part of the land cannot be given away without the consent of the wife because it is her share also. Thus, the debate is on. These households become beneficiary oriented economic units. These joint titles to land were so significant for development programmes to be directed and focussed. Thus, we see that inter-linkages were also important.

The Seventh Plan also did not review the progress of the announcement made in the Sixth Plan or joint titles. It only described it as a 'radical move in the concerted attempt to improve women's status' (Paragraph 14.13). However, it made the promise that the existing scheme or policy of funding assignees of ceiling surplus lands would be now oriented to confer benefits on a larger number of households headed by women to enable them to buy inputs, etc., (Paragraph 14.41iii). There were some setbacks also because of the change in Government.

The Eight Plan talks about changes in inheritance of property although it took place much later. The Hindu Succession Act was implemented in 2008. After the Hindu Code Bill, it took almost one hundred and fifty years to change inheritance laws. Thus, we can see the kind of resistance that was there at different levels. But the Plan did talk about it, this which means the State is recognising the important issues. How programmes could be directed, in such a way, that

they encourage people to give property to women. It would act as an incentive. Whether it is acquired or inherited the programmes could be directed towards it. It linked women's asset holdings with inheritance rights. It stated, "One of the basic requirements for improving the status of women is to bring about changes in the laws relating to inheritance of property to fully protect the interests of women and to enable them to get an equal share in the parental property, whether inherited or self-acquired. Social legislations for women will be effectively enforced with the help of women's groups. They can help in reaching out to rural women." Para 15.5 deals with Social Welfare and Development of Women. It says, "the role of women in agricultural production has to be given due recognition. Women's control over economic resources and services will have to be encouraged as a large number of women are heading rural households. Measures would be necessary to distribute surplus land to women-headed households as well and titles granted to women in the allotment of house sites as also in respect of other productive assets. For married women joint titles would be desirable for productive assets, houses and house sites." (Para 15.5.11).

"There are about 30 percent rural households headed by women who bear all the burden of earning and caring for the families and suffer on account of lack of access to means of production and ownership of land and other property." (Paragraph 15.4.7). These reforms can bring about changes in their life.

The Ninth Plan was for group activities for land conservation and improvement. Women's groups clearly start forming at various levels. Para 4.1.45 of the plan states, "The strategies for agricultural development will focus on the social objectives of employment generation, food and nutrition security, gender equality, poverty alleviation, and environmental sustainability. Towards these objectives, a special thrust will be given to raising land productivity in Eastern India and the arid zones of peninsular India where the poor are largely concentrated. These regions require investment in minor irrigation, watershed development and general infrastructure as well as support to small and marginal farmers by way of timely credit, availability of inputs and seeds and market linkages. An attempt will be made to bring about effective coordination between agricultural programmes and rural programmes. Women's rights in land will be recognised and women will be given preference in group activities for land conservation and improvement."

The debate also shifts with the kind of data being brought by the women's movements and by studies and women economists who played a significant role. "Rights of tenants and sharecroppers need to be recorded and security of tenure provided to them." (Para 4.1.57 of Ninth Plan). This is very important in Bengal also. In the last seven or eight years there is this lack of recordings and security of tenures. Studies have shown there was a lot of violence in Bengal. A lot of political violence also is linked with former owners of land trying to use lack of recordings of tenures to get back the land to whom it was distributed. Thus, this created conflicts and I remember reports from Bengal when the Trinamul came to power. I was looking at reports

why these conflicts were taking place and I am sure it has definitely got to do with rights and security of tenure. Recording is important. Title should be recorded to enable the procurement. It is important to have the documents with names. In public life also we need to have direct strategies to provide equal access to control over land. “This alone would provide incentive for increasing investment in agriculture, as experience in certain parts of the country has shown. Preference should be given to poor, especially women with respect to wastelands and common property resources.” (Paragraph 4.1.57 of above).

Recognising the fact that women have been socialised only to take a back seat in public life, affirmative action through deliberate strategies will be initiated to provide equal access to and control over land and other forms of property including through inheritance, common property, resources, credit, technologies and markets, etc.

The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) is like a Sectoral Plan. In Chapter on Sectoral Policies and Programmes it talks about what is happening in agriculture and at policy level there is a need to have a concern about that. How female headed households were increasing and what are the different kind of sectors. How new colonies are being built? And how the Plan itself respond to these changes. The stress was on “effective implementation of land reform legislations, ceiling and distribution of surplus land and issue of Joint *Pattas* under Government schemes, etc. It will also make concerted efforts to ensure that the benefits of training and extension in agriculture and its allied activities of horticulture, small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc., reach women in proportion to their numbers. Special training programmes in the latest technology, keeping in view the role of women as producers, will be expanded to assist rural women in meeting the market demands. With the rise of women headed households the phenomenon of feminisation of agriculture will be attended to as a concern at the policy level.” (Para 2.11.83).

About the Eleventh Plan (2007-12) what is interesting is we could actually impact the Plan. There is no planning now but then there was this window open for dialogue with the State at that stage. Therefore, we were able to discuss some of the conceptual shifts and provide direct data and case studies through which to bring about changes in approaches. That kind of openness or inclusiveness, i.e., consultative process and consultative environment was there which is sadly lacking now. The stress was also on an inclusiveness approach. It stated, “For growth to be at all inclusive, the agricultural strategy must focus on the 85% of farmers who are small and marginal, increasingly female, and who find it difficult to access inputs, credit, and extension or to market their output. While some of these farmers may ultimately exit from farming, the overwhelming majority will continue to remain in the sector and the objective of inclusiveness requires that their needs are attended to. For example, credit has grown at unprecedented rates (30% per annum) to other sectors but not to small and marginal land holders and women who lack collateral security.”(Paragraph 1.14 of the Chapter on Agriculture). Group approach, collective groups and subsidies which were mentioned in the plan are very important. One of the most successful models in many of the States have been these Group approaches — leasing out

land, leasing in land, working as a Group, the benefits of Group activity, having grain banks, group level and village level activity. The kind of support it gives is important. This is the contribution of both the studies from the ground as well as the movements. How they impacted the way these various Plans were conceptualised, how women's life can be changed and what needs to be done.

Women's land rights were incorporated as follows: "Besides issues such as rights to land (especially for women), it is now well recognised that the poor are best empowered if they function as a group rather than as individuals. Hence, there is need to encourage a 'a group approach' for the women to reap economies of scale and be effective farmers. A group approach could also improve the bargaining power of small cultivators in contract farming. The few examples where small and marginal farmers have benefitted from contract farming are where they have entered into contracts collectively rather than individually. (Para 1.14). Stress was laid on group approach to subsidies, and infrastructure. It is also very significant because it talks about agency. For that a two-pronged strategy will be adopted:

- i. ensuring effective and independent land rights for women; and
- ii. strengthening women's agricultural capacities (paragraph 6.30).

"A specific scheme will be devised by Mow CD for identifying and helping women in States where agrarian crisis has ravaged families. Women's vulnerabilities resulting from farmer suicides due to crop failure and inability to pay loans will be addressed." (Paragraph 6.31).

What is the way forward?

The amendment of the Hindu Succession Act has enhanced women's claims through inheritance. We can imagine the amount of resistance there was. Also, if we have land and resource rights we need gender laws, other gender equal laws at other levels also. It cannot be in isolation. Lives are linked to various laws, various communities, various households located in specific areas. We must have other equal gender laws. We just can't have rights to land and other laws unequal. Also, we need to ensure recording of women's claims, increasing legal awareness and providing legal aid. In Gujarat we use to hold these camps on claims. Once they get to know how these claims can be made, they start moving. How is the administration functioning? How should you move as a widow or as single women in the family property? These claims should be recorded. It is important for advocacy to be able to increase the knowledge and legal awareness and provide legal aid so that women can learn their rights and how to claim it. This is very important. We found out that once in a village when one or two women claimed then others also start recognizing and start moving. This gives incentives to others also. If she has managed it so why not me with legal and other kind of support?

State intervention is one of the Land reform policies. The National Reform committee (in 2010) set up with the Minister for Rural Development with Prime Minister as the Chairperson

mandated to prepare a New Land Reforms Policy had as one of its 15 wide ranging terms of reference “To examine measures, to provide women to better access to land and other productive assets.

In the Planning process there is a democratic challenge also. Plans should be public documents. What’s happening in PIO and whole process of decision making needs to be in the public domain. It should be answerable to Parliament and to different State Assembly. There should be. spaces for consultations and debates and advocacy and there should be the question of political will.

Webinar 12

Distinguished Lecture on Writing Women into History using Oral and Written Sources: A Methodological Enquiry

Veena Poonacha

**Former Professor and Director, Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's
University, Mumbai**

(The Lecture was delivered on 30th July 2021)

As I begin, I would like to thank Prof. Lipi Ghosh and the Women's Studies department for having invited me. I am very happy and excited to see so many of my dear friends who have come in as well. We have shared spaces within the SNDT Women's University—a place of excitement and enrichment. To be in an institute of higher education entirely run by women and managed by women was truly an empowering experience for me when I entered Women's Studies in the early decades of its growth. With these few words I would like to begin my talk.

The talk which I am going to deliver is on the uses of oral resources in the reconstruction of history. Here I am not really touching on oral histories, but rather specifically focussing on oral traditions as a method of recovering women's voices from the margins. These are histories of those who do not have access to the written work and are therefore outside the frames of textual history. More importantly the politics of history writing is such that it even excludes vast areas and communities because there is also an urban-centric bias in the writing of history. In this methodological enquiry I am restricting myself to recovering the historical experiences of women from a small agricultural community called the Kodavas—an indigenous name for an agricultural community with warlike traditions. They are also known as Coorg's. The Kodavas who are the original inhabitants of Kodagu/Coorg in Karnataka have a culture which is vastly different from the others in South India. To me, this search is not merely an intellectual quest, but a personal search, for it is my own self-identity and is the legacy that I have inherited from my foremothers as I am from this very community.

My study is premised on the felt need in historiography, since the 1960s, to find the histories of those without historical representation. Such efforts not only indicate the many-layered historical experiences of people across class, caste and gender divide, but also disclose the

absences and gaps in history. My argument here is that the past revealed through the oral tradition of each community could well hold fascinating tales of migrations, settlements, experiences of people as they curved a distinct identity within a socio-cultural location and within a certain biosphere. I take for granted that the biosphere has a decided influence on the history and culture of each region. Unearthing such historical memories preserved in orally transmitted communicative practices can enrich our understanding of history, particularly when such voices are heard not as a monologue but rather as conversations over time.

It is by listening to the cadence of many voices that it is possible to capture the muted voices of women. The importance of such efforts to recover the histories of those without historical representations grew out of the protest politics of the 1960s. Aimed at recovering the voices of subaltern communities, the new history consciousness shifted the focus of history from past politics to people's lived experiences. This process of recovering histories from the standpoint of various marginalised groups challenged the monolithic understanding of past events and created inclusive place. The need to recover those excluded voices has led to a search for alternative sources borrowed from anthropology, sociology, literature and many diverse areas of social sciences

Similarly fuelled by feminist politics, feminist historiography has sought to restore women's history. The felt need for a distinctive historic space for women was because of the failure of historiography, even subaltern history, to recognize gender as a category of analysis of historical experience. Geraldine Forbes has written, at the outset feminist historians welcomed subaltern history, particularly when it challenged a nationalist, elite and colonial construction of the past. But they neglected women and gender concerns until Spivak joined the group and addressed the problem of writing history of the colonised people.

Feminist historiography has shifted the focus of attention from litany of men's achievements to women's experience. Their efforts to rediscover women's resistance of patriarchy has not only overturned the conventional understandings of the past, but also made evident the politics of writing history. Further, the efforts to claim historical places for women have forced historians to acknowledge gender as a category of social analysis –a point that is reiterated by Romila Thapar.

The development of feminist historical consciousness has posed serious theoretical and methodological questions about the interpretation of historical events and the legitimate tools of enquiry. The importance of these questions is because history, is not just an endless search for facts as some historians of the 19th century did but is based on what historians make of the available historical evidence. It requires, as historians from Collingwood to Thapar would attest, historical imaginations to make the necessary leap in history and an important example that I came across in the use of historical imagination to bridge the gaps in history is Romila Thapar's, *Somanatha: The Many Voices of a History*.

The search for historical evidence draws upon many sources. Along with historical evidence found in material cultures, such as art and artefacts, history is dependent on documentary sources -- chronicles, accounts, memoirs, government records, past histories, wills, letters, records of sales, fiscal accounts taxation documents and court records. Therefore, Geraldine Forbes writes, the first step to the writing of women's history is to recover documentary sources. However, since the very process of archiving has selectively focused on men's history, it is difficult to recover women's histories. This is not to suggest that women historians have not used archival resources to recover women's histories, but rather to point to the politics of archiving that has privileged men's histories. very little attention has been paid to women's histories.

Despite the lack of archival sources on women's histories, women historians have been able to read between the lines to recreate women's histories—a point that Ratnabali has made in her presentation. Many historians, like Samita Sen, Nirmala Banerjee, Uma Chakravarty or Meera Kosambi, have created a rich tapestry of women's history through the use of archival resources. Further recognizing the need to preserve women's archival resources many initiatives have been initiated by women's groups and organizations. Among these organizations, mention may be made of the Sound and Picture Archives for Women (SPPAROW) archives of the Indian Association of Women's Studies, the Dr. Avabai Wadia archives at the Research Centre for Women's Studies, SNDT Women's University. These archives have sought to preserve women's private papers, diaries, letters photographs and various other sources of women's histories.

Additionally searching for women's voices from the past, historians have sought to recover women's histories through their life writings, oral histories—a point that Prof. Ratnabali Chatterjee has made—and also to look at oral traditions. This kind of historiography begins at the experiential level. It takes women experiences as central to the process of historical enquiry. The aim is not to arrive at objective truth, but rather conceptualise truth as subjective and influenced by the ideological perspectives of the researcher and the research. The important part of this process of recovering women's history through oral resources is the recognition that the context of discovery is as important as the content. It is also necessary for the researcher to identify his or her ideological locations. Feminist historians have relied heavily on oral traditions, such as myths, ballads, lullabies, women's songs, to claim women's history. It is because of the need to explore the many dimensions of history that I have focussed on the Kodava community. The Kodavas are a very small minority group with a very ambiguous status within the Indian caste system and are also (as I had said earlier) outside the framework of historical focus. This is because the writing of history has been largely urban-centric and the community under study have lived throughout history in the dense jungles of the Western Ghat forests

I seek to reconstruct the history of this community by examining all the extant sources of history and then interfacing the data with the repository of myth, ballads and family histories of

the community. In this paper, I have taken these oral traditions as evidence of historical consciousness of communities without written sources to record their own histories. Subsequently I will discuss some of the challenges of doing this kind of history. The reason why I see oral traditions as important is because the community does not have a specialized group of memory-keepers to transmit their historical experiences from one generation to another; and yet, these neatly structured ballads correspond with the existing socio-cultural practices that exist even today. This is not to say that these oral resources unambiguously represent the past and are apolitical. It is also possible to discern numerous contradictions in the textual and oral records.

What I wish to emphasising is that the historical memories preserved in different genres of folk songs such as, religious songs, ballads, family histories and woman's songs reveal different facets of social histories. They tell us stories of migration, expansion of agriculture into dense forest, family feuds handed down from one generation to another, raids into neighbouring areas and the political uncertainties of the time. Largely the product of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the narratives reveal the socio-political organizations of the time and the everyday concerns of the people. The social organization of the community centred around their *ainmanes* or ancestral homes. These homes built on strong lines of fortification are still to be found in Coorg and are the focus of clan cohesion. Although these houses are now uninhabited, the members of each clan gather in these houses to jointly conduct the rituals associated with the veneration of their ancestors. These ancestral homes belonging to different lineages are built amidst paddy fields, forests, meadows and were isolated homesteads. The nearest neighbour of each homestead was a Kodava clan who owned land on the other side of the hill or across the valley. A few such scattered households with satellite families of service providers form a Kodava village.

The ballads from the period reveal the household economy. It shows that women were the mainstay of the household economy centred round the paddy fields, the cattle sheds, the pigsties and the kitchen garden. The women of each household along with the Poliya servants were responsible for the management of the household economy—the storage of paddy and the produce from the kitchen garden, etc.; while men engaged in hunting and had to render military services to the king. They also went with caravans of bullock carts to Malabar to sell surplus paddy and purchase salt. Interestingly none of the songs refer to money transactions and it would appear that wages for labour was paid with rice and salt. This kind of rich social history is not revealed in the existing historical records.

Archaeological excavations in the region have revealed the existence of Megalithic culture. But a search of the history of the region in myths and legends that have been handed down through the centuries reveal very little. Perhaps traces of memories from the hoary past is still to be found in the stories of local deities. These deities are distinct to Kodagu and are not found in the Pantheons of Hindu Gods. According to the story of the *Seven Children of God*. Six brothers and their sister travel from across the seven seas to reach the Malabar coast. Three of the brothers

settle in Kerala and the other three along with their sister travel to the mountains of Kodagu. This story has an interesting sub-plot: The siblings decide to hold a shooting contest to see who could shoot an arrow the furthest. Sure enough, the sister wins the contest, and the brothers are angry with her. The eldest among the siblings who came to Kodagu and later on becomes the presiding deity of agriculture, challenges his sister Ponnagatalamma, to cook rice without fire. Ponnagatalama says, that she would do so, if her brothers eat their rice without salt. The brothers accept the condition of the challenge. Ponnagatalamma adds milk to a pot of rice and buries it in the sand. The rice is well-cooked and hence the brothers have to eat without salt. This makes them very angry with her and they conspire to make her lose their ritual purity. Through deceit the brothers make Ponnagatalamma lose her ritual purity and she is forced to become the Goddess of another tribe. There are many ways of reading the story; it could well represent (as early feminist anthropologists like Peggy Sunday or Elinor Reed will argue) the historic defeat of women. These are however debatable ideas in feminist theories and is not explored here.

It does not also suggest the unmitigated subordination of Kodava women. The worship of the river goddess Cauvery indicates the cultural recognition of the sacred. The Cauvery Purana which forms four chapters of the Skanda Purana, is undoubtedly a Brahminical narrative; there is however an indigenous version of the legend that indicates a different recall. According to the indigenous version, noted in the Gazetteers, when the Goddess Lopamudra, the wife of Agastya rishi decided to flow away as a river to serve humanity, the Brahmin disciples of the Rishi followed her and plead with her to return to her husband. The Kodavas however support the Goddess and say that a woman has a right to leave her marital home and reside wherever she chooses to do so. The Kodavas were therefore blessed by the Goddess with prosperity and the Brahmins were told that they would not prosper in Kodagu.

If you look at historical records, there is a big gap till the 9th century. What we find, between the 9th and the 16th century, are a few epigraphic records and sculptures. Looking for women's history in these sources provide contradictory evidence. On the one hand, you have sources which tell you about women who owned properties and were able to make donations and on the other, there are a few *virakallus* depicting women who committed *sati* on the pyres of their heroic husbands. Epigraphic records found in Coorg are interesting: They confirm a woman's right to inheritance and that of her children,] not just in the absence of a male heir. The inscriptions from the 13th century also confirm inheritance rights to the children of slave women called *thotina makallu*. Against this evidence of women's control of resources, we have evidence of women committing *sati* and some of these *virakallus* continue to be worshipped as the ancestors of a few Kodava clans. The idea that a woman should die on the funeral pyre of her husband as depicted in the *virakallus* is not apparent from the existing Kodava customs of marriage. A widow or a divorcee has a right to remarry. This is a historically significant because these rights did not emerge out of the social reform movement of the 19th century. Further

women do not lose custody of their children should she enter into a second marriage. There are elaborate provisions in the Kodava customary law on the guardianship of children.

Now, I would like to probe into from the pre-colonial documentary sources. The earliest documentary sources we have are the *Rajendranama* (1808) written at the behest of King Virarajendra a few years after the Fourth Mysore War and the *Hukkumnamas* issued between 1811-1820) by the Lingaraja the last king of Coorg. These sources make no mention of sati and also confirm the customary right of a widow/divorcee to remarry. Among the orally transmitted ballads, there is only one example of *sati*, and no attempt is made to glorify the incident. In this particular ballad, the heroine Chembavva immolates herself in the funeral pyre of her lover. She could only immolate herself in the funeral pyre of her lover after detracting the other mourners present there.

Women's work and economic activities are described in great detail in the ballads. In the Kettrappa song, Kallmuda Ayiappa informs his mother that he would be taking a caravan of thirty-six bullock carts to Malabar to sell paddy. His mother starts the preparations for the journey. She calls the women servants to take out the paddy from the granary. They de-husk and clean the rice. These women workers are fed throughout the day and are paid their wages, in the form of salt and rice at the end of the workday. The personal care of the Yajamanathi (the mistress of the house) with the labouring women, becomes apparent for the ballad describes the Yajamanthi applying castor oil over on the head of each working woman to cool them after hard work. Similarly, in preparation for the journey, when the Poliya servant comes to the cattle-shed to take the bullock for grazing, the lady of the house gives him packed lunch for the day and on his return, she gives him food and pours castor oil on his head. He, in turn, calls her *Petta Avva* (meaning the birth mother).

Apart from the images of everyday concern, the ballads sketch stories of women who ridiculed assemblies of men, killed tigers, initiated love affairs and helped in the capture of an enemy of their *and* at a time when Coorg comprised several small principalities governed by mutually warring chieftains.

In the story of Chiyavva of Kelappanda clan, Chiyavva goes to the jungle to fetch wood. On her way, she chances upon a cave with the tigress and her cubs. Chiavarisharpens the end of a stout stick and spears the tigress and captures the cubs. On her return to the village, she goes to the village green and narrates the episode. Chiavarithen tells them 'Heroes who are assembled here, I have a case, to be decided. If a man kills a tiger, you honour him by tying the *ojas* cloth to his rifle. Where would you tie the *ojas* cloth to honour a woman who kills a tiger? The men reply, there is no such case. When she hears that a woman is not entitled to an honour for her bravery, she is enraged. She throws the tiger's tail and says in such instance the *ojas*, the red scarf, should be tied to a women's head. She goes and gathers the other community members in the village --not the Kodavas-- and has a celebration of her own bravery.

Subsequently, she builds a cage and had the cubs reared in it. One of the tiger's cubs escapes the cage. In the Mathanda meadow, there were 500 milch cows and another herd of 100 grazing cattle. The 'glutinous' tiger attacks the milchcattle. Mathanda Cheriamana, tries to hunt the tiger with 500 youth of Beppunad, but fails in his attempt. Therefore, despite the ongoing feud between the Beppunad and Yedenad, the people of Beppunad call upon Polladevira Aiyappa from Yedenad, to kill the tiger. He kills the tiger, cuts its tail as a souvenir (since the person who first touches the tiger's tail is considered the bravest) and goes back to his own village. Nonetheless, the men of Beppunad, take the dead tiger and have a *Nariman gala* honour.

Now the Matanda woman is offended. She goes to the village green and tells them 'You are not men but dogs. When Polladevira Aiyappa is having a Nariman gal honour performed with the tiger's tail, you are too busy having a similar honour with a tailless tiger.' The subsequent story speaks of the Mathilda woman's attempt to snare Polladivira Aiyappa and deliver him to the men of Beppunad— then men of her family. Aiyappaya meets Matanda *kodachi*, while she is manuring the paddy fields with buffalo dung and falls in love with her. She takes him to her house and makes him comfortable. While he is intoxicated, she sings. 'O Beppunad men! I have tied the runaway bullock to the byre. Come surround him in three circles.' Aiyappaya wakes up, kills her and tries to escape. He is captured by the men of Beppunad, and he tells them 'If you kill me here, no child will thrive. If you kill me in the fields, I will haunt the place as a ghost, but let me first and first teach you the seven kinds of dances, I have learnt, before I die. So, he is surrounded by all the Beppunad men and by seven rows of buffaloes; Aiyappa begins to dance, and he tells the Poliya drummer to bend low and play the music. As the Poliya servant bends low, he leaps over him and escapes.

Although I have said earlier, the culture has evolved orally and there are no specialised groups within the community entrusted with the task of its maintenance and interpretation. So we can just infer that these neatly structured songs sung by men to the monotonous beat of the kettledrums had a role in the transmission of culture. The language and idiom of expression in these songs sung during festivals weddings as well as funeral dirges attest to her antiquity. They provide picturesque details of the kind of ceremonies that have to be done on each occasion. In these songs, which recite how each ceremony has to be done you see strong women.

In the wedding song, for instance, there is an account of a search for a suitable bride, courtship and wedding of a young man called Aiyanna. He meets with Machamma his future wife. She is not portrayed as a coy and shy woman. She is an adult woman of sixteen years of age and is a self-possessed woman with a mind of her own. When he approaches her house, she unchains her dog Bollu with the instruction: I fan outsider has come for me, let him come in, if he is an intruder, drive him away. Finally, when Aiyanna approaches her, she boldly asks his intentions. She says, 'have you come for me or for any other reason? And so, she takes charge of her own selection of her marriage partner. What is interesting in Coorg wedding there is no

custom of *kanyadan*, as it is two adults who are get married and the formalisation of the marriage is through a verbal contract.

To the Kodavas, the clan is a sacred institution, and an individual has no existence outside the lineage. The genealogical narratives preserved in the 'Song of the House,' provides accounts of women's courage, endurance and hardships. The worship of the ancestor is an essential part of Kodava custom, therefore the *manepat* is extremely important. The household is the sacred place. The ballads have the specific task of communicating the family histories to each generation. The women glimpsed here are caught in situations that are not of their own making.

There is a story that goes back to the 16th Century when Uttunayak from Beppunad, set fire to the Ichetira house. This is at a period when Coorg was divided into mutually warring principalities. In those days Coorg households had thatched roofs and therefore the fire in the Ichetira house spread rapidly and none of the inmates could escape. There were seventeen children locked in that particular house; with great difficulty, two women from the inner chambers, broke open a window, attracted the attention of the servants and handed two children over to them to be taken to safety. The servants carried the children over to the Ballachanda house and narrated the story. These children are reared in the Balachanda house and are later able to reclaim their Ichetira heritage. In memory of the story, even today, the Ichettiras and Balachandas do not marry because they are seen as foster brothers. The Kodavas practice clan exogamy.

There are other stories, like that of Kitiyannda Somiah's aunty, who, with great personal risk helped her nephew to escape from the house when it was set fire by the invading armies of Tipu Sultan. Somiah and his aunt were imprisoned. she masterminds her nephew's escape to ensure the continuity of their family.

In the Kuttetirafamily, there is the story of Kuttetira Sommana's wife, Accava, who in order to save the family honour had to take the difficult decision of drowning her only son Muthannawho is twelve years old and also commits suicide. What had happened was during the Mysore wars. Kuttitira Sommana was the head of the Sidda forest, and his twelve-year old son Muthanna had been captured by the army of Tipu Sultan. So Sommana asked the officers of the East India Company to intervene. The king of Coorg was very suspicious because these were very uncertain political periods and there existed defensive alliance between Coorg and the British. Seeing Sommana is a dangerous corroborator of the British, the king ordered Sommana's execution in the Sidda forest and the imprisonment of his brother Bhimmaya and wife Somnavva. The king decreed that Sommana's wife Akkavva and child Muthanna should be given away to the lower caste. Here you see how as history constructed from written records corroborates with orally transmitted microhistories. You also see the development of caste consciousness. So, in order to prevent this happening Akkava took the extreme step of drowning her son and committing suicide. It is only subsequently Bhimmaya and his wife Somnavva

were pardoned due to the intervention of a clan brother who had fought in the wars at Amar Suliya.

Not all the stories of women in these are stories of courage. They also reveal the sadness of women's life in a patrilineal society. In 1761, Biddanda Bopu's mother Subbavva was divorced by her husband on a flimsy ground that the child was born under Vinayak Chaturthi day. The sadness of women's life also emerges from women's songs which are very different from those sung by men. While men's songs are sung to the monotonous beat of a kettle drum, the women's songs have a lilting quality, and these songs reveal the beauties of the contrasting seasons. The sweet, clear smelling mountainous air in the rainy season when the frogs croak, the fishes leap over silvery brook, tortoises swim and rabbits up about and along with the eulogising of this nature they celebrate their own ability to bring forth new life. Women also speak of the isolation and the vulnerability in their marital home. One song, for instance, says 'if you have a pair of hardworking hands your brothers-in-law will allow you to live.'

What I have tried to do here is to interface the social histories of Kodavas, as indicated in their folk literature, with the written documents; these stories seem to be corroborated with books like *Rajendranama* and *Hukumnama*.

In fact, during the British period, the *Rajendranama* was seen as proscribed literature, although a watered-down account disbelieving everything that the king said is found in the Gazetteers. Written at a point of time, i.e., *Rajendranama*, when the takeover of Coorg was eminent, it was an attempt of an Indian king to record the history of his dynasty. It does show the political life of the people during this long--drawn-out wars because it was a thirty-year war which the Kodavas faced against Tipu and Hyder Ali. The profiles of women which we have seen here seem to be balanced with what you see in the Gazetteer. It seems to be more or less the same when they describe the ethnographic background because that is seen as the anthropology of the Kodava community.

Now, coming to the point of discussion. The use of oral traditions to recover the voices of those outside the frames of history, have posed serious methodological challenges to the writing of history. This is because the fundamental requirement of historiography is that historical sources are subjected to rigorous scrutiny for authenticity and credibility. The question that can be asked is why some sources of history are considered authentic and others dismissed as myths and legends of a community? Why are epigraphic inscriptions and documentary sources seem as legitimate historical records, but oral traditions of a community dismissed? This question becomes important when we acknowledge that historical documents are also produced by persons with a given social identity and with definite political bias. While undoubtedly new elements enter oral sources more easily than the written sources as they go from one generation to another.

But, nevertheless, it cannot be assumed that indigenous communities do not have a historical consciousness particularly. This is something that Indira Choudhury has brought out in 2014 while discussing oral histories and oral traditions. She says the value of these sources in the reconstruction of Indian history is particularly because not enough effort has been made in the preservation of documentary historical material in India. We still do not know the value of preserving our own history. I can give two examples to show how women's histories have been recovered by the use of these. One is by Badri Narayan, entitled *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertions in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics*. Badri Narayan interweaves colonial ethnological records with *jati kathas* to enable subaltern groups to reclaim their history. We hear of Jhansi Rani, but not of women who were also part of Jhansi ki Rani's struggle and the other, is by Prem Chowdhury the *Veiled Women: Shifting Gender Equation in Rural Haryana (1818-1990)*. Chowdhury by using oral traditions with archival materials has sought to recover the histories of rural Haryana. Her study indicates the role of the colonial state in legally enforcing certain customary practices to enhance patriarchal controls over women's sexuality and inheritance rights.

But the reluctance of historians to accept oral traditions as historical resources is largely because it cannot be pinned in a time frame. Oral narratives are also re-worked and re-interpreted with each telling. New elements also enter oral narratives as community memories of past events alter within the changed socio-economic and political context of the narration. Underlying this hesitance is the fundamental concern in historiography for the reliability of sources specially because (in today's politics) through selective use of historical sources, community memories can be manipulated to meet the current political agendas of people and groups.

It is also on the basis of this concerns that we need to ask questions about the value of oral traditions. Here, I am really not referring to oral history, because these sources will fit into a different timeframe. You can at best go back to the early 20th century with oral history and are therefore not useful resources for an earlier period. In this presentation, I have used three kinds of oral traditions. I have not even referred to the rich collection of proverbs or other orally transmitted communicative practices within the community as I state that each of these have transmitted different kinds of historical memory.

Discussing myths that are present in various cultures Evelyn Reed way back in 1981, who was a Marxist feminist, anthropologist, saw them as stratified pieces of social history, revealing customs and practices obscured by passage of time. She had argued drawing from Engel's work that myths indicate a stage when mother-right prevailed. There is also another valuable work by Briffault on motherhood itself.

The same argument is made here. This seems to be a possibility of women's overthrow of matriliney under patriliney, when we look at the story of watered-down who is cheated of her rights by her brother. That can be discussed in great deal, but here I would say, we need to still have cautious about using myths as historical evidence. Thapar writes myths are of interest to historians not because

they narrate events that actually happened; but because they encapsulate the hidden assumptions in society. They provide clues for instance on how community disguises the breaking of normative rules. The ballads used in this paper have nuggets of historical information about pre-colonial social life, because by colonial period, gradually paddy cultivation became less important as the British opened up the doors to coffee plantations. Since then, coffee plantations have far exceeded rice cultivation in this region. These images of the Coorg social life are also, as I said earlier, corroborated with the *Rajendranama*. But the family histories, which are the ties that bind each lineage, refer to events largely between the late 18th century when Coorg was at war with Hyder Ali and Tipu Sultan. These stories are important in the search for women's history, and we cannot dismiss them.

How do we deal with these orally transmitted histories? The same problem comes up when we deal with oral history: the question of objectivity. The search for 'objective truth' can disempower people belonging to a different form of culture. But we have to be careful of the sources in the present politics because of what I see is happening in Coorg. It is feeding into the politics of demonising Tipu Sultan. It is a very dangerous politics, because it creates the image that there was an unmitigated destruction of the community. No doubt, there is evidence that families have suffered, but to see it in out of its political context would be injustice to history. How do we handle this? It is by contextualising the story with the political history of the time.

When I read the *Rajendranama*, which is in Kannada, is very interestingly. I find that it is addressed to the larger Indian sub-continent, and it has got a number of Hindustani words in it—not just Kannada. Here what we see is that the *Rajendranama* which records the 200years of the history of Coorg, the Mysore kings --Hydar Ali and Tipu Sultan -- were invited by the Coorg king to settle a property dispute by one of the other scions of the dynasty. They saw their kingdoms as personal property --personal fiefdom. Hyderali and Tipu sultan were invited to Coorg and later when the king went back on his promise to cede, lands to the Mysore kings, it led to the long-drawn out war. Yes, there were conversions here. There is a community called the Jamma Mappilas who accept that they were originally from the Kodava community, who captured and converted during the reign of Tipu Sultan. These are shared histories. Despite the problems of using oral traditions as historical accounts, I would like to say that we need to acknowledge the importance of traditions, cultural practices of communities to understand past histories and this is a point that even D.D. Kosambi has made, early in the 1960s, on the recovery of histories. He said that recovery of history cannot be only through endless textual sources.

I would also like to conclude that the area and the people about which I am writing is a shared socio-cultural space. Therefore, even within this small biosphere there may be many other stories that could be recovered. With these few words, I will stop and thank you for giving me this opportunity to hear stories from the margin.

Webinar 13

Distinguished Lecture on

“Feminist Avatars” and anti-patriarchal claims in the narratives of the Matua community

Carola Erika Lorea

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(The Lecture was delivered on 19th August 2021)

Thank you so much for this thorough introduction. Thank you so much Prof Lipi Ghosh for inviting me. It is such a pleasure to virtually visit Calcutta University and of course like many of us because of the Covid pandemic I am stuck in Singapore. I have not been able to visit India for more than one and a half years and I realise this is the longest time since I was nineteen that I have not been in India. It has really been hard. Thank you again for this invitation. I am really honoured. I am also slightly terrified to have Prof. Shekhar Bandopadhyay Chairing and discussing this talk because my work is largely built upon his excellent historical and social analysis of the Namasudra movement. I am thankful to all the participant, all those who are listening and I am really looking forward to all your comments.

I have been working with the Matua community since 2012 almost accidentally. I was working on the songs of Bhaba Pagla-one popular guru from East Bengal. He is very well known among Bauls and Fakirs and in the major gatherings of Bhaba Pagla devotees there are many singers and Kabiyaals or Kabigan of the Namasudra caste. So, it is through them that I have first learnt about the Matua dharmandolan. Kabigan is very important for all the Matua leaders and practitioners for these displaced communities. So, I would just like to say that I am really thankful for all these artists, singers, shilpi, gayaks, kabiyaals, all the practitioners who shared their time and their knowledge with me and opened their house. There are too many to be possibly mentioned but Jai Haribol as they would say and my gratitude goes to them.

You are probably all familiar with the Imagined Communities of Benedict Anderson. –the national community as an imagined community. In a way the Matua community is a kind of a displaced and fragmented nation scattered across the subcontinent and the Bay of Bengal. But instead of an imagined community of readers of vernacular periodicals, and newspapers, I call

this a community of sound because songs, recitations, oral narratives, performance events such as kabigan, are really at the centre of the identity making of the Matuas as a distinct social and religious group. So, my main research is on these sonic experiences and how they produce a sense of community and belonging for displaced people which is why I do multi sided ethnography and I study the circulation of people, items and religious ideas across the borders, across the shores of the Bay of Bengal. So, my research methods are mostly immersive ethnography combined with the study of oral literary sources like songs. So the data that I work with, the kind of sources that I use, as you can imagine are quite different from official archives and canonical sources but rather they are travelling archives of stories and songs. This was just to give you a broad sense of what I do before jumping into my presentation because my topic for today is not the core of my research but rather a spin off.

I will discuss the discourse around gender and women's roles as it is represented in Matua narratives and I will go through these main points. I will start with a very quick background and I won't say too much because Shekhar da has already given a very good summary of this roughly 200 year old community of low caste people, mostly Namasudra by caste but not only who used to be called Chandals. They share collective memories of untouchability and humiliation. Their lives have been affected tremendously not only by the Partition of India but by the *longue durée* of the Partition of India, its aftermath, and the liberation war of Bangladesh. Their territorial unity has been fragmented by these borders. It is very hard to say how many are members of this community because it is loosely institutionalised. You are probably familiar with the All India Matua Mahasangha which is the most visible institution, but it is the one among many Matua organisations. So according to some of the leaders of these institutions there are about fifty million Matua followers –nine of them in Bangladesh. This might be an inflated number, we don't know. They are scattered across a very large area and again we lack official mapping. We have to rely upon the inaccurate map of the distribution of the Namasudra caste. We should not artificially conflate these two labels. Most Matua followers today are found in West Bengal particularly in bordering districts but also a major part of the community remained in what is now Bangladesh -- Gopalgunj, Khulna, Barishal and other most southern districts. Then we have big Matua groups in other States of India where refugees from East Bengal have migrated and have been resettled since the 1950s specially Assam, Tripura, Andaman Islands, Uttarakhand and the Dandakaranya area as well. Of all those areas my multisite field work includes different areas in West Bengal, Bangladesh and the Andaman Islands and my main argument is that even though Partition and displacement have disrupted the unity of the Matua movement, it is through the travelling archives of people's songs and stories that all these scattered Diasporic branches find unity and coherence and resilience.

I am going to talk about the religious movement itself. It is building upon older forms of ecstatic Vaishnava devotionalism, but it started asserting itself as a distinct identity with the founding Guru Harichand Thakur then it further consolidated under his son Guruchand Thakur.

They are both worshipped as Gods together with their wives. As a religious identity it developed hand in hand with the Namasudra movement for social upliftment of the lower castes---the movement which has been studied in depth by Prof. Shekhar da.

The name Matua itself was given by outsiders and it was derogatory in the sense of intoxicated, crazy people out of their mind. Outsiders would call the devotees by that name because of their ecstatic ritual practices of sound and dance leading to states called *bhab*, *bhaber bibhor* and *Samadhi*. But the same term was appropriated in an emic sense with pride by community members who explained the term as *nam-e prem-e mattohara*. So, people who can get absorbed in the Holy name in divine love. For the purpose of the talk of today I would like to draw your attention on the fact that there is very little information about the early women saints of this community while the names of male saints and their ancestries are well remembered and eulogised in all the scriptures. Of course, this is not so surprising because as most Bengali communities the Matua's too follow a patrilineal and patriarchal system and so in the genealogies of the Matua saints --like the ones you would find in the beginning of *the SriSri Harililamrito* --you, of course, do not see any name of woman members of the family. What is interesting is that Matua preachers --*gonshai* --have a theological explanation for these. Shanti devi is worshipped as *adi shakti*, as *ma janani*. She is the mother of the Universe and so she has no beginning and no end. Hence, she cannot have a date of birth and death. So, I hope this was enough of a very quick introductory background because I want to move to my second point about one very recurrent bundle of narratives and stories about the divine ancestry of Harichand Thakur. Harichand Thakur is worshipped as an incarnation of Hari or Vishnu as his latest--ultimate avatar. This recurrent theme is recited orally during performances but also printed in books and periodicals published by Matua Presses. It is not 'just' a myth or a bunch of legends: I would like to cite Aditya Malik when he says, 'We should keep in mind the histories of the Gurus cannot be separated from the actions and words of their devotees and their concern for justice in their own lives.'

In the image of a cover of one Matua magazine, you will find Harichand Thakur is in the centre, and he is inscribed in a frame of Avatar of Vishnu -- Ram and Krishna by his sides and above him is the saint Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. He is inserted in a Cosmo-history of divine figures who intervene at critical points of time when dharma --the righteous Cosmic order --needs to be restored. A great part of Matua scriptures, poems and songs is dedicated to explaining why the world needed another Avatar--specially one born in an untouchable family in the marshy frontiers of British India ---in the *Ishaan* corner, in East Bengal. The Matua answer is to uplift the depressed classes, to empower them offering a spiritual path for social liberation stressing the importance of literacy, education, respectability and political participation but also because the world needed one Avatar for women to provide them a dignified spiritual path. I will give you two examples of such oral narratives that emerged during my field work.

“Harichand is an Avatar of our dark age.: first, Ram and later Chaitanya. Ram’s mother reincarnated as Chaitanya’s mother. Because of her Ram had to leave the kingdom and was exiled to the forest. So, in her next life, as Chaitanya’s mother she was left alone. Her only son became a renunciate and left home and she had to beg from house to house. Next came, Harichand and Shanti Devi. He had to come back because Chaitanya had hurt his mother too much.”

So, it is not only famous male saints who have their previous incarnation but also their mothers, and their wives: they are also inserted in the Cosmo history of reincarnation. Harichand Thakur descended on earth to fix the karma of his predecessors—Ram’s stepmother forced Ram into exile which resulted in Chaitanya’s mother being left miserably alone without the economic support of a working male.—son and finally the decent of Harichand who choose *sansar e sanyas* –a holy life within the household. In so doing he repaid the emotional debt: the debt towards the mother of previous Avatars.

Let’s see the second narrative.

“Harichand had to come to Earth because of something that his previous incarnations could not do. Mainly because they could not respect women [...] Women have been mistreated in a way that cannot be expressed through words. In the third cosmic era Ram could not respect Sita. In the next era Krishna could not respect Radha: Look what he did with all the Gopis! All the viraha! Chaitanya left his wife Vishnupriya alone to become an ascetic. Then Harichand came to teach us a religion within family life- *samsarar dharma, garhastha dharma.*”

Of course, this is a message addressed to men. These stories do not tell us about Matua women, but they convey these ethical prescriptions that mothers should not be abandoned; women should not be left alone without financial support like the prestigious figures of high caste Hindu caste have done. This is what I call the ‘Gendered agenda’ in the Matua genealogy of Avatars.

These narratives are crucial for identity making. They provide the Matuas a sense of distinction and superiority vis a vis the other more powerful communities of orthodox Vaishnavas and higher caste Hindus. The stories assert that Matuas value a different treatment for women if compared to what they see as the Hindu model of *sanyas*, intended as a single, celibate male renunciate, which became a prominent model of, masculine, nationalist Hinduism in the late 19th century.

Matua narratives present Harichand as incarnating a new idea which in fact is not that new in the religious history of Bengal—the idea of the renuncer within the household. This idea is presented by contrasting Harichaand with the failures and the moral limitations of his previous incarnations like Ram, Krishna and Chaitanya. These stories are not only shared among rural Gonshais and singers like the two Matua gurus. (voices that I have just shared). The same views

are also circulated widely among well-educated Matua writers and activists who migrated to urban areas, got access to higher education and white-collar jobs. As a final example I will share with you is a passage from an article published on a Matua magazine which repeats basically the same claims about Harichand Thakur and his feminism *ante litteram* which is so omnipresent in the works of male Matua writers.

“The Matua religion takes shelter in conjugal life {...} In Hinduism women are described as a gateway to hell, a thorn in the path to devotion. This is a great offence. [...] Lord Chaitanya got married but did not maintain a household. He rejected his mother and his wife and pursued spiritual realization for himself. [...] There are only two castes among humans: men and woman. Among the two there are no bigger or lower one [...] The Matua religion which is the (refined) *sukhya sanatan dharma* has given to woman utmost respect and dignity.[...] During congregational singing [nam samkirtan], men and women both, together, melt in the ecstasy of love. This is a proof of woman’s independence [...] In Hinduism women are merely slaves: they cook, serve and raise children. They have to obey whatever the husband says [...] On the contrary, among Matuas the authority of women is of utmost importance [Bagchi 2018 (19-20).”

So, once again the claim of moral superiority based on the independence of Matua women is articulated by retracing the history of incarnations. Chaitanya got married and selfishly abandoned his family to seek spiritual realization for himself. Hence Harichand had to bring back justice and respect for women’s rights.

Matua claims and self-representation as explicitly anti-patriarchal and feminist are justified through quotations from the hagiography of Harichand. They often go as far as to say that in the entire world only the Matua doctrine gave to women the same rights as men and that if women today can be doctors or lawyers, it is a direct result of the teachings of Harichand Thakur.

So, this is a very frequent contention that says our women are more free and we treat our women better.

In my next point I will try to problematise these claims as a complex conglomeration of Dalit patriarchy with a pre-existing layer of tantric Vaishnava ideology which values and worships femininity and divinise the father and mother principle (*matapitatattva*).

The discourse around women’s emancipation is often used as a weapon of dominance. British colonizers, Christian missionaries prolifically described the ‘abominable’ condition of women in the Hindu tradition to justify the colonial mission of civilization and evangelisation. Negotiating colonial assumptions on how a modern woman ought to be, Hindu middle class reformist movements in colonial India heavily gravitated around women’s issues ---widow remarriage, the movement for the abolition of Sati, abolition of polygamy, child marriage etc etc. These public issues contributed to craft the image of a New Indian Woman by presenting the Nation and its

traditions under the Gendered Nation making mechanism that Partha Chattarjee has called a New Patriarchy. Prof. Shekhar Bandopadhyay suggested that the Namasudra leaders with the stress on conjugality, with the fact that women are considered equal partners in congregational life indicates awareness of these ideas of the bhadrakalok patriarchy. Matua leaders employed them for their aspirations towards upward social mobility.

The 19th century reformist discourse disseminated ideas on education of women, companionate marriage and conjugality which indeed the Matua community was quick to embrace and appropriate.

I try to understand why?

Guruchand Thakur had a thriving new business of jute procurement and transportation to Kolkata. He lived in close vicinity and in close association with an Australian Baptist mission which was very influential in developing his own philosophy of the Matua community. Guruchand himself is remembered for having promoted education for girls. He established a girl's school in his very own property. He is also remembered for having encouraged and having officiated himself inter caste marriages, inter religious marriages and remarriage of low caste widows.

Matua leaders were not simply absorbing and imbibing ideas that were circulating among elites. The Matua formulation of a new religious identity for the so called Chandal was also shaped by at least two things. First, it was shaping in accordance with tantric Vaishnava ideals of divine love which are mirrored in the embodiment of men and women. Second, it was shaping in response to derogatory caste stereotypes and very strong criticisms from dominant elites. Colonial and reformist narratives portrayed low caste women as harsh, vulgar, raucous, sexually promiscuous moving suspiciously freely, accused without fail of having a dubious sense of morality, as Charu Gupta and many others have shown. This applies also to low caste religious movements. There is a ubiquitous criticism in the last part of the 19th century towards low caste communities accused of promoting sexual promiscuity and the use of intoxicants. These critiques provoked various reactions within the low caste communities ranging from conservatism to proud appropriation, ranging from enforcing 'respectable femininity' as Nitya Rao called it and appropriation— 'Yes, our women are more free'.

As an example of the first reaction (enforcing 'respectable femininity') in the first organized meetings of the Namasudras led by Guruchand Thakur in 1872, it was decided that their women should stop visiting the market and freely walking around in the bazaar. Guruchand instructed the Matua devotees to refrain from adultery and from marrying multiple women because it would bring disgrace and infamy to the community. The doctrine instead focussed on restraint, containing sexual passion for reproductive purposes and strictly within wedlock.

Flash-forward to 2021 and you will notice that in the contemporary Matua community you will find that male Matua leaders, in order to be credible and also as a sign of their spiritual achievements, do not have children until their wife has completed a master's degree and even then they have only one child. This is taken as a sign of sexual continence and of mastering the *ripus*, the vices and the impulses of the body.

So the independence of women in Matua discourse is used as a status maker and status marker. This is not something that the Matua community does but virtually every society and entire nations. Americans invade the Middle East and justify it because poor women are getting stoned to death. Our women have freedom. In South Asia, feminist scholars of Partition have argued that the chastity of women or the violation of their bodies has been used by both Hindu and Muslim men as markers of honour for the families for their communities and their religion. In India citing Velaskar women feature as the gateway to caste through whom caste purity could be threatened and caste status could be claimed. Whether the responses are emulating respectability by restricting women's mobility and freedom or claiming that our women are more free---both these discourses are often interpreted as mimesis, sanskritization or absorption of cultural notions from the established or orthodox religious order which produced in turn a new patriarchy—a Dalit patriarchy we might call.

I agree with Prof. Shekhar Bandopadhyay's analysis **but I also suggest that we need to complicate** this notion of absorption and strategic emulation of higher status norms.

Just because absorption might be understood as a passive process and in this case, it would fail to recognise two things. First, the agency and creativity of early Matua thinkers and second, the legacy of orthodox tantric Vaishnava movements from which the Matua community has inherited many radical, egalitarian aspects and gender ideology—*mata pita tattwa*.

As I argued elsewhere the Matua community separated in the mid-19th century from a fluid range of Bengali lineages often called with umbrella names like Sahajiya, Bastubadi, bartaman panthi etc. and all these lineages give ontological centrality or even superiority to womanhood, to femininity and women, at least ideally.

How does these play out in the Matua community and their rituals?

In the sophisticated sonic theology of the Matua community, ritual music, religious sounds and dance are used to achieve liberation. This process entails a psycho physiological transformation towards feminisation, towards the embodiment of a different kind of masculinity. For example, male singers of Matua kirtan have explained that a good kirtaniya is like a mother who is breast feeding the baby. —an image of ideal love, purified from kam. The performance of Matua kirtan is instrumental to achieve liberation because the sound and dance of Matua kirtan liberate from kam intended as selfish, sexual desire. This decreasing of kam leaves visible signs on the devotee's body. One Matua Gosain said if you look at my Gurus's penis it is so

small because of his ritual practice. These ritual performers are also characterised by collective crying and hugging. Embracing traits and emotional qualities are perceived as motherly and feminine. Matua theology designs an alternative construction of masculinity. This idea of a gentle, compassionate and care giving masculinity is in striking opposition to the hegemonic representation of the Namasudra man as ugra, hardworking, strong, aggressive and belligerent. This alternative masculinity is also at play in the religious teachings that prescribe the proper behaviour between opposite sexes. For example, it is thought by Matua gurus that men should never have sexual intercourse with his wife unless she desires it. This might sound obvious. But it is in nowhere close to mainstream ideas on marital relationship in many parts of South Asia where marital rape is not criminalised. Women in the Matua Community are fully identified as participants in the religious spheres. They are gurus and Ma Gonshayi, preachers and healers in their own right with the large following of devotees. I have seen women single handedly conducting, sponsoring large scale rituals and women can be and are often the main ritual specialists in big events. They also travel, parade, sweat; hold the staff of the dolopati (as the image that Manosanto Biswas choose for his book cover on the Matuascan show). They make themselves heard as ritual singers,(this is a photo from a 'HariLilamriter Paath' near Orakandi, in Bangladesh), drummers and dancers **in a sacred genre that is most frequently described as martial and belligerent, physically** requiring, and energetic. This is called *Matam*.

The story of the gender conscious avatar Harichand Thakur assumes even more radical significance in the context of displacement among refugees in the middle of the Bay of Bengal. When thousands of low caste refugee families were resettled on the Andaman Islands under the so-called colonisation schemes, the male workforce was not enough to put under cultivation large and distant plots of land which required tremendous labour. Women needed to contribute and also find an ethical and religious foundation for these roles. This kind of work required clearing vast, distant plots of land of stumps and bushes, building huts and. protecting the crops from many wild animals, hiking for the entire days trough forests just to access basic facilities. My field work notes with first generation migrants on the Andamans are full of these stories of tremendous hardships. Women contributed by taking responsibilities for tasks that were not necessarily part of their gender role back home in East Bengal. Apart from husking, boiling and drying rice, women were working in the fields protecting the crops, fishing in ponds and on the seashores, harvesting vegetables in the thick, frightening forests. Displacement for them also meant more relaxed rules for inter caste marriage and this distance from traditional patriarchal practice gave some space for semi arranged and companionate marriage and allowed women to take up important roles outside of the joint family home. So somewhat, like in Kolkata displacement opened up new possibilities for women refugees to earn and influence the public sphere.

It is in this context of displacement as a source of trauma and insecurity but also as an opportunity to rethink gender roles that the stories of Harichand and Guruchand Thakur as

Avataras for women are performed and re-enacted and re actualised holding old and new meanings that cannot be reduced to imitation of high caste stories.

As a way of conclusion, I will just say something about what happened during the pandemic.

Since February 2020, of course, my ethnography has been disrupted by the Covid pandemic, but I was very lucky to get a small grant from the Asia Research Institute to study religion and Covid 19 in Asia. So, I could hire a team of research assistants mostly anthropology students or gender studies students based in India and Bangladesh, and I think a few of them might be here today. We started experimenting with remote ethnography and digital ethnography with the Matua community to study their responses to Covid 19. With this great team we conducted online ethnography and many phone interviews for a few months until last February. So what emerged is that our phone interviews overwhelmingly recorded male voices as mostly man had the privilege of the technology, the connectivity and also the luxury to spend time with us on the phone. It was incredibly difficult to have one on one conversations with women and in some cases their husbands or brothers or sons would explicitly tell us that they would not allow us to speak privately with them unless they turn on the speakers or unless they had some kind of male supervision or cooperation. Phone interviews as methodology should take into account digital and technological divide, exacerbated by gender inequalities. In South Asian rural areas, a phone is often a commodity shared with the whole household dwelling in the pockets of a man. While we often could reach young or middle-aged working males, their mediation was always needed to reach women and elders of the community. Like most religious communities in Covid times, the Matuas started to use many digital platforms –Facebook groups, you tube channels and zoom to recreate their rituals and social gatherings in the cyberscape. But while the traditional festivals of the Matua community offer and exhibit plenty of religious agency and authority for Matua women, in this new media these platforms again overwhelmingly are male dominated. Live streaming of sermons and speeches abound but among hundreds of male voices we were able to find only a very few invited women speakers. Instead, on these social media of Matua religiosity, women when they are present, at all, are seen singing sacred songs or performing rituals from their homes, filmed and uploaded by male handled technologies. Their voices are reproduced, played and listened but remained unheard. When religion shifted to Zoom and social media platforms these reconfiguration reinforced inequalities along patriarchal lines. Videos of female participants portray women as emotional, melismatic singers to be seen, while male members are rational, articulated speakers over-*seeing* them.

Since the beginning of our research, we heard of seven Matua girls who dropped off from education as the schools had to close and a very few had the technological means and the infrastructure to do online learning. With schools closing adolescent girls were suspected of spending too much free time with boys and with suspiciously known Hindu boys. Another side effect of the viral Covid was the viral spread of the love jihad rhetoric. Many got married and at least seven schoolgirls we heard of were married and one committed suicide during the pandemic

in one single Matua village in Bangladesh. The feminist Avatars Harichand and Guruchand could not prevent these tragedies and behind the anti-patriarchal claims of Matua intellectuals and writers and activists there is a long way to go on the path towards equal power distribution and representation between men and women not to mention all other genders and sexual orientations.

If I have to repeat one take away is that we need to be cautious and inquisitive about both—the Matua discourse that our women are fully equal and we have feminist gods, but also the outsiders view that Matua anti patriarchal claims are imitations of elite discourses on womens' emancipation. The reality as usual is more complicated than both these discourses. While some feminists continue to neglect caste and some Dalit activists continue to neglect womens issues, I hope this study demonstrates that intersecting caste, gender, religion and caste is imperative.

Webinar 14

Distinguished Lecture on Narrativising Trauma in Women's Autobiographical Writing from Afghanistan: An Asian Counter- hegemonic Discourse

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(The Lecture was delivered on 25th September 2021)

I have titled my talk "Narrativising Trauma in Women's Autobiographical Writing from Afghanistan: An Asian Counter-hegemonic Discourse". I will follow a tripartite structure for this talk. The first part will delve into the theoretical premise apposite for this discussion. The second will focus on a rich repository of women's autobiographical writings from Afghanistan. I have deliberately not mentioned only Afghan women because it is about both kinds of narratives- those by Afghan women and by women who have landed in Afghanistan- either through marriage or certain other ways, for instance, journalistic purposes etc. The third part will meditate on Sushmita's autobiography *Kabuliwalar Bangali Bou* and I will try to establish its legitimacy within the trauma discourse.

Trauma Studies which has its provenance in the research around the two World Wars and the holocaust must necessarily diversify as a discipline to incorporate and represent the other histories that have been completely denied voice so far. We have seen how Western scholarship which is predominantly Euro-centric has defined and classified trauma in consonance with the Western experiences of the War and violence relegating the Other World to oblivion. So, the colonised, the Other, the Third World and the Asian too in their own concentrations need representation in this very hegemonic trauma-scape to construct a counter discourse that can redefine trauma. Since the 1990s psychoanalytic criticism has given an impetus by endowing some sort of a clinical dimension to trauma studies. The critical question under review is why trauma which emanates from exile, loss displacement, expatriation or may be even migration- why should it receive such primacy in recent times and become the locus of attention amongst other disciplines? We have seen how in the last two decades Dalit narratives along with Partition literature and even African writings for that matter, have challenge the politicisation over trauma studies that has completely ignored individual voices particularly from post-colonial locations. Interestingly, the impossibility of the representation of trauma is undermined by autobiography as a genre that allows, I would suggest, not only the transformation of trauma itself but also of the subject through the act of writing. The term script therapy often suggested (and it is also much current) shows how the process of writing is also simultaneously a process of healing. Sushmita Bandyopadhyay whose *Kabuliwalar Bangali Bou* was published in 1998, I believe, it is a unique autobiographical narrative of a

Bengali woman who has been subjected to exile in Afghanistan after her marriage with a kabuliwala Janbaz Khan. It is not simply an account of personal grief. It is a tale of resistance against violence. It represents the lives of other Bengali women who have been stranded in Afghanistan. It even chronicles the Afghan life, culture and politics. In fact, we get to see her social activism even in the face of death. She was issued a fatwa by the Taliban because she declined to follow the codification for women in Afghanistan and she very penetratingly describes the moment of conversion to Islam and of course, her daring return to India. Later on, she decided to revisit the country which was almost a suicidal attempt because we know that she was murdered allegedly by the Taliban in 2013. But she desired to document the lives of Afghan women and children. In order to place Sushmita's writings within this trauma-scape I would like to make reference to three very important texts in the context of trauma theory. The first one is by Dominick LaCapra which is titled *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* published in 1994, the next is Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience- Trauma, Narrative and History* published in 1996 and the third text has a very interesting title, it is Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* published in the very same year. These three texts can be identified as transformatives in the meaning and conceptualisation of trauma. In the Introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Caruth explains the origin of trauma as some sort of a fragmented discourse which had its genesis in the reaction to the Vietnam War and its consequent codification as PTSD i.e. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder by the American Association in the 1980s. Surprisingly, the epistemology has called for a diffusion of boundaries between disciplines which problematises pathology at one hand and the cure of trauma at the other rather than providing some sort of a complete scientific discourse. I would suggest that this disruption can be attributed to the very nature of trauma experience itself because it eludes a simple definition and also any kind of cataloguing of symptoms and locations of the phenomena. Hence, we see how psychiatry, psychology, sociology, historiography and last but not the least, literature has been summoned afresh to take a look at the fissures in the study of trauma. Clinical definitions of trauma have excluded the individual and the more local experiences, witnessing and testimony of trauma, thereby denying representation and we see how it actually doubles the trauma through voicelessness. Interestingly, the individual, here in this case I will cite the instances of Afghan women and of course other women, we will see how the autobiographer becomes the space wherein the intersectional forces of gender, class, caste, religion, culture and nationality intertwine to create new histories of identity formation. This politicisation over trauma theory in locating trauma needs to be interrogated through indigenous frameworks that can appreciate as well as canonise individual trauma stories as valid testimonies.

Sushmita was born in 1959 in an educated Bengali Hindu Brahmin family in Khulna, Bangladesh and she was raised in Kolkata. She happened to meet an Afghan Janbaz Khan with whom she fell in love and eventually they got married. She decided to visit her in-laws in Kabul as a '*musafir*'. The word '*musafir*' is important here. She says that "I am a traveller" who should have been received with hospitality but to her utmost horror she realises that this short trip would actually extend into a lifelong incarceration ending in a tragic death. She has written six other very important autobiographical texts which are not much talked about or much known even. Many of these books are not even available. A lot of conspiracy theories hover over her death and there has been inadequate research on her contribution as a writer activist from Asia.

In her bestselling autobiography *Kabuliwalar Bangali Bou* she testifies to the violence which is perpetuated on women by fundamentalists in a foreign land and her singular attempt to resist. The tragic

potential of Sushmita's abortive efforts to flee and her dramatic escape in 1995 has been captured in a Bollywood film *Escape from Taliban* which was released in 2003. Sushmita was rechristened as 'Sahib Kamal'; she did not know the language Pashto and grappled to understand the meaning of it. Later on, she realised it probably means 'Sahib-ka-mal' i.e. the property of the Sahib. It was a name given to her by her in-laws. She served as a healthcare worker at her own dispensary which she had built in her in-laws home so that she could alleviate the poor medical facilities for the women and children in the country. Incidentally, her testimony runs counter to the image of the kabuliwala which is deeply entrenched in the Bengali consciousness that was familiarised by Tagore in his short story with the same title. This romanticised familiar home-grown image of the kabuliwala, Rahmat from Afghanistan was carved in Sushmita's psyche. Sushmita was an avid reader of Tagore. She was completely belied by the reality that she faces in Kabul.

Janbaz had abandoned her right after her marriage and left India in order to pursue business. Sushmita's experience of violence and violation of rights as a wife at one hand, a daughter-in-law and an Indian citizen on the other, is exemplified through the incoherence in the text. There are disruptions in the narrative which are punctuated by ellipses at certain points which I believe expresses the impossibility of voicing trauma.

The narrativisation of trauma in her case is an effort at assembling the pieces of her identity in order to attain stability, integrity and peace. I argue that her national, cultural, religious, linguistic and even familial identity is reconstituted in the course of her existence in Afghanistan. The pain that is generated by this deep sense of loss which emanated from the severance from her motherland India, her mother tongue Bengali and her own mother pulsates throughout the narrative. She voices her incarceration and says, "I am not in Andaman's jail but I am subjected to penal servitude in a familial prison in Afghanistan." But what is her sin that she could not discover.

Trauma studies must be decolonised to investigate the presence of the Other within the patriarchal structures and postcolonial locations in the Asian experience and legitimise the claim of the marginalised through parameters that can be instituted way beyond the West. We see how trauma writing connects the past with the present and it situates these personal narratives within a larger grand politico-historical narrative and private memory within the broader public consciousness.

We know that Afghanistan after the Soviet years witnessed the tussle between Pakistan and Taliban to hold the reins of power. The worst possible combination of feudalism and fundamentalism became prevalent in the country. Sushmita's autobiographical writing is a desperate attempt to preserve her testimony while at the same time she negotiates with her own trauma that is experienced through repeated loops of re-enactment. I would suggest that akin to this ramifying history of trauma theory itself, Sushmita's text is non-linear. It is non-chronological. It is characterized by this constant spacio-temporal shift that represents not only the discontinuities in her own life but also the makings of her own memory.

I would like to move to the second section of my discussion today wherein I would make reference to some of the most poignant narratives from Afghanistan. What is interesting to observe here is that most of these narratives were written from a state of exile. These women writers have adopted pseudonyms so that their actual identities can be camouflaged.

The first one that I would be speaking about is *My Forbidden Face* by Latifa. This is an astonishing account of a very young promising girl who witnessed the Taliban regime. She was born in the 1980s in Kabul in a very middle-class family. Like any other girl, she engaged in discussions on cinema, fashion and music and she aspired to be a journalist one day. But on 26th September 1996 when the Taliban seized power in Kabul, her entire ordered world fell apart and streets were suddenly deserted. Her school was shut down. All forms of connectivity- phones, radios-everything fell silent. Latifa was around 16 years at that point of time. She realised that she is a virtual prisoner in her own home. She could not even walk out of home or look out of the window because these things were forbidden. This sudden transformation in her life which she had to live behind the purdah, having to hide her face behind the crocheted grill completely turned into a life of fear because she could see women being lashed and brutally maltreated on the streets of Kabul. As an act of defiance, Latifa set up a clandestine school at her own home which could not be run regularly because the Taliban would know that she was doing such kind of a job. The teaching gave her a reason to live. In this very poignant narrative, she describes how her life along with her entire family suddenly changed. She speaks of the other women in the family. She speaks of her mother who was an educated woman and her own sister. The entire family had to escape from Afghanistan in 2001. They were brought over to Europe through an operation by a French-based Afghan resistance group. It was there that she started writing this particular memoir in collaboration with Chekeba Hachemi who the founder of Afghanistan Libre is. Before I conclude this part on Latifa's account, I would just like to state that there is a very haunting passage in this narrative where her brother who was a student at Kabul University, he witnessed the naked body of a woman bisected and pinned to the two sides of a swinging door. This was left as a souvenir by Gulbuddin Hekmatyar's men when they ceded the University's campus to Ahmad Shah Massoud of the Northern Alliance. These haunting passages give us an idea of the kind of atrocities that women in Afghanistan had to go through. The reality is actually unbearable as we read these fascinating accounts. She says that the burqa is not clothing it is actually a jail cell.

I would like to move to the next account which is *Zoya's Story* by Zoya. The name Zoya is actually a pseudonym which was given by a Russian journalist whom she met at one of the refugee camps in Pakistan. This is an absolutely spine-chilling account which Zoya has written in assistance with two journalists, John Follain and Rita Cristofari. It speaks of the clandestine resistance movements that young woman like Zoya participated in. Both of Zoya's parents were active in clandestine politics. Her mother was a RAWA member. Her mother was her role model. She had introduced her to the works of RAWA and her father was also aligned with an underground organisation. Both of Zoya's parents suddenly disappeared one after the other because they were murdered under the orders of the Mujahideen. It was then that Zoya's life was completely shattered. She only had her grandmother to live with. Both of them were rescued by RAWA. She was admitted to a boarding school so that she could be trained in women's rights and sex education. She writes about the life of refugees in Peshawar and how it is very difficult to teach and attract young girls to these schools because the fathers would not allow them to go. These girls could be profitably engaged in may be weaving carpets and they believed that education would turn them into an infidel. Zoya who is the eyewitness writes about the horrors that are perpetuated in Afghanistan by the Mujahideen, warlords as well as the Talibans. But this is not simply a narrative of despair and devastation. The message of hope and optimism is very powerful in this story. In fact, if you look at the back cover of this book it enlists the mistreatments that the Taliban had meted out to women in

Afghanistan. For instance, women cannot laugh out loud. Women cannot access medical treatment by male doctors. They cannot wear bright coloured clothes. Neither can they be seen in public places alone. The burqa is something that is absolutely mandatory for them to wear. This is a fascinating tale that I have read.

The next one that I will be talking about is by Nelofar Pazira. Many of you might be knowing Pazira because she is a very popular actress and also a director. Her account is entitled *A Bed of Red Flowers: In search of my Afghanistan*. This is a very emblematic title which refers to a very traditional celebration in Afghanistan where the entire community comes together to take a look at the carpet of poppies- the red flowers that cover the landscape. Pazira speaks about this fond memory in her childhood. This very thrilling narrative underlines how her family has to put up a lot of sacrifices and the harrowing tale of their escape to Pakistan through the rugged mountains and how the family finally managed to reach Pakistan. We also learn about Pazira's journey to become a writer, teacher, journalist and an actress. When she was sixteen years old, the family had to flee to Canada in 1989. That is the year when Soviet occupation ended in Afghanistan. She revisited Afghanistan ten years later in search of her friend Diana. Diana was the only emotional refuge that she had. Both of them shared a passion for poetry and they both had a dream of a free Afghanistan. Suddenly, she realised that Diana had stopped writing letters to her. Both of them corresponded when Pazira was in Canada. She apprehended that possibly Diana was contemplating suicide under the atrocities of the Taliban regime. This hunt, this entire search for her friend becomes the story of the film *Kandahar*. This film was premiered in 2001. Just about four months later, the World Trade Centre was attacked by Al-Qaeda. This film received renewed interest and importance in the context of what was happening around.

Nelofar was five years old when her father who was a respected doctor was imprisoned along with several other Afghans and the very following year the Russians invaded the country. What ensued was a blood bath on account of this conflict between the Soviet army and the American-backed Mujahideen fighters. She talks about how she joined resistance movements. When she was as young as eleven, she along with her friends would throw stones at the Russian tanks and she talks about the reign of terror wherein rockets would be soaring in the sky. There would be explosions on the streets every now and then. Later on, Pazira when she went out of Afghanistan, she decided to make a life and career of her own and eventually she became a journalist and film maker.

I would now like to move to the next account which is by Malalai Joya. It is titled, *A Woman Among Warlords*. The title Joya she adopted from the name of Sarwar Joya who is a very well-known activist, a constitutionalist in Afghanistan. He had fought for independence all his life and he was imprisoned for twenty-four long years until his murder.

Joya's account is a stunning narrative wherein we see how from the depths of trauma she brings herself out and eventually becomes a very popular, albeit controversial political figure. She has been named as one of Times Magazine's Hundred Most Influential People in 2010. She speaks about her life in the refugee camps of Iran and Pakistan. She worked as a teacher in a secret girl's school wherein she would hide the books behind the burqa so that the Taliban could not find them. In fact, in 2003 she took a very daring step when she spoke against the NATO-backed warlords. She became the youngest person to be elected to the Afghan Parliament. But unfortunately, in 2007 she was temporarily suspended from her

position because she has continuously critiqued the US policies and she was very critical of the drug merchants and the warlords who had taken complete control of the Parliament.

In a very interestingly titled Introduction to her book, 'Dust in the Eyes of the World' she writes that, "I come from the land of tragedy called Afghanistan". This narrative opens with a very striking statement: "In Afghanistan killing a woman is like killing a bird".

I would now like to move to the next autobiographical account which is by Fawzia Koofi. It is titled *The Favored Daughter*. Koofi's life is one which will surprise us to a great extent. She was the last daughter born to her mother. She was the nineteenth daughter of an MP of Badakhshan which is a very remote rural area in Afghanistan. Koofi was left to die in the sun until her mother discovered her crying and she realised that the child is still alive. She was crying because she had second degree burns on her face and her mother changed her mind and she decided to bring Koofi up very differently from her other daughters. In this narrative she underlines what it means to be born female in Afghanistan and writes about the hapless condition of rural women who have lesser value than the cattle that is reared by the farmers in that part of the country. Koofi was brought up in the midst of an extended family because her father was assassinated in 1978 and eventually both her mother and Koofi had to move to Kabul. She unfolds this narrative pitted against the war-ravaged Afghanistan. She writes about the invasion of the Soviets, the Civil War and of course, the Taliban regime. She sees how her country gradually regressed to the Dark Ages. In fact, she was denied the pursuit of her medical studies. Later on she returned to her home province and became an MP of the same place and represented the very people her father did.

In this particular narrative she basically writes letters to her two daughters before every political trip that she takes wherein she describes the future and the freedom that she dreamt about Afghanistan. Despite the fact that she was brought up in a stringently patriarchal set-up- Afghan society is patriarchal, patrilocal, patrilineal- she writes that "I truly believe that people change their opinions only from first-hand experience. And opinions on gender can and do change, even among the most conservative men."

The last narrative that I will be discussing in this particular section is by an American, Phyllis Chesler. Many of you might be familiar with the name because she was a Second Wave feminist. She was an Emerita Professor of Psychology at the College of Staten Island. Her narrative begins with this absolutely gripping statement, "I once lived in a harem in Afghanistan.". She writes about her experience of meeting an Afghan Abdul Karim whom she married eventually and both of them went over to Europe for a trip. Later on she visited her in-laws home in Kabul where her American passport was immediately confiscated and she realised that there is no point of return from here. This book is formatted in a dialogic exchange between her and her husband Abdul Karim. It kind of shows the clash of the East and the West. Also, I would suggest it exhibits the cultural syncretisation because Chesler attempted to appropriate the Afghan culture as far as it was practicable. She speaks about how on a spree for youthful adventure she married this young man where she underwent an excruciating experience of torture at the hands of her in-laws, particularly her mother-in-law. It was in 1961 when she ventured to Kabul.

What she observed was a drastic change in her own husband Karim who converted himself into some sort of a medieval despot from a very liberal-minded man who had always encouraged her to write. Karim contrived to impregnate her so that she could be permanently tied to Afghanistan. She underwent intense emotional trauma when she was left alone by her husband. He was busy pursuing his own political career.

Later Chesler fell very ill. She was unable to acclimatise herself with the food habits in this country and she planned to make a trip back home. In the book she writes that the experience she gathered provided her with material to write. She has written more than fourteen books. She mentions that “my American feminism” germinated in Afghanistan.

This I think is a very apposite closure to the second section because this helps me move to Sushmita’s account. I think both these narratives can be placed as comparatives to one another.

Sushmita’s autobiographical writing has emanated from a diary which was written in the home of her in-laws in Kabul. It is surely a private enterprise to write through trauma but at the same time, it is a documentation that encapsulates a narrative of an Indian woman who is marooned in a foreign land in a somewhat solitary confinement. She was constantly seeking her own identity in the midst of transacting with other relational identities. She says that “I exist. I have no one. I have a heart, but it is not excited. Desire is there, satisfaction is not there. There is enough madness, but it is not quenched. I exist. I have no one. I am a lost woman.” I think the importance of her work cannot be judged solely upon her writing as it historicises an individual’s survival story in a particular historical period. Simultaneously, it upholds the socio-cultural realities of an otherwise impenetrable land. So, the scripting of her trauma is as much personal as it is political. The abandonment by her husband, the feeling of inadequacy because she was childless, the physical torture that was perpetrated by her in-laws, the scarcity of resources- bare minimum resources such as food, and even the confinement- all of these comprise her personal trauma. She had approached the Indian Embassy in Pakistan so that she could come back to India. But she received an indecent proposal there and felt very humiliated. So, we see that how an individual’s struggle for survival and good life rises to the politics of borders and conflicting national identities. In Afghanistan Sushmita was the Other- the outsider who just did not fit into their culture irrespective of the fact that she made all possible attempts. She tried to learn their culinary practices and even the language Pashto. So, I argue that a postcolonial reading of Sushmita’s autobiography is necessary and it is absolutely possible in view of this Third World woman surviving in a completely different context in Asia where the infiltration of the West to champion the causes of equality, liberty and justice- all of which we know has been a failure. This has been a prolonged historic process. The monolithic trauma discourse that was initially premised on the West and the Rest can be reconfigured when we consider some of these very important narratives. In fact, there is a very important book by Theresa Saliba titled *Gender, Politics and Islam* published in 2002 wherein we look at the cases of Taslima Nasreen and Malala Yousafzai, and several other women from some of these Islamic societies. But Sushmita’s case is very different because it did not receive the limelight as the others, and it has been more of an individual’s crusade until her death when the Indian State finally intervened to claim her body back to Kolkata.

We have seen that in Afghanistan to curb Islamic fundamentalism and the Taliban’s extremism the US had sustained a seventeen-year long war. The 9/11 terrorist attack on US by Al-Qaeda was followed by Bin Laden’s killing in 2011. When we place Sushmita’s murder by the Taliban in 2013 preceded by these series of events that I have mentioned in a conflict-ridden Afghanistan, it actually throws light on the very troubled international politics in this country. So Sushmita is a woman, a Bengali, a Hindu, consequently a *Kafer*, an Indian or Hindustani, an Asian woman, an Afghan wife, a social activist and also a writer. All these intersectionalities inform Sushmita’s identity. So as readers we compulsively become historical witnesses to her trauma that is both unique at the same time it is collective. I would suggest that her text is

some kind of a postmodernist assemblage because it has a very rugged structure. There are constant flashbacks, there are these futuristic leaps that defy any expectation of chronology as in the case of an autobiography. The authorial point from which she writes, it becomes a referential point through which she looks at her past which is a life of safety, security, pleasure and protection in the midst of her own family in her homeland. She dreams of a free Afghanistan even if she knows and is conscious of the impossibility of it. The present is looked at some kind of a continuum until her sudden death takes place. The veracity of Sushmita's writing is tragically established by her death. She addresses the reader at the beginning of the text; we can feel the telltale signs of her death approaching shortly. In fact, I would like to make reference to what Freud had said in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* wherein Freud talks about the cycle of trauma within which certain individuals repeat their suffering. Very strangely, we have seen that catastrophic episodes recur for those who have survived it once. It is just the case for Sushmita who undergoes a series of sufferings that was initiated by her own acts of defiance and retaliation. A kind of 'traumatic neurosis' as Freud possibly would term it, is evident in her writing.

Sushmita was able to listen to the trauma of other women- the local women, the women in her own family because she served as a healthcare worker. She was much revered as a doctor in Kabul. She actually tried to give voice to the sufferings of several Bengali women. It is in her writing that we get to see some very shocking experiences that many of her associates, people that she connected with in Kabul, had undergone. In this absolutely spine-chilling narrative, Sushmita tries to grapple with the trauma which is not easily available to her consciousness, and she relives similar experiences by repeating the act time and again. There is this crisis of death at one hand and the crisis of life at the other; the text moves between the two, it kind of oscillates. The tension between knowing and not knowing is sustained throughout. I would like to conclude with this on trauma theory and my attempt at placing Sushmita's narrative in the midst of the other narratives that I have discussed. It is very important that trauma studies looks at how trauma can be acted out and worked through particularly in the case of autobiographical writing. I suggest that future avenues of a positive outcome of suffering wherein I believe that postcolonial configurations of trauma need to explore virgin grounds. We are quite aware that victimhood would necessarily imply passivity and the narratives of trauma have reflected the agency that the survivor has in order to relive life. There is this attempt of bouncing back. The process of narrativising in itself is a way of healing. Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* talks about how declarative memory helps in organizing disparate experiences that the victim has and how it lends order into this kind of chaos in one's life. The trauma which is deeply embedded in memory for a certain period of time is transformed through the process of narrativisation. Feminist traumatology can help in relieving this kind of a double traumatisation wherein the legacy of colonial wounding as well as woman's experiences as an Other can be addressed. I would argue that Sushmita's story is not simply about her own personal survival along with that it is her cultural survival in an extremist context. Consequently, her story is not an escape from reality or from death for that matter; it is a turn to life. A double telling constitutes the narrative as the story of death in reality is also the story of Sushmita's life.

Webinar 15

Distinguished Lecture on Understanding Asian Women: A study of Bengali periodicals 1860-1940

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(The Lecture was delivered on 28th October 2021)

Understanding oneself as the World Poet famously said is the first step to understanding the divine so that the other and the self becomes one. By mulling over one's identity through transactions with both the self and other, the highest form of understanding and unity can be achieved. In the search for a national identity from the late 19th century Bengal, these transactions were mulled over by various brands of intellectuals through multifarious paths and ways. The concept of the other too changed as and when necessary though the broad framework remained anti-colonial. Despite nationalism being the essential preoccupation, religion even, the trends of cosmopolitan ideas that were flowing from the west through the new education and information systems, remained active for a long time. In this paper I hope to bring out two strands of ideas on national identity creation which converged towards understanding of the self for Indian women through juxtaposing against the colonial other not only themselves but assessing through transactions of exchange with the self, outside the territorial boundaries of India. This was done effectively through women's writings on information about Asia and the world, spread immediately and easily through vernacular periodicals to a large reading public. The medium was effective not simply for its entertaining acceptability but because it served the purpose of popularising a model of the ideal Bengali woman through a comparative analysis of 'difference' and 'otherness' to negotiate what Carl Thompson calls 'a complex and sometimes unsettling interplay between alterity and identity, difference and similarity'¹ and through what Partha Chatterjee calls 'a subjectivity' adopting the 'same essentialist conception of the Orientalist discourse' but with a difference in their analysis of Asian women, as I hope to show. Accepting that there were many other paths to constructing the idea of an ideal Indian woman in the 19th and 20th century, with and without women's agency in that construction I will only restrict myself today to talk about the writing in the periodicals, some of which were specifically aimed at women and others more towards the general reader, to show how influences of cosmopolitanism, universalism and nationalism contributed towards a common vision of a united and powerful Asia and how these ideas

were put into practice in making women become the focus of the didactic efforts of all writers for a horizontal dissemination of Asian consciousness.

The *samayikpatrikas*, periodicals were naturally responsive to women's issues from the 19th century which Radha Kumar called the Age of women when many progressive sections in different parts of the country were engulfed in the central issue of the age of reform, the 'women's question' as Partha Chatterjee calls it. The *patrikas* were vocal on debates on the position of women in society and as in real life, men's voices were as loud on issues concerning women and society as those of women. But what is noticeable in the periodicals is greater agency for women than was credited to them in the field of reform. The lines between the 'outer' and 'inner' domains were sometimes drawn deeply and at other times blurred in these essays on Asian women and travelogues. But what is certain is that a bond between women, beyond the nation and self, is being constituted not entirely imaginatively but through knowledge of customs, traditions and real-life experiences, with the unceasing motifs of improvement and empowerment, obviously varying in degree and quality according to the authorship. Defying traditional social binding women's writings in vernacular journals tried to find a space outside the dual control of patriarchy of the society and state. Rooting for less advantaged women, these essays on information about and travel in Asia try to create awareness against social dominance through intimacy and gender solidarity. Though articles for women are scattered in all the literary periodicals of the time, for this paper I have decided to concentrate mainly on the periodicals for women, *BamabodhiniPatrika*, *Mahila*, *Bangalakshmi*, Antahpur as well as general magazines like *Janmabhumi*, *Prabashi*, *Bharati*, and *Bharatbarsha*.

Writing for women by men or anonymous authors and setting up stereotypes:

One of the earliest magazines started in Bengali, aimed at educating women was *BamabodhiniPatrika*. According to a recent anthology of articles on *Women and family in BamabodhiniPatrika*, the editor historian Bharati Ray, points out that it was the first periodical aimed at casting the 'light of knowledge' for 'improvement of their mental faculties' in a language, 'gentle yet lively' for 'women in seclusion' in Asia. The articles were mostly written by educated Brahmo men and maybe by some women, on current topics of health and hygiene, aimed at women's mental and physical wellbeing. But strangely enough most of them have not given their names so authorship remains a mystery. Most of the articles about other countries, even when they are translations of English articles, contain direct references to women in different countries, aimed at attracting the interest of their women readers. They describe features, attributes, activities and dilemmas of women of Asia as well as similarities or dissimilarities with Indian/Bengali women. Almost always the description of Chinese women, include the custom of foot binding as the ultimate injustice done to them. It is obvious that the westerners who were encountering local Chinese in the port towns were writing about the custom which was under debate in the wake of the Taiping rebellion (1850-64) and this encounter was reported in contemporary newspapers which were read all over the world. The writer in *BamabodhiniPatrika* claimed that 'Men have always opposed the idea of women going out of the home which is why they find this custom, which immobilises women, so attractive. Not just feet, even their minds are constricted.' A few years later in 1902, an article on Chinese men and women, in *Janmabhumi* by Ajit Prasad Sanyal, has a section on foot-binding. 'All civilized nations, India included, prepare their marriageable daughters to be beautiful in body, as well as be

flawless in character and intelligence. But the Chinese look for the size of the bride's feet as the most important criterion.

Description of family structure and family customs were of great interest for these writers since they presumed that their female readers would enjoy them. Again, similarities are explored, and differences are analysed in the articles. Burmese women are a source of great interest to many Bengalis who were travelling to Burma on work since the annexation of large parts of Burma from 1886 though even before an article in 1870 probed marriage customs in *BamabodhiniPatrika*. Another country which interested writers on women's freedom was Persia. An article in *BamabodhiniPatrika* in 1867 on Persian women brings in a discussion of family life where men are said to value loyalty and dedication in their marital relations. A comparison is brought in between the new bride's position in a Hindu family and a Persian family and says that there are similarities in the fact that the bride is surrounded by a large contingent of female relatives but unlike a Hindu mother in law, a Persian mother in law does not mentally torture her. A similar argument is made by Hemendra Nath Dutta about Turkish women in *Mahila*.

Japan came into the intellectual radar of Bengalis from the turn of the century when she was able to achieve iconic status in the world as an Asian power destroying the myth of western invincibility by defeating Russia in war, reach an apogee of power through self-modernization, aspire to provide leadership to the rest of Asia through a united Pan Asian inspiration and then ruin the hold that she had established over the countries of Asia and definitely over the minds of some Indian intellectuals by its aggressive actions in East Asia. Majority of the articles however still focussed on a fascination for hunting out the 'secret of Japan's successes, though Rabindranath Tagore alone tried to convince the world of the pitfall of excessive nationalism and braved inordinate hostility in the two east Asian countries. What is interesting is that in the articles specifically meant for women readers the stress was not on politics but womanhood and family and reiteration of ideas of sacrifice for the family, society and nation. What Partha Chatterjee writes about the "new woman" of Bengal in the age of the rise of nationalism, as 'modern' but having to display signs of national tradition' was projected on to the Japanese women as well as illustrations of perfect womanhood. *Navyabharat* published an article on the Rise of Japan in 1906 in by Taraknath Mukherjee which contained a section on a comparison between Bengali and Japanese women.

Women's education claimed the attention of almost all writers from the earliest years of the *SamayikPatrik* and was one of the areas which ensured agency for women, in the Age of Reform. Admiration for Japan's modernization programme also included analysis of education there. Especially those Bengalis who came into contact with Japan expressed admiration at what was considered to be a unique education system for women. In 1906, Jadunath Sarkar, a student in Tokyo, wrote about the different medical, technical, agricultural, fine arts and music schools for girls in Tokyo, most of which were run by women as well as foreign missionaries. There was excitement in India over the establishment of Women's college/university in Japan in 1901 by JinzoNaruse whose views have been discussed by Brojosundar Sanyal in *Prabashi* in 1908 and Ganapati Roy who wrote an article in *Manashi*.

Women's freedom in Burma excited the interest and attention of Bengalis through the entire period of close interaction and almost all the articles on Burma invariably contain at least a mention of the freedom enjoyed by the Burmese women vis a vis the Indian- sometimes approvingly, and at others

disapprovingly. Also, freedom for these writers was specifically connected to movement outside the home about which there was still ambivalence of opinion in Bengal. They admire the ability of Burmese women to move out of the seclusion of the home but issue a warning to the readers that this freedom is not real since it has not brought improvement to the Burmese lives.

Writing for women by women and Women's travelogues

Besides a noticeable commitment towards the nationalist agenda of improvement, obviously following editorial guideline, women's writings in the periodicals also played an important qualitative if not quantitative role in the other project of cosmopolitan nationalism through intellectually nudging Bengali women towards a wider meaning of nationalism by including the idea of Asian women as partners in the construction of the 'new woman'. These articles in the literary journals stand out in making women of East, West and South Asia visible- bringing their lives to the homes of those who are not able to as peripatetic as others or who were not as communicative. This was done using means to create comfort reading not only subject matter wise but stylistically as well. They often translate articles from English language newspapers and journals for their Bengali readers but with adaptations to create familiarity for easy acceptance and appeal. It was a great bonus when women travellers write about their travels. They are of course rare occasions since very few women travelled and even when they did it was almost always with a chaperon, barring one unique case discussed later.

Bharat Mahila though a conservative journal, upholding womanly ideals, described in 1909, Japanese educational system for women through institutional segregation making a case for the need to open one such institution for women in India. In an article in 1913, Hariprabha Takeda, while describing her trip to Japan, writes about a girls' school in Tokyo that she visited. 'It became clear to me,' Takeda wrote, 'that to be a true human and to teach one's children and other countrymen to be human, women's education was absolutely necessary. Abala Bose in *Bamabodhini Patrika* in an article on 'Women's education in Japan and our duty', in 1915, draws upon the Japanese experience regarding women's education to say that it is not always beneficial to formulate the syllabus of women's education according to a western model. 'When Japan modernised herself, there was a slavish imitation of western modernity. But to prevent this from becoming widespread, a Japanese style of education for women was proposed.' Shanta Chattopadhyay visiting Japan in 1938 also visited many schools run by women for young ladies. She describes a whole day she spent in three schools (JiuagaKuen) run by Mrs Motoko Hari as well as a school run by Mrs Mochiji and she also includes many pictures which might interest her readers.

It is true that compared to the travel narratives by men the number of women travelling was much less but the very fact that women were able to ignore or circumvent the normative practices of the time and become trendsetters not only in practice but also in writing was a unique factor. Women's travel narratives which came in the different issues of the periodicals, have not found much place in the academic discussions on Bengali travel writing till recently, though they form an important element in the understanding of women's self and their position and role in society. Jayati Gupta's recent book *Travel Culture, Travel Writing and Bengali Women, 1870-1940* (Routledge, 2021) is an important book in this regard. The conventional studies on women's travels narrative have in general been monotonously and invariably directed towards the colonial gaze. It is only rarely that the reverse is studied. Even in those rare cases the concentration is on migration studies and the women's experience in settling in a new place.

The exploration of the western countries- Europe, England and the United States by women belonging to a colonized nation and then sharing of their experience through travel narratives in the form of a diary entry or letters has not been documented at all, and the same is true of women travelling to the east as well. The travel narratives I discuss here are written by women belonging to Hindu/Brahmo *bhadralok* class, affluent and well connected and well educated in Bengali and some English who are travelling to the east, who are mostly travelling with male family members with the important exception of Sarala Debi. The connection between travel narratives and the use of the letter form has been discussed by scholars like Amy E. Smith who argues that travel narratives were better received when they were written in the same style as a letter. She says that this form of writing is more likely to produce a stylistically enjoyable narrative that has ‘an inherent sense of audience’. The addressing of the recipient of the letter by name or a family relation gave the reader a sense of closeness with the writer and a sense of sharing like a family member. The use of the form of diary entry or letter writing creates an aura of authenticity since it is assumed that the traveller is writing down their entire experience immediately leaving no room for imaginative or subjective manipulation. However, Clare B.Saunders points out that, ‘the assumed authenticity and greater honesty of a personal diary or correspondence which records personal experience, ...can easily be manipulated with omissions and elisions to meet the agenda of the writer...’ Here I must add a caveat that the very reason I have chosen not to use travelogues published later and only stuck to the articles published almost immediately in the journals is to prove authenticity.

Rajkumari Bandopadhyay, the first Bengali woman to travel to the west in 1871 and Krishnabhabini Das’s account of her travel to England, *A Bengali woman in England*, (first published anonymously in 1885) were not published in the journals, though Das’ later essays about her experience in England, however, were published from time to time in the periodicals. I’ve discussed travel writings to the west in my forthcoming book on *Wandering Women* and here only mention that they are important since these writings of counterflows express admiration but no admission of colonised mentality. What is most frustrating about women travellers is that very little biographical details can be found about them in their travelogues in the journals and not all their writing are published later as books. Some women travellers about whom we have some details are - Sarala Debi Chowdhurani, who travels to Burma for a conference, is well known to posterity through her multifaceted activities- inspiring the youth to physical activity and associations to journalistic ventures both in Lahore and Bengal. Her writing and role in freedom movement is well known and documented. Another writer Hariprabha Takeda, a Bengali social worker married to a Japanese businessman Uemon Takeda, sent her travel account to the editor SarajuBala Dutta of *Bharat Mahila* for publication in 1912 and luckily for us the editor wrote a few lines explaining who the diary writer was. Similarly, Shanta Chattopadhyay, Sita Devi, and Aparna Devi as daughters of famous fathers and some having famous husbands as well and more from the nonfiction books that they have written we get some biographical details. It is the fact of their travel and writing about it that is of greatest significance. These women hardly provide any biographical details and rarely mention their husband’s name. Even Sarala’s accounts in 1931-32, which make wonderful reading in her description of sights and her own insights, is threadbare in details of the work she has gone for. Another traveller, Saratrenu Debi has turned to be an enigma in more ways than one since one cannot make out where she originates from since her comparisons are with Bombay rather than Calcutta, and her travelogue is incomplete. Abala Bose, brought up in a Brahmo environment, along with her sister Sarala, learnt from their father Durgamohon Das, the importance of education and open mindedness in life. Later

after her marriage to the scientist Jagadish Chandra Bose, Abala gave up her medical training and travelled extensively to Europe, America, China and Japan. From her extensive experience she writes, ‘we need to travel to get out of the monotony of our daily existence in order to find our strengths and lift our minds above our problems... We understand and love our country better and through visiting a new place we are imbued with a self- confidence and self-reliance.’

Some travellers are famous for their fictional writing and essays even if their travelogues are unconventional. Sita Devi and Shanta Devi were already well known to the Bengali readers through their fictional and non- fictional articles in the periodicals started by their father Ramananda Chattopadhyay. Sita Devi stayed in Burma for seven years after marriage (1923-1930) but only wrote one article on Burmese women. Shanta Chattopadhyay Nag, accompanied her husband Kalidas Nag abroad and her long serialised travelogue on her visit to Japan with her husband and daughter is one of the best by a Bengali woman. One article by her came out in *Prabashi* in 1914, but though she writes about Borobudur temple in Java, its discovery and preservation by Dutch archaeologists and scholars, she does not appear to be visiting. She however uses photographs by another Bengali traveller Kali Mohon Ghosh in it. The tone indicates that she is aware of the Greater India ideas prevalent in Calcutta a decade before the Society is established. Two writers based in Rangoon wrote interesting travelogues - Mrinalini Raha, a resident of Burma and writes about the various places of interest though it is as if she is in an Indian bubble, so to speak, and even her second article on Burmese men and women is strange in many ways. Another travelogue is by Pushpalata Debi writing in *Mahilain* 1903, about her travel to Malacca with Singapore as a base. Aparna Debi 1933 article on Japan is both informative and analytical. Chittaranjan Das’s daughter, who in her reminiscences of her father, mentions that out of deference to her father’s wishes, she never travelled outside Bengal as long as her mother was alive, and went to Japan much later.

These women who are travelling were educated- not only in their mother tongue but in English literature as well. What they see, especially in the west, reminds them of English stories, poems and dramas during their travels and they do not hesitate to use the references when writing the articles inferring that the readers will also automatically associate with their thoughts while in others travelling in Asia the visuals bring out poetry in Bengali or Sanskrit not only in their descriptions of the sites they see, the country they have left behind and in the greatness of Lord Buddha who sustained India’s lost glories in the present age. Coming from well to do and well- connected families they stay in good hotels, speak of going to lunches and teas with all the rich and famous personalities and seem to be very comfortably placed in the best rooms in the ships with some exceptions. The mention of famous men and women whom they meet may be for the entertainment of their readers but also to establish their credentials in their home society which may have been shaken a little because of their unconventional behaviour of travel.

All travelling women start their journey from the preparations at home and then describe their travel by sea and the road or rail in detail. Presumably they are the first women in their families to be making this arduous journey which is why they go into details describing not only the view but their rooms, the ship as well as the places they touch on the way. What is generally considered stereotypically a ‘woman’s touch’ in travel narratives is actually very helpful in the reconstruction of a journey by sea. For all the women describing the sea, seasickness, fellow companions, food, entertainment, seems to be of first importance while there are less details in the travel narratives by men. Sarala Debi’s description of

seasickness is artistic to say the least.’ Others are more prosaic. Saratrenu Debi describes her trauma on board the S.S.Chakla when on embarking the ship, she was informed that their second class cabin, uncomfortable as it was, had been allotted to someone else and they would have to sleep on the deck. She suffered from sea sickness for two days and even when their allotted second- class cabin became available, she found it ‘too uncomfortable because it had no fan and only one porthole’. Hariprabha writes that her tiny cabin was not only hot and stuffy, but she had to share it with another Japanese couple. These two women probably belonged to economically more backward background than the other women, since they are booked into second class cabins. The women describe the route they follow in detail and the journey is as important as the destination in their descriptions of their co passengers, the events occurring enroute, the friendships they make and the infrastructural details they encounter. Since the narrative follows the form of diary entries or letters with dates (with some exceptions), the reader journeys with the writers.

Similarities with home country and gender perspective:

All the travel writers remember their own country from the moment they leave it, whether they are off on a short tour or a prolonged stay. They compare every aspect of the places they visit with comparable situations in India and create a sympathetic bond between the traveller and the reader. Sarala Debi compares Rangoon with Calcutta saying that both were cosmopolitan cities and just like in certain localities of Calcutta one cannot see Bengali faces so also in Rangoon, some streets are devoid of Burmese. Mrinalini Raha writing for *Antahpurin* 1902, compares the roads and infrastructure of the capital city Rangoon or Yanggon as the local people call it, with the different Indian cities and point out that ‘only Jaipur is comparable in beauty’ and ‘unlike Calcutta, Rangoon never suffers from muddy roads.’. Similarity for Hariprabha Takeda had a different meaning altogether as she embraced her new family. When she landed in Japan, a Japanese newspaper wanted her reaction regarding her decision to join her new family. Hariprabha replied that she had every intention of continuing ‘the meaningful bond between the two homelands. Hariprabha’s descriptions of the city of Kobe, cleanliness of the roads and parks, the efficient railway system which makes it very convenient even inside the city where ‘a sense of national unity visible everywhere’ in the ‘lack of pushing and shoving’ with people looking after the comfort and well-being make interesting reading.

If gender is bound in hegemonic ideologies and women were made an instrument of and/or were complicit to politics of imperialism the corollary was also true of nationalist project. Partha Chatterjee’s idea that educated colonised women within the nationalist discourse internalised ‘material /spiritual distinction’ condensed into ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ dichotomy may be extended here to see how they articulated this in their travel encounter in the east, differently from their experience in the west. Extending the logic of ‘east’ being different from the West, they extend their eastern self to include Asian by articulating similarities, even when they find themselves face to face with dissimilarities. The site of gender and culture as being more important than political or economic differences as a means to underline solidarity of inner self and spiritual values, made establishing understand easier. It is not that these women did not consider their readers as competent to imbibe information on politics, because there are references to politics and war especially in westward travels. Even if in the case of Japan, they may refer to modernisation/ development or even politics, in the case of Southeast Asia at least, they highlight cultural ties.

An important part of the gendered vision is that women are much more visible in women's eyes. Sarala Debi referred to the attractiveness of the Burmese women and the culinary ability of her hostess Mrs Vardun who made several vegetarian dishes.' She also discusses the changing fashion in the Burmese women's clothing. That Sarala was different in her outlook compared to most Indians of the time, is evident when she describes the four or five young women Mrs Vardun invited to meet her and analyses them individually sending messages for her readers at home regarding the importance of self confidence in one's traditional identity and yet willing to embrace the world. All the writers mention the women they meet on the streets, markets and the tourist spots they visit, describe their appearance and closely watch their behaviour in order to compare with their own and to draw some lesson for their Indian compatriots. These women writers too often used the trope of 'freedom' outside versus un-freedom within the country. There is also an awareness of doing something which needs legitimization and support from others, since they are doing something not usually condoned for women, even by other women. This is applicable to travel even within the country. Swarnakumari Debi's travelogue to Prayag while showing her professed dependence on her travel companion, her elder brother Dwijendranath Tagore, writes about her experiences in 1886, as an exemplar for a conservative society despite the fact that she is already an empowered woman, educated and professional as editor of successful magazines. These hesitations are not visible in Sarala Debi her daughter in 1930, who also has a preliminary statement, not about fear of social ostracism, or travelling alone but revealing her surprise that it took so long for an opportunity to present itself.' That irritation probably stayed with her since she looks down on the excited women on board the ship referring to them as 'birds freed from their cages roaming restlessly from one deck to the other' in a purposeless manner. It was freedom from their monotonous existence where there was no fear of reprimand. Obviously Sarala feels isolated from these women who she knows have led much more restrictive lives compared to her, but she recognises the value of travel in consciousness of freedom. Freedom from social patriarchy and colonial hegemony remains partial for these travellers since these travels are not adventures on their own. Finally, what one realises is that these writings for women, travel or knowledgeable essays are not only for entertainment, they want to set an example for other women. Besides stressing commonalities and universal values, a sense of self- worth and self- confidence is also conveyed in the writing.
