



International Webinar



18th July, 2021

10 a.m.(IST)

*Does the 'Women's question' need a new language?
Exploring prospects and challenges in mobilisation
for social transformation and nation building*



Organized by

**INDIRA GANDHI NATIONAL OPEN UNIVERSITY
Regional Centre, Kolkata**



#internationalwebinar #ignoukolkata #does the womens question need a new language



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Concept

This is an era in transition. The illusion of infinite planetary resources and human transcendence has been broken by tangible evidence of nature's bio-physical limits to the continued expansion of human enterprise. The truth is that neither material resource nor energy will last us indefinitely. The pandemic has revealed extreme vulnerability that coexist with the so called myth of scientific prowess and infinite affluence. We are a species in search of atonement. The GOOD NEWS IS WE ARE A GENERATION THAT KNOWS WHAT WORKED AND WHAT DIDNT, the isms that were handed down to us as given did not work....

This brings us to the phase of the final consciousness of the urgency to create a whole new network of institutions, institutions that recognize these changing frontiers of knowledge and facilitate either a restructuring OR creation of a whole new mindset, value consciousness for a new framework of institutions with a positive vision. It is most definitely not our intention to reinforce the same archaic rhetoric's of differentiation between men vs women, male values vs female , nature vs culture , marxism vs feminism, as we definitely need to transcend the conventional framework of Feminist ideas derived from the narrow field of awareness of womens rights and interests based on a mechanistic worldview of socio-economic and political equality of genders. From this narrow paradigm of gender consciousness every effort to legislate on rights of women in society has failed. In an effort to create an universal framework that work toward institutionalized egalitarian value consciousness, through education, political participation and universal justice we are ready to address the new framework of questions. For example How can we create shared values where the RICH wants to share with the poor, in the same way as we can have more MEN advocating for justice and causes of women.

Do men suffer any less in conflict society

Is environmental disaster or Domestic violence gender sensitive?

How do we explain the incidence of conflict induced displacement in North East vis a vis environmental disaster driven displacement by flood and river

So instead of envisioning a revolution such as what Marx did, that is violent in ushering a false socialism of deprivation and redistribution, that curbs growth, affluence, beauty, creativity, LEISURE, abundance WHY DON'T WE energize institutions to perpetuate all these but with a new value consciousness of equity, justice, universalism . How can we create shared values where the RICH wants to share, in the same way as we can have more MEN advocating for justice and causes of women.

Points for reflection

- 1. Engage in social science and hard science perspectives to the understanding of “Women's question” in the post-colonial narrative . Is there a “ Pure” scientific foundation to the social divergence between sex?**
- 2. Explore the possibility of a paradigm shift, a new reconstructed ‘language of representation’ for ‘Women s question’ for social transformation and institution building.**
- 3. Evaluate the dominant Eurocentric, mechanistic, male centric models of western liberal philosophy with a view to ascertain their accuracy and authenticity in application and knowledge driven policy making.**
- 4. Discuss prospects, challenges and strategies, for social transformation and women's empowerment within the framework of universalism, equality and balance for institutionalization of political participation, economic independence responsible citizenship, local development, socialization, environmental sustenance etc.**
- 5. Case studies to reiterate the above.**

Profile of Participants and abstracts for presentation

Panel 1

Topic Trans Cultural perspective; A post modern approach to understanding the womens Question

Abstract : There is no doubt that the Feminism and its theoretical extension, Feminist Theories have over the years provided us with an analytical tool to ask and answer the querelle des femmes or “The Woman Question”. However, early feminist and modern feminist theories are grounded in Eurocentric principles and thus may not be an appropriate frameowrk to answer "The Woman Question" for the rest of the world. In addition, the theoretical assumptions of these models are guided by Modernity and it’s characteristics of objectivity, reductionism, essentialism etc. While the later frameworks guided by the 2nd and 3rd waves of feminism have addressed the problem with the assumption of women as a universal entity by incorporating intersectionality, they are still limited in their analytical power. So, the question of our time is – do we need a paradigm shift? And if so, what would an appropriate framework look like? This presentation is an attempt to answer these questions and offer a transcultural framework as an alternative.

Panelist : Soma Sen is a Professor at the School of Social Work, San Jose State



University. She started her academic career in 2007. She holds a Dual Masters Degree in Economics and Community & Regional Planning from Iowa State University and a Masters Degree in Social Work from University of Minnesota. She received her doctorate from Arizona State University. She teaches foundational theory in the Social Work Graduate program in addition to supervising final year students’ thesis projects. Her overall scholarly agenda focuses on understanding and addressing health disparities among marginalized groups, such as sex-workers, gay men, victims of human-trafficking, etc. Her research includes both theoretical and conceptual projects as well as data driven

empirical projects. She publishes consistently in national and international journals and disseminates her research through local, national, and international conferences. She was one of the core team members of the Social Work Education Enhancement Program (SWEEP) an UNAIDS funded project on Social Work Education in Vietnam. Recently she served as the Co-PI on European Union funded grant “Building Social Capital by Improving Multicultural Competence in Higher Education and Labour Market” that aimed at promoting and enhancing multicultural competence in higher education.

Topic Sri Sarada Devi: A New Paradigm for Independent Woman

Abstract : Much that we talk about intersectionality in gender studies, and the challenge third world feminism threw at white feminism several decades ago, have we yet been able to work out a model for ourselves which is our own model, which speaks to our own context and is yet suitable as a more or less universal model? The proposed talk will explore one such model of enlightened and empowered womanhood available to us. The women associated with Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda have set up different models—through their life and work—for a new paradigm for modern women. While we have lessons to learn from each of these models, the talk will focus on Sri Sarada Devi, whose life and teachings, it will be argued, are a paradigm shift with regard to the “woman question” and the role of women for universal welfare. It will be shown how she provides a live model of synthesis of knowledge, service, care, responsibility, independence, leadership, harmony, intercultural sensitivity and empowerment, in other words, a new direction of growth for modern women. The power for all these qualities is drawn from the eternal philosophy of Vedanta, which says that human beings are the omnipotent sexless Atman, yet in Sarada Devi, this power is actualized and becomes operational in the specificity of the female frame.

Dr. ArpitaMitra is Assistant Professor at the Department of History in KaziNazrul University, Asansol. She has a PhD in History from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. She was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (2015-2017), where she wrote a monograph that critically revisited the debate on Swami Vivekananda’s “Neo-Vedanta”. She specializes in intellectual and religious history and has worked at the



interstices of history, philosophy and religious studies. Her research interests are Ramakrishna-Vivekananda studies; Vedanta; history of Hinduism; historical geography of India; history writing in colonial India; Sister Nivedita; and Indian nationalist thought and movement. She has contributed eight entries to the Hinduism section of the Springer Encyclopedia of Indian Religions, articles to journals like Annual Review of Sociology of Religion (Brill) and Religions (MDPI) and chapters to edited volumes published by Routledge, D K Printworld, and Aryan Books International Dr. Mitra has given talks at prestigious platforms like the SushmaSwaraj Institute of Foreign Service, Government of India, and participated in several national and international seminars, like the 3rd ICCR Conference of Indologists held at Saint Petersburg, and seminars organized by Presidency University, Indian Council of Philosophical Research, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, European Sociological Association and so on. She has created the module on ‘Swami Vivekananda in Indian History: A Re-evaluation’ for the Annual Refresher Programme in Teaching (ARPIT) 2020 of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Topic Biological Determinism In The Differences Of The Sexes – An Evolutionary Perspective.

Abstract : A human societal concept, feminism is a tool to empower the often suppressed and exploited female of the race. Posited in the natural world, governed entirely by natural laws and based upon survival and propagation of a species, the role of the female is decided by its ecosystem, its spatio-temporal distribution and the environmental challenges and competition it faces. This talk shall touch upon fundamental questions from a purely scientific perspective based on the evolutionary cost and selection of the fitter of the sexes. The male and the female are two halves of a whole that are vehicles to conserve, improve and perpetuate the gene and information embedded therein to better cope with the changing environment. Any concept of feminism, to succeed, must therefore take lessons from the natural world.

Professor Ena Ray Banerjee, is currently Senior Professor of Zoology, University of Calcutta, India and leads the Translational Outcomes Research Group that focuses on Immunobiology and Regenerative Medicine, drug discovery studies and basic research, including development and validation of novel drugs, functional food, nutraceuticals, antibody and tissue engineering of stem cells in inflammatory and degenerative diseases for which her team holds several patents, publications and grants..She has contributed to trans-disciplinary higher education, science popularization and outreach, and promotes innovation involving science and society. She has spearheaded resurrection and transformation of a centenary heritage zoological museum into an experiential center for Zooarcheology and conservation. She is an entrepreneur helping translation of academic discoveries in biomedical sciences into usable applications and commercialization and is also the founder of a consortium for life co-ordinating activities for environmental conservation and sustainable development via convergence of academics from different fields of science and technology as well as the liberal arts and social sciences.



In addition to academic responsibilities of teaching, Professor Ray Banerjee is member of several national and international scientific, educational and research and administrative decision and policy making bodies and also serves as committee member and in advisory capacity in various government, non-government non-profit, and corporate projects involving scientific and social entrepreneurship. For her significant contribution to higher education and advancement of science and technology she has been awarded several awards.

Panel 2.

Topic Women in Liberation of Goa (1947-61)

Abstract: The present paper is an attempt to produce a monograph based on the unexplored sources of Women's History and participation of women in the Liberation of Goa during 1947-1961. The author has conducted extensive field work to collect primary data about the women freedom fighters of Goa and has succeeded to discover thirty three file photographs in different archives of India. A short biographical sketch of each of the Women freedomfighters of Goa has been prepared to supplement each of the Photographs.

Dr. PoulamiAich Mukherjee is the Director of Research Centre and Assistant Professor at PG Department of History & Research Centre, Assumption College Autonomous, Changanacherry. After completing her PhD from Jadavpur University, Kolkata in International Relations on the theme of Indo-Portuguese Bilateral Ties and its Legacies in 2010, had done her Post Doctoral researches from The Asiatic Society, Kolkata on Gender Studies (2010-12) and The Gulbenkian Foundation Lisbon, Portugal on Legacy and Heritage Studies (2012-2017). She has developed her interests in Indo-Portuguese Studies, Maritime History, Interculturality in History and Gender Studies. She has



been recipient of few fellowships from the IFE Institute of Advanced Studies, Africa, the Archaeological Survey of India, the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, the Planning Commission of India, the Indian Council for Historical Research, AvabaiWadia Fellowship from SNDT University, Mumbai and Inter University Centre For Intellectual Property Rights Studies, Cochin University of Science and Technology, Kochi. She has authored a number of books on women s studies .

Topic Cultural Politics of Hygiene in Late Colonial India

Abstract The talk is based on excerpts from her book, “*Contagions of Feeling: Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890-1940*”. It studies the emergence of hygiene as a socially and medically useful knowledge and practice in India and its intertwined relationship with cultural and social transformation in late colonial Bengal. It shows how hygiene emerged from within colonial governance and the political engagements of the Bengali middle class, as well as through the formation of modern and cultured subjectivities.

Srirupa Prasad is Associate Professor at University of Missouri-Columbia.



Her primary research interests are culture and politics of contagion, hygiene, body, and infectious diseases. She is also interested in issues of critical feminist pedagogy and teaching. She teaches courses on women’s health and globalization; feminist theories and methodologies; sociology of health; body and society, and gender in India. Her first book, *Cultural Politics of Hygiene in India, 1890-1940: Contagions of Feelings* was published from Palgrave Macmillan in 2015. It investigates genealogies of contagion in colonial India and highlights the dynamic and contested passages between contagion as a microbe and contagion as an affect. She is currently working on a new project studying the history and contemporary politics of tuberculosis and care work in India.

Topic Evolving a New Language of Protest ? : Women in the Anti-CAA Movement

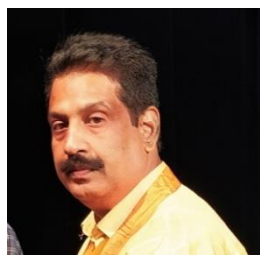
Abstract : The enactment of the Citizenship Amendment Act 2019 sought to give Indian citizenship to immigrants from neighbouring countries of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh etc. with the exception of Muslims. This was in turn linked to a proposition for creating a National Register of Citizens which would require people to produce ancestry documents in order to be recognised as citizens. These sparked off huge protests across the country from different quarters, which were led by Muslim women, students, political activists etc.

Based on an ongoing work which attempts to understand the character, motivation and forms of participation of women in the anti-CAA protests I explore some of the distinctive continuities and discontinuities with earlier forms of participation of women in social movements. Does this recent mobilisation of Muslim women offer us a new language to understand women's concerns ? What lessons does it hold, if any for feminism ?

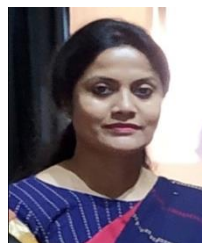
Dr Shoma Choudhury Lahiri has been teaching Sociology at St. Xavier's College (Autonomous) Kolkata since 2007. Before that she taught at the University of Pune and has had short teaching stints at Jadavpur University and at IIM, Kolkata. She did her doctorate from the Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics wherein her doctoral work was on the People's Science Movement in Kerala. She has a few publications in the form of articles and book chapters in national and international journals. Her research interests are in the field of social movements, ecology, sociology of science, development and on qualitative methods. She has recently published an edited volume on qualitative research methodologies titled *Doing Social Research : Qualitative Methods of Research in Sociology* (2020), Orient Blackswan, New Delhi.



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