

A large crowd of women, many wearing white headscarves, are gathered for a conference. In the foreground, a woman in a white shirt is speaking into a megaphone. The background shows a large, ornate building with arched windows.

Violence : A Human and Political Predicament A South Asia Women's Conference

5, 6 & 7 December 2014

**Mrinal Gore
Interactive Centre for
Social Justice and Peace in South Asia
&
Ata Institute of Social Sciences**

**Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for
Social Justice and Peace in South Asia**

in collaboration with

Advanced Centre for Women's Studies (ACWS),

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS)

“Violence:

A Human and Political Predicament

A South Asia Women's Conference”

A REPORT

Date: 5th - 7th December 2014

Venue: New Conference Hall, SDM Library, TISS,

Deonar, Mumbai

Introduction:

In the context of a changed socio-political, economic scenario there has been a silencing of ideological debate on issues of social importance and a marginalisation of social movements in advocacy for change. The Mrinal Gore Centre established in Mumbai provides a space for policy discussion outside the capital and mobilises grassroots networks to connect with macro issues.



Stalwarts from the political and social movements in Mumbai came together and formed a core group that invited people from South Asia to collaborate and extend their support to develop the Centre. The Centre provides a

platform to engage in discussion and debate and also revive networks across South Asia.

A key feature is to build a bridge between academics and researchers



and grassroots activists' and communities. Hence it was fitting that collaboration between the Centre and Advanced Women's Studies Centre of TISS was forged to organise the first conference which marked the launch of this Centre. This conference is only the beginning of a continued process of collaboration and partnerships and a long term planning and execution of subsequent activities.

The conference was attended by over 310 people from Mumbai, Maharashtra, India and South Asia. They came from different walks of life, including researchers, academia, grassroots activists', students, movement leaders, civil society, journalists etc with years of experience in working on issues concerning South Asia.

Concept:

Violence is outrage against the autonomy of a person's body and mind. It's an attempt to demean his/ her personality; an attempt to break his/her free will by using ones might to put the person into constant state of tension, humiliation and subjugation.



Violence can occur in person to person, inter personal relationships, within the family, in societal situations, group violence (either against a person or another group) and state violence against a specific group. So essentially violence denies the notion of natural human rights in terms of sanctity and integrity of a human person, as well as constitutional right.

The way in which women of South Asia have been subject to systemic violence at various times in the process of the construction of the South Asian nations is a reality and history we need to confront and collectively

engage with, before we are able to imagine and begin to live in a violence free society.

This Conference looked at violence primarily as a political and human predicament, while focusing on South Asian women. The Conference was a tribute to a veteran socialist activist Mrinal Gore, who passed away in 2012 and whose life was spent in fighting injustice. Our approach in this



Panaromic view of the hall

Conference was in consonance with the values that Mrinal Gore stood for in her lifetime: she fought for civic rights, women's rights, communal harmony and the rights of workers. She led protests of the common man and woman in the streets of Bombay city and into the corridors of power, questioning how civic laws were implemented, as well as working for changes in the law as an elected



representative at various levels of government. Her co-workers remember her for her personal integrity, and her innovative forms of peaceful protest against injustice.

The most apparent form of violence, though, is physical but is not limited to it. To mention a few: it has psychological, structural, sociological, geo-political dimensions and multiple manifestations.

In any country, those seeking to vitiate the socio-political atmosphere,

create hate, mass hysteria by means of rhetoric, by using the concept of righteous indignation. In this heightened state of mind groups take upon themselves the task of punishment. Many a times it is a punishment for the 'other'. Ethnic violence, religious violence, takes upon a primitive shape and as such the punishment to the other male members of any group is - rape of the women folk, and ethnic cleansing. Right from the historical past, wars in the past to our era of group violence and caste wars, the same situation prevails. The honour of patriarchy is thus defined in terms of women's chastity and caste purity.

The various levels of attacks on women do not always spring from lust but from the macho image and its mind set given to the men folk by tradition.

The arrival of women in the public space, their success and gaining the seats of power gives rise to jealousy and insecurity. The only answer to this state of mind takes form of character assassination of her in the public space or direct/ and indirect attacks on her physical self.

There is an exaggerated vision of women's success and the assertion of women's rights and aspirations that has given rise to patriarchal anxieties. The idea of chivalry is replaced by crude hostility in the present times.



Tea Break

In order to create a peaceful environment, a person has to acquire peace with one self to arrive at a state of non-violent mindset that would unleash the forces and create new relations based on mutual respect and dignity.

In this Conference we discussed a South Asian masculinity from Buddhist, Islamic and Hindu social constructions, the social construction of a South Asian masculinity in its Buddhist, Islamic and Hindu versions, especially though not only in a majoritarian religious framework.

This conference has given us a political direction and a path for engaging in research, advocacy, networking and campaigning in the coming period.



Mrinal Gore's Varied Vision

5th December 2014

Inaugural Session:

Prof. Pushpa Bhav, veteran peace activist and academic, welcomed the gathering on behalf of the Mrinal Gore Centre. She emphasised that because of our colonial past and a hegemonic western influence we have not had the time and patience to develop our own perspective, so



Inaugural Session:
Neela Dabir, Pushpa Bhav,
Nimalka Fernando (Sri Lanka)

when in South Asia we look at our own problems we do not have a reasoned explanation leaning on our experiential present. Many countries in South Asia have had this feeling of self inadequacy but in recent past we have asked probing questions which in their turn have offered a fresh outlook and a significant critique of the complex happenings around us.

While conceptualising this conference we had a feeling that there are commonalities as well as differences between South Asian ethos and we felt no matter what is the political context in a particular country we must have people to people dialogue on fundamental issues.

Prof. Neela Dabir, Deputy Director, TISS welcomed the delegates on behalf of the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. She spoke about her experiences of working with



Nimalka Fernando (Sri Lanka)

women (victims of domestic violence) and wished that the Centre will consider violence in family especially against women as one of their focus areas.

Reflecting on the theme of the conference our keynote speaker

Ms. Nimalka Fernando, peace

activist from Sri Lanka, expressed that we as people have been struggling to build a South Asian solidarity that transcends nationalities. She said that we have fallen short of advocating for reforms and solutions rather our strategies were defined by the context of the political situation. She also said that we needed to talk much more about the victims of violence especially women to highlight that the state is patriarchal. In this context she urged the gathering that we had to overcome our own shortcomings and re-imagine a South Asia. This is because violence is embedded in the nation state.

The response of movements and civil society should be rational and independent of State response and it should steer clear of the structured internationalism.

Plenary 1: Philosophy of Violence and the Aspirations for Peace among the People of South Asia.

Speakers: Pushpa Bhawe (Chairperson), Ilina Sen, Meghna Guhathakurta, Milind Bokil.

Prof. Ilina Sen, ACWS, Tata Institute of Social Sciences shared that the issue of violence against women is very visible in India. She pointed out that in the recent past, the “Nirbhaya Case”, has brought national as well as international attention on the subject of violence against women in India. She further expressed that structural and societal violence still continues in various forms. She expressed that political violence has been built into our histories. She asserted that in the process of building the nation state, women were treated as chattels. For example, she brought to the attention of the audience that in the formation of Bangladesh as a country, rape on a huge scale was carried out. Thus she reiterated that women have always suffered sexual violence in situations of border dispute and armed conflict situations.



Dr. Sen added that India has a history of ‘resource grab’. In the globalization era, people who lived in areas where there were resources were displaced. Indigenous people have been dispossessed and now live in inaccessible areas and their rights are constantly violated.

She expressed that there is an imminent need to understand these complexities while talking about violence practiced against women. For example, in the past few decades, AFSPA has violated the privacy, body and space of women. Hence the dominant development paradigm perpetrates violence, in a sense national security is at the cost of women’s security. She ended by urging the audience to include these dimensions in the construction of violence against women.



Meghna Guhathakurta (Bangladesh)

Meghna Guhathakurta, academic and writer from Bangladesh, provided a conceptual overview of violence and peace building. She pointed out that the acts of violence are often described as acts of irrationality but when we look deeper, it is structured in two ways- “patriarchy” and “class”. She pointed out that patriarchy and

class marginalize women in terms of their access to resources. She argued that the inequalities that emerge are not static structures but those get configured and reconfigured.

Ms. Guhathakurta mentioned that during times of conflict, housewives may become breadwinners and norms and values underlying gender relations get restructured. Women and men are not merely passive recipients of tradition but they are also active agents who can choose to reaffirm these relations or to challenge them. When the element of violence dominates, it affects formation of civil society, and individual psyches. She said that in order to establish creative mechanisms, the stakeholders ought to be heard, whether it is majority or minority. Finally, she challenged the audience to find ways and means to

address the root causes of violence - patriarchy and unequal distribution of resources.

Milind Bokil, academic and literary writer from Pune, expressed that violence is part of human nature. Hence it cannot be resolved easily. He said that violence is apparent in variety of ways in South Asia due to the deep rooted culture, social



Milind Bokil

structure, polity and economy. He said that people in the name of religion have become violent in the recent past and put forward few strategies to address it.

Some of the strategies he proposed include encouraging inter- caste/ religious marriages, introducing gender equality legislations, women friendly market regulations, developing strong social security regime, etc.

Plenary 2: Narratives- Women's Experiences of Violence and Peace

The organisers from the very beginning wanted the conference not only be abstract and academic but draw out from the real life experiences of women who have faced violence in various forms as described by the speakers above.

We appreciate their engagement with the theme of the conference and commend their openness and frankness in sharing their stories.

Speakers - Kiran Moghe (Chairperson), Saroja Sivachandran, Farida Khan, Shanur Shaikh



Saroja Sivachandran (Sri Lanka)

Saroja Sivachandran, Executive Director Centre for Women and Development, Jaffna, Sri Lanka, she spoke about the war that took place between the State of Sri Lanka and the LTTE that ended

on 18th May, 2009. She said that during the war period, people moved to places like Kilinochini, Mulathive and Bhavaniya in Northern Sri Lanka. Women and children were continuously displaced to different places. They experienced violence, harassment during the war period and later were witness to the massacres. She pointed out that war was not fought according to the rules of the UN Conventions. For example, according to UN resolution 1325, women and children have to be protected during the war and the Sri Lankan Government failed to abide to the rules of the Convention.

Saroja highlighted the statistics on missing, killed and abducted people during war and post war period. She narrated an incident in which common people of Tamil minorities were being killed both by LTTE and the State during a camp transition process. She said that the State committed acts of violence through



Farida Khan, Kiran Moghe, Shanur Shaikh,
Saroja Sivachandran (Sri Lanka)

its military against the people of its own country.

In the post war development, the State sponsored welfare camps were also protected and monitored by the military. She said that the camps didn't accommodate families rather it had separate camps for young girls, young boys, women and children. She said that women and young girls were being raped by the military personnel. She also highlighted that the military has occupied the land of the people in northern part of Sri Lanka and land rights are violated.

She advocated for the removal of military from the post war zone and wants other aid organizations to provide social interventions and rehabilitations for the people in the post war zone.

Shanur Shaikh, Advocate, narrated her life incidence that questioned her identity as a Muslim .She is practicing law for the past 10 years and helps vulnerable women , who come for help though the ‘Akhil Bharatiya Janvadi Mahila Federation’ in Pune.

She said that on the day of the election result, i.e on 31st May 2014, communal violence was triggered in her locality where majority of the residents are Hindus. On the morning of the next day, she saw vehicles of ordinary people damaged by some of the Hindu political groups and she was confused whether to report to this incidence to the police. Though as an advocate she felt that she should do her duty



Participants listening in rapt attention

but was wary because of her own minority identity. She also witnessed violence in the nearby bakery shop that was owned by a Muslim. Always working for the betterment of the society with a secular mindset she posed the question of identity politics and need for its resolution.

Farida Khan works in a social work college, and said that she had never seen communal violence in her life before the Dhuliya incident. She became conscious of her own religious identity after the incident. On October 2008, the Dhuliya communal riots had created a scary situation in her life. She was asked to leave the village. A Maratha woman, who gave her shelter, assured her that she will be safe. She found even children were raising slogan against the

Muslims. She questioned Hindu-Muslim relationship during those times and wished that there is communal amity.

Workshop 1: Violence within Women and their Stratification

Speakers: Swati Dyahadroy, Sangita Thosar, Zeba Imam

Swati Dyahadroy, academic, initiated the discussion by talking about the practices of the state that gives rise to fundamentalist agendas which in a way contradicts the principles of the constitution. She talked about the Hindu nationalist project of creating a role model of good mother- good wife by giving examples from “Promodini”. She challenged the idea of Stree Shakti and the patterns of women's entry into public space as it does not pose any challenge to the patriarchal structures.

Zeba Imam, academic, talked about minority identity and the constitution by reflecting on the recent incidents and agitations that occurred in Aligarh Muslim University regarding Women's access to the college library. She talked about how the entire discourse turned into a protectionist agenda rather than a matter of appropriate use of physical space.

Sangita Thosar, academic, spoke about the increasing incidence of violence among dalit women over the years. She threw light on the fact that control of sexuality is a tool of caste patriarchy and dalit women face both public as well as private patriarchy where upper caste women are essentially subjected to private patriarchy.

The group members in the workshop discussed the idea that "identity" as a category should be treated with a border view. They deliberated on the fact that it is not just how we understand identity, but whose identity we are concerned with is an important question.

Workshop 2: Hierarchy and Hegemony in Public and Private Space

Speakers: Sujata Chavan, Nasreen Contractor, Nandini Manjrekar

Sujata Chavan, argued that the violence on women is due to their subordinate status in the society and the insensitivity of the administrative system. She proposed three main perspectives of understanding violence against women:

1. Individual - Attributes violence to individual behavior. Interventions include individual counseling;
2. Socio-psychological - examines the social institutions causing violence. Interventions are in providing shelter, healthcare, counseling support to violated women
3. Feminist - examines the structures of power that cause violence against women, especially patriarchy. Interventions are to improve the overall status of women in society, dismantling the power structures

She noted that the Domestic Violence Act, 2005 enforced in October, 2006 is an important measure provided by the state to address violence in the personal sphere. The Act has provisions such as legal support, shelter, and counseling. Dr. Chavan highlighted that most of the women who face violence are in the reproductive age group of 18 to 35. She mentioned that the Act considers all forms

of violence including physical, mental, and emotional. She pointed out that patriarchy operates in the courtroom and that it was critical to work towards bringing about gender sensitivity among the members of the legal system such as judges, police.



Nandini Manjrekar,
Nasreen Contractor, Sujata Chavan

Nasreen Contractor, mentioned that sexual violence is a manifestation of

hierarchy and hegemony embedded in structural inequalities that exist between people, communities, nations, regions. She argued that even though women have entered the workplace, there is discrimination. Sexual

violence is in the form of unwelcome sexual behavior that is intended to offend, humiliate and intimidate persons in lower/weaker positions in the hierarchy. She quoted the example of ‘Gauhar Khan Controversy’. Gauhar was a young woman who was slapped by an unknown man in public because he found the way she dressed to be offensive. Ms. Contractor pointed out that in the public sphere; a woman’s primary marker of identity is her body which symbolizes the honour of her community. She emphasized the need to focus on making men gender sensitive.

Nandini Manjrekar, pointed out the need to unpack the word ‘hegemony’. She said that Antonio Gramsci defined hegemony as not absolute power, but a commonsensical understanding that this power is valid and justified, even ideal. What we understand as ‘commonsense’ is a construct, created through different mechanisms.

She stated that South Asia is a historical region, with cultural affiliation but politically divided. South Asia has conflicts based on caste, ethnicity, military, etc. She mentioned that in 2002 riots the Muslim women’s bodies became the sites of inter-religious violence. She concluded by noting that in times of conflict, the community closes in on itself, resulting in more oppressive conditions for women.

Workshop 3: Religion, Culture and Custom

Speakers- Nirja Bhatnagar, Saroja Sivachandran, Saloni Singh

Nirja Bhatnagar said that each word, namely “Religion”, “Culture” and “Custom” are hegemonic and highly patriarchal. She further argued that “State” is also equally patriarchal in the South Asian Context. She pointed out that India today is moving towards Hinduism as its state religion and Hindutva as its political ideology. She



Nirja Bhatnagar, Saroja Sivachandran
(Sri Lanka), Saloni Singh (Nepal)

posed some questions such as “How can we engage with a state that perpetrates violence”? , “why do women bear the brunt of conflict?” etc. Ms. Bhatnagar called for the need to fight violence by raising consciousness of the ordinary people.

Saroja Sivachandran, from Sri Lanka mentioned that Buddhism is considered as the state religion in Sri Lanka and other religious groups are perceived as the minority community in Sri Lanka. She argued that religion played a dominant role in the elections in Sri Lanka. She said, culture is deeply imposed on women, and Hindu women are expected to dress “modestly” in saris. She said that the law ultimately gave men the advantage. She substantiated this argument with the recent Domestic Violence Act 2005 in Sri Lanka. She said that divorce rates have increased and no system of social security is ensured for women. She concluded by saying that religion, culture, and custom are deeply interlinked and women find it hard to escape from these.

Saloni Singh, from Nepal said that only country which has never been colonized was Nepal. She said, that country had internal conflicts, insurgency, and has recently seen democratic governance. She added that Nepal is more secular and there is a very harmonious relationship with Muslims living in the country.

Saloni argued that culture in Nepal was transformed by women. Due to war, most women became bread earners, and they took decisions. But when the issue of representing in constituent assembly came, women were sidelined. She pointed out that there is an urgent need to look at role of gender in all levels and structures if we were to engage in peace-building.

Workshop 4: Globalisation, Corporate Profit and Violence

Speakers: M.J.Vijayan, Wandana Sonalkar

M.J. Vijayan, spoke on the physical aspect of violence and how it supports corporate profit, i.e direct economic violence. He gave many examples to show the linkage between structural violence and physical violence. He argued that violence operates on the platform of class, caste and gender. He

concluded his arguments by pointing to the gap between academic knowledge and knowledge produced at ground realities.

Wandana Sonalkar, agreed with Vijayan's remark that academia has failed to answer the questions of ground realities. She spoke of the functions of global capital and its influence on violence. She listed four of them.

1. Militarization of Capital
2. Primitive Accumulation based on Marxian Theory
3. Accumulation by Encroachment
4. Encroachment in areas like household, care economy and marketing of intimate source.

She argued that media is restructured under the umbrella of corporate which has its own language that mediates the views on violence against women.



M.J.Vijayan, Wandana Sonalkar



DNA - 7th December 2014



Hindustan Times - 6th December 2014

Day 2: 6th December 2014

Plenary 1: Fractured Modernity and Globalisation

Speakers - Saloni Singh (Chairperson), Vibhuti Patel, Wandana Sonalkar



Wandana Sonalkar,
Saloni Singh (Nepal), Vibhuti Patel

Prof. Vibhuti Patel Economist and Activist, argued that ‘modernity’ as a paradigm is supposed to inculcate rational behaviour, scientific temper, respect for plural beliefs, tolerance towards multicultural lifestyles, ethos of liberal humanism- by way of greater access to education and reforms in the social sphere, equality, liberty,

democratic governance, non-discriminatory behaviour and challenging the hierarchies based on class, caste, race, ethnicity, religion and gender.

However, there are manifestations of fractured modernity which has resulted in actions like attacks on dalits, religious and ethnic conflicts, dowry murders, glorification of sati, acid attacks, killing of childless, single, widowed, deserted or elderly women as witches, crimes in the name of honour, moral policing, female genital mutilation, denial of education to girls, sexual violence on girls and women and apartheid in housing.

Prof. Patel pointed that the rise of cultural nationalism and identity politics has empowered Khap Panchayats. Further the caste, community leaders conduct their internal kangaroo courts to give savage and barbaric verdicts to all those who deviate from antiquated ‘norms’.

She explained that social construction of ‘honour’, ‘prestige’, and ‘identity’ has given the Khap Panchayats, the authority for control over sexuality, fertility and labour of women.

She compared the colonialism and post colonialism scenario and pointed out that the situation is same as in the post colonial economies, governments attack the livelihood base of the poor countries by draconian forest laws, land grab, commercial crop for agro business and racist migration policies. All this have resulted in hunger, misery, informal sector work force, women as last colony, war mongering.

Prof. Patel accounted neoliberalism as a global force which has utter disregard for people and entire civilizations. She then compared post modernism and conservatism and proposed that right wing understanding has a static view of history and it cashes on the feeling of disappointment with modernization.

She said the current reality seems to be more worrisome. For many critics, non-western culture and practices are at risk of being overwhelmed by homogenizing 'McDonaldization'. She said that there is a process of individualization which inhibits class distinctions but inequalities by no means disappear. There is a shift from the system of standardized full employment to the system of flexible and pluralized under-employment. She concluded stating that globalization of industrial society will have political systems that lose their function, corporate capitalism reigns supreme status, migration might transform the nature of symbolic exchange and life conditions of people throughout the world, these

changes are not necessarily at the expense of local culture.

Global modernity does not break with its colonial past but reconfigures it. The major challenge for the new community is how to resolve the tension between economic growth, uneven development and fractured modernity.



Prof Wandana Sonalkar of the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies, TISS, argued that modernity in South Asia on the one hand has choices in

consumerism and technology offered by global capitalism and on other hand we see assertion of religion in an aggressive way.

She quoted a study from the book “Fractured Modernity” by Sanjay Joshi, which studied the middle class families in Lucknow in 20th century. The findings of the study gave insights that though middle class families spoke about their democratic values and rights to make one’s own life and not to adhere to the social order of the feudal elite, still those families showed assertion of traditions and wanted their women to be submissive to the household. Thus middle class asserts equality of opportunity against the feudal classes at the same time they reassert their religious identity and are anti-dalit.



She pointed out that duality of such processes always existed and is even seen in the ethos of nationalistic movements. She said, today we see resurgence of capitalism and consumerism of the worst kind embracing technology i.e. social networking sites. On the other hand, asserting religious identity in alarming way.

Then, Dr. Sonalkar dwelt on the Third World phenomenon - the concept of third world was conceptualized by the advanced capitalist. Now the concept is no more valid, especially after the Independence of India, the nationalistic struggles have embraced some of the socialistic agenda’s such as:

1. Fight against the neo colonialism of advanced countries.
2. Against the establishment of global economy.

She called for a need to re-imagine South Asian for which it is important to look at:

1. A Common South Asian Vision
2. Reevaluation of diversity of the cultures.

In the context of India, Dr. Sonalkar mentioned that the rise of right wing politics combined with embarrassing capitalism is going against the Right

of Livelihood of people. She said, if we think of development in India or in any South Asian country for that matter, it should be sustainable development with protected livelihood.

She included a comment on how the media plays a role in politics of a nation. She mentioned the study by Arvind Rajagopal, in which the Ramayana serial telecasted in television lead to Ramajama Bhumi Movement and later demolition of Babri Masjid.

She said that Dr. Ambedkar's role in framing the Constitution is a progressive step in the South Asian region embedded with a nationalistic fervour and values of equality and also his way of introducing progressive Hindu Code.

She spoke on the importance of self assertion of dalits, women assertion in public, recognition of their capabilities which is usually controlled by corporate forces. She concluded stating that globalization and global capital can lead to aggressive accumulation at one hand and dispossession at the other.

Plenary 2: South Asian Masculinities

Speakers - Kalpana Sharma (Chairperson), Kamla Ganesh, Sheema Kirmani

Prof. Kamla Ganesh, Senior Academic, started by saying that in a Conference on Violence and Peace and in a session on masculinities we cannot avoid the old discussion about



Sheema Kermani (Pakistan),
Kalpana Sharma, Kamla Ganesh

the correlation between masculinity and violence and whether it is innate or learnt behaviour. She gave an insightful introduction to the hitherto least explored area that is 'Culture and South Asian Masculinities'. She revisited the field work done by Margaret Mead in 1930 for her seminal work- *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. Prof. Ganesh pointed out that the study done by Mead reiterates that culture dictates the way sex and gender are seen in

different societies. She then dwelt on Prof. Leela Dube's work related to socialization of girls in Indian society and examined the contested idea that sex roles are natural.

Prof. Kamla Ganesh urged the audience to come over the bipolar category of male and female and look at sexual variations as a continuum. She referred to the efforts made by the LGBT movement off late. She pointed out that in South Asia; masculinity is manifested through patrilineal and patriarchal arrangements. The nexus between religion, cultural and polity disembowels people to understand masculinity. A distorted image of masculinity relating to size of penis, ability to satisfy women, produce children, etc are propagated in the society.

In branding certain behaviour as *mard* and *namard*, the society reinforces the predominant view. When male members of the society often produce violence, society is mute and remains a silent spectator.

Prof. Ganesh pointed out that in the recent past, a phenomenon called new masculinities is observed. New masculinities emerge from men's organisations fighting cases related to violence against men. By not including women in debate and discussion, the organisations, namely interest groups act as counter to the feminist movement. She ended by saying that there is a need for a platform where both men and women can discuss the issues and develop a pan South Asian perspective on masculinity.

Ms. Sheema Kermani, feminist and cultural activist, used multiple mediums like songs, poetry and video commentary to put forth her view on violence and masculinity in the South



Sheema Kermani (Pakistan)

Asian society. She began with an analysis that society uses tradition, culture and religion to tame women and control their sexual and other forms of life. She read the poem "They said I should not sing and dance" to bring to light the struggles of girls and women in our patriarchal society. Through the video

commentary titled *Imprisoned Princess*, she pointed out that aggression, war and militarization are aggressive masculine tendencies to dispossess and humiliate women. She highlighted the cry of women who grieve on disappearance of young men in Pakistan as result of war. She lifted the spirits of the participants by saying that women will not budge to these cruel forces. They will arise and fight for their rights.

Narrative Plenary 3: Women's Experiences of Violence and Peace

Speakers: Gabriele Dietrich (Chairperson), Sugandhi Francis, Rohini Raman, Taran Khan



Ms. Sugandhi Francis, feminist and activist, shared about her personal history and her struggle with her ex-husband, in-laws and other family members and dwelt on how she overcame the challenges. Sugandhi used to get bashed up by her husband every time and the family members kept quiet about it. When her daughter

was just 14, her ex-husband wanted her to get married. Ms. Francis opposed the proposal. Hence she was thrashed. This time she took courage and hit him back. The family members who were quiet for 14 long years began to question her. She fought back boldly and said that she would file police complaint against all the members. Thus she could overcome the abuse she suffered so long.

Sugandhi shared that she later got married to Vivek Monteiro, a trade union activist in Mumbai. Sugandhi's daughter got a degree in Development Management from Manila and currently heads an NGO. Thus her issues were sorted out. She believes that change should come from one's self first. Ms. Francis opined that upper caste women rarely partake in struggles and social action. She urged women from every aspect of life to fight against exploitation.

Ms. Rohini Raman, researcher shared a comparative study on honour crime in Bangladesh, Pakistan and India. The study showed the extent of similarity of the crimes across borders and irrespective of one's religion and culture, violence against women is perpetrated in the name of honour. She even pointed out that during the presentation of the report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Women; the Indian Government was in denial about the honour killing practices in India.

She expressed that the society should allow women to choose the partners they want to marry and material gifts in the form of dowry and social sanctions cannot be the compensation package.

Ms. Taran Khan, journalist, spoke about the connection of violence with mental health in the society of Afghanistan. Through the case narrative of Husna- an Afgani women, she brought to light the near hopeless situation of women in Taliban occupied Afghanistan. Husna lost her father at a young age and was



Taran Khan

married to Ajaz, a Talibani Mulla who treated the young girl as a machine producing children. In a short span of time they had 5 children and in the meantime Ajaz was arrested. Though Husna took up some job and managed her home, she could not raise her children as normally as one would like to do.

From her presentation one could understand the pattern of aggression and hysteria perpetuated in Taliban occupied Afghanistan. This can be connected to the larger reality of violence in the country.

Dr. Gabriele Dietrich, senior activist, started with a thought provoking question whether a non violent mode of production can be attained in the South Asian region. She commented that the capitalistic mode of production has resulted in

financial crisis and fascism. She pointed out the classic case of Sri Lanka, where the neo liberal politics has resulted not only in peasants' upheaval but also in ethnic violence, war and violence.

She spoke about the growing distance between the haves and have not's and the rich-poor parity. She opined that it is due to this situation, the productivity cannot improve, as the rich have accumulated wealth and the poor have become dispossessed.

She also said that such capitalistic modes of production will beget colonization of women, adivasis and dalits- the most marginalized sections of the society. She proposed to find solutions to this situation through democratic means and strategies.



Dr. Gabriele Dietrich

Plenary 4: The Human Rights Approach to the Problem of Violence

Speakers - Justice Suresh (Chairperson), Meera Velayudhan, Jyoti Punwani



Justice Suresh

Justice Suresh, judicial activist, emphasized that human rights provisions in the Constitution should be accessed and exercised more by people of the country. He suggested that human rights approach can be a meaningful framework for development. He also pointed out that human rights are obligation of the

State. He encouraged the audience to seek solution through legal-constitutional means.

Dr. Meera Velayudhan, academic and activist, shared her views on violence on women and dalits in the society. She pointed out that the structural and cultural framework disallows these marginalised sections to challenge the powerful elites.



She asserted that there is a need for new laws which are protective of the marginalized and said that an amendment in CrPC is called for. Dr. Velayudhan argued that people instigating communal violence should be dealt firmly by the law. She ended by revoking the ethos of the constitution and asserted that life and dignity of individuals should be

protected at all means and costs.

Ms. Jyoti Punwani, journalist, started by saying that the greatest violator of human rights is the State. She pointed out how landless; labourers and poor adivasis are displaced by the state. She highlighted the case of police encounters as murders. Jyoti called for reevaluation of the death penalty.

Workshop1: Fractured Modernity

Speakers: Meghna Guhathakurta, Anagha Tambe

Anagha Tambe, academic, started the discussion with the idea of moral policing. She stressed that “Love Jihad”, “Kiss of Love” are all part of fractured modernity where the middle class use moral policing as a fundamental force to retain the culture and tradition. She said that all these perspectives are located in the non-modern classes and questioned whether the middle class share the same non-modern status. She pointed out that though middle class claims to be modern and secular but it continues to attach it self to certain conservative stands.

She took ‘Khap Panchayats’ as an example to argue how tradition is used

for brutality and caste assertion. She also pointed out how love-cum-arranged marriages happening in recent times are based on social mobility rather on the basis of individual compatibility. Towards the end of her deliberation she even mentioned how public spaces like malls and coffee shops have become sites of public display of affection and privatised space is only accessible to a particular class of people.



Meghna Guhathakurta, presented the phenomena of fractured modernity in the context of Bangladesh. She mentioned that education system in her country is fractured into two streams such as school with vernacular language and Islamic schools (madrasas). She pointed out that Islam is a

growing religion in the country and narrated how development in Bangladesh started with Nehruvian view and recently shifted towards privatisation.

She said that the State and Class have different ideas of modernity and gave the example of Shahbag youth movement in Bangladesh which demonstrated the participation of youth against the State.

Workshop 2: Labour and Migration

Speakers: K Bindhulakshmi, Meena Gopal

Dr. Bindulakshmi, academic, spoke on the informal sector and how women's labour is understood in the society. She pointed that the phenomenon of casual labour is increasing due to migration of poor

people. She said that migration is often confused with trafficking, that hampers women's mobility.

Based on a study, she described how women felt more empowered when they are working in spin yards and in factories and how they felt good of going out for work and being paid for it. Dr. Bindulakshmi ended with a question related to safety of women in work situations.

Dr. Meena Gopal, academic, dwelt on the issues faced by bar dancers in Indian cities. She highlighted that these women did not directly come to this field by choice but slowly entered here as they did not get proper remuneration for working in the factories and due to fact that some were forced by families to bring in extra income. Most of these women are single earning members of their families and have to handle other social relations. Dr. Gopal ended by stressing the need for understanding the case of bar dancers within the labour dimension.

Workshop 3: Food and Health Security

Speakers-Asha Achuthan, Prof. Ilina Sen

Dr. Asha Achuthan, academic, started the discussion with a critical note on the language used by the state in health policies that stereotype women's body as a site of reproduction. She mentioned the dual war with the State and policies by the feminist movement is still a challenge. She critiqued that the population polices of the country had a target and incentive approach and questioned the concept of development.

Prof. Ilina Sen argued how privatization of health has increased the cost of drugs. She pointed out how population policy didn't consider the redistribution of resources. She shared her experiences in Chhattisgarh of how small farmers use the indigenous knowledge to protect the crops without the incentives from the state. She argued the debates around the acquisition of land by the state are less challenged.

Workshop 4: Manifestations of Violence in State, Social, Cultural, Economic and Political Institutions

Speakers - Lalita Ramdas, Karamat Ali

Karamat Ali, peace activist, talked about the need for co-operation between the South Asian nations. He spoke about the shared colonial history of these nations and they are also prone to violence. All of these nations thus have a part colonial, part feudalistic past and are thus prone to inter as well as intra state violence.

The boundaries shared by these nations, too, are arbitrary lines drawn by the erstwhile colonial rulers and are not yet fixed. The uncertain nature of these boundaries results in frequent territorial disputes. Thus, to ensure peace between the South Asian nations, it is essential to clearly demarcate the boundaries and settle the border disputes. Maritime borders too, need to be fixed so that unsuspecting fishermen don't become political prisoners and add to the animosity between countries like India and Pakistan.



Another issue confronting all the South Asian nations is of majoritarian violence. The identity of the majority religion assumes a national identity. The persons belonging to the minority faiths thus become victims of violence, whether they are believers or not. Religious leaders of all faiths are especially implicated in instigating communal violence. The concepts of “majority” and “minority” also inadvertently reinforce communal beliefs. Hence there is a need to redefine our conception of secularism itself.

He stated that ethnic, religious and border disputes have also led to increasing militarisation and nuclearisation. The state uses the archaic

colonial “weapon” of sedition against anyone who dares to speak out against its militaristic, centralist and majoritarian policies. All of this is embedded in the neo liberal nature of development which has resulted in large amounts of illiteracy, dispossession and poverty. He proposed that the South Asian nations need to come together and co-operate. He said that we need to form a South Asian Union and have more mutually beneficial initiatives.

Lalita Ramdas, peace activist stressed on the need for a vibrant and active civil society, which would encourage people to people contact. Since patriarchy is an issue which cuts across the borders of these nations, she questioned the women’s movement for having failed to take up the issues related to militarisation, nuclear arms race and for having failed in demystifying the link between nationalism and militarism. She pointed on the role of the corporate and military nexus in “keeping the fires burning”.

Ms. Ramdas, said that apart from its shared colonial history, the south Asian region also bears the brunt of climate change. The worst affected due to global warming and climate change, are women and children. In drought prone areas, women have to walk for miles to collect water. The civil society



Ilina Sen, Lalita Ramdas

organisations, especially the women’s movement, in all South Asian nations need to come together on issues of climate change and global warming. The focus of her presentation was thus on co operation on shared issues, instead of focusing on controversial issues.

The discussion which followed focused on questions of intra state issues like weakening of the federal democratic structures in these nations and vacuum created by this. It was felt by the participants that civil society actors need to

push for change, enhance dialogue across borders and promote a mindset change. The common ground for such co operation is the environmental and peace movements.



Participants engaged in discussion



Cultural Dialogue between India & Pakistan



Neela Bhagwat - Vocalist & Social Activist from India
Sheema Kermani - Danseuse & Cultural Activist from Pakistan



Day 3: 7th December 2014

Plenary 1: South Asian Networks and Country Contexts

Speakers - Jatin Desai (Chairperson), Gajanan Khatu, Nimalka Fernando, Saloni Singh, Taran Khan, Meghna Guhathakurta, Karamat Ali.

Jatin Desai, freelance journalist and peace activist, welcomed the speakers and initiated the discussion with connectivity and its politics as a site of concern among the South Asian countries. He mentioned that growing right wing politics in India is a biggest challenge threatening the countries in South Asia.

Taran Khan shared her experiences as a film-maker and journalist in Afghanistan. She shared that media can be a strong tool to negotiate with the countries. She gave the example of sisters (Roya and Alka) who have set up a film house called the Royal Film House in Kabul that works as a medium for women to express their voice and articulate women's issues.



Meghna Guhathakurta situated her talk around the theme of connectivity. She said that Bangladesh has both legal and illegal migrations. Most of them migrate to Maldives and India respectively. She pointed out that India is concerned only with bilateral relations and not open to multilateral relationships with countries. She viewed lack of Indian publisher for Bangladeshi literature as one of the biggest challenge of recent times as it limits the Indian readers to know about the situation in Bangladesh. She concluded with a request for funded exchange programmes for improving the capacities of civil societies.

Karamat Ali, peace activist, briefed the audience about the networks of different labour and trade unions from 1992 till recent days. He shared the recent developments among labour unions such as South Asia networks for

garments workers and South Asia networks for floor wage in garment factories. He highlighted the importance of using SAARC as a platform to build networks among South Asian countries to discuss issues concerning labour, minorities and dalits, women's issues, religious fundamentalism, etc. He raised the issue related to visas especially between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh that challenges the connectivity in South Asia.

He brought to light the state support to fringe groups in Pakistan which creates terror. He argued that in a multinational country like Pakistan, religion or religious identity cannot constitute the State. He pointed out that for intra-country autonomy and development, peace should prevail in the region and the respective states and their agencies should desist the urge to destabilize neighbouring countries. In this context, Dr. Ali felt the need for a strong SAARC, which will strengthen our true identity- that of South Asian.

Ms. Saloni Singh began with the fact that Nepal was the only south Asian country which was never colonised. The rulers of Nepal were benevolent too. However, after 1951, for the next thirty seven years, autocratic regime prevailed. The people's organisations challenged the regime and because of their efforts a democratic regime was born. However in the 1990s, violent conflicts broke out and people were terrified.

Ms. Saloni pointed out to the role of the women during these conflicts. She said that the women's organizations had a big role behind the peace accord with the Maoist camp. She highlighted the networking skill of the Nepalese women and felt that it is important to recognize the efforts of women in democratization of the country.

Ms. Nimalka Fernando straightaway came to the point that the emergence of the nation state concept is the villain for the insecurity and violence in the region. She critiqued the official SAARC forum as a stage for leaders and demanded that the voice of people be heard. In this context, she referred to the 14 South Asian people's declarations passed earlier. She lobbied for a visa less regime and articulated her dream of pan south Asian identity. She stressed that we

cannot allow the army to take over the lives of the citizens and rightly said that it time to demilitarise the region for security and peace in south Asia.

Gajanan Khatu, veteran socialist and leader of the cooperative movement, noted that globalization in India has created much inequality and thus increasing the



Gajanan Khatu,
Nimalka Fernando (Sri Lanka)

scope for violence and inequality. He highlighted that the national income has arisen 16 fold in the last 20 years. However the budgetary allotment for key social security and welfare is very low. He lamented that the trickle down theory of growth has resulted in lack of concern for social issues.

The right wing politics, policy and lack of inspiration for key reforms in administration have left the country in deep trouble. Khatuji also pointed out that the new middle class has lost touch with the toiling masses. He urged the young people to connect with the marginalised and bring in the necessary reform.

The Way forward for an Imagined South Asia Free of Violence and Misogyny

Speakers - Lalitha Ramdas (Chairperson), Karamat Ali, Ilina Sen, Varsha Rajan Berry

Karamat Ali pointed out that mapping of existing South Asian initiatives taken by individuals and groups can be one of the prime agenda for the Centre. He mentioned that such exercise can identify gaps and strengthen the networks among the civil societies. He suggested that People's SAARC based in Delhi has an official research platform that can facilitate in mapping process and he wanted the Centre to become a monitoring partner for SAARC as none of the civil society organizations has volunteered for the same.

Prof. Ilina Sen felt that the Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Social Justice and Peace in South Asia can engage as active partners in the South Asian academic component in teaching programmes of TISS. She said that

two courses, namely in M.A in Development Studies and in M.Phil in Women's Studies address regional issues in papers such as "South Asian Geopolitics" and "Women in South Asia - Feminist Engagement and Writings" respectively. Apart from these courses focusing on the issues of South Asia, there was scope to evolve the academic programmes of TISS further with a focus on South Asian studies. There was also a scope at TISS to build up library resources of books published in various South Asian countries which are not always easily accessible outside of individual nation states.

She extended an invitation for students outside the TISS to attend her course "Women in South Asia - Feminist Engagement and Writings". She contrasted the ideas of friendship, peace and secularism among the people of South Asia countries with disputes raging on the nation state level, for eg. as seen between India and Pakistan on one hand, West Bengal and Bangladesh on other hand. She mentioned that cultural exchange can be a site for strengthening the relationship among the countries, in which TISS and the Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Peace and Justice could play a part.

Varsha Rajan Berry, South Asia peace activist, drew out that the Centre should be a platform for continuous dialogue, networking and campaigns against the injustice in the context of South Asia, particularly in the context of greater polarisation and politicisation of ideologies and debates.



Karamat Ali (Pakistan), Ilina Sen,
Lalita Ramdas, Varsha Rajan Berry

She said that this space of political discourse has diminished in the last couple of years or at best has been limited to annual events. If we truly want a way forward for South Asia free of violence and misogyny, we all have to be continually engaged in processes of political discourse amongst civil society. The Centre aims to provide THE platform for this debate and discussion and be a pressure

centre to evolve and campaign for a better understanding.

She expressed that the Centre could work on specific thematic areas such as crimes in the name of honour, migration of women and renewal of connectivity in the South Asian region.

Karamat Ali emphasised that the Mrinal Gore Interactive Centre for Peace and Justice should have one of its agenda to address issues on militarization. He argued that there is increase in the militarization in South Asian Countries and proposed that the centre should engage with SAARC.

Admiral Ramdas, peace activist, addressed the audience and mentioned the importance of having a humanist perspective in handling issues in South Asia. He



Admiral Ramdas

said the lack of just perspective has limited development and progressive civil society.

Lalita Ramdas, peace activist, proposed that the Centre should deal with questions of climate change and global warming as a strategic position to address critical issues such as anti-war, anti nuclearization and anti-

militarization. She expressed her concern of how State is promoting the above process and has become a source of continuous war and violence. She emphasises that feminist movements need to address issues of women and environment in the context of South Asia.

Prof. Ilina Sen concluded the three day Conference with a Vote of Thanks.



Wandana Sonalkar, Ilina Sen,
Anjali Vartak

APPENDIX - 1
Conference Programme along with Resource Persons

Day 1 - 5th December 2014

9.30am - 10.30am - Registration & Tea

10.30am - 11.30am - Inaugural and Welcome Session - Pushpa Bhawe, Prof. Neela Dabir
(Dep. Director TISS) Nimalka Fernando

11.30am - 1.00pm - Plenary 1 - **Philosophy of Violence and the Aspirations for Peace among the People of South Asia.**

Speakers - Pushpa Bhawe (Chairperson), Meghna Guha Thakurta, Ilina Sen, Milind Bokil

1.00pm - 2.15pm - Lunch

2.15pm - 3.15pm - Narrative Plenary- **Women's Experiences of Violence and Peace**

Speakers - Kiran Moghe (Chairperson) -Prof. Farida Khan, Adv. Shanur Shaikh,
Saroja Sivachandran

3.15pm - 3.30pm - Tea

3.30pm - 5.00pm - 4 Simultaneous Workshops

1. **Violence within Women and their Stratification** - Sangita Thosar, Zeba Imam,
Swati Dyahadroy

2. **Hierarchy and Hegemony in Public and Private Space** - Nasreen Contractor,
Nandini Manjrekar, Sujata Chavan

3. **Religion, Culture and Custom** - Saroja Sivachandran, Saloni Singh, Nirja Bhatnagar

4. **Globalisation, Corporate Profit and Violence** -Wandana Sonalkar, M.J.Vijayan

5.00pm - 6.00pm - Report Back From Workshops

Day 2 - 6th December 2014

9.30am - 10.45am - Plenary 2 (Part 1)
Fractured Modernity and Globalisation

Speakers - Saloni Singh (Chairperson), Vibhuti Patel, Wandana Sonalkar

10.45am - 11.00am - Tea

11.00am - 12o'clock - Plenary 2 (Part 2)

South Asian Masculinities

Speakers - Kalpana Sharma (Chairperson), Kamla Ganesh, Sheema Kirmani

12o'clock - 1.00pm - Narratives Plenary- Women's Experiences of Violence and Peace (2)

Speakers - Gabriele Dietrich (Chairperson), Sugandhi Francis, Taran Khan, Rohini Raman

1.00 pm - 2.15pm - Lunch

2.15pm - 3.15pm - Plenary 3

The Human Rights Approach to the Problem of Violence

Speakers - Justice Suresh (Chairperson), Meera Velayudhan, Jyoti Punwani

3.15pm - 3.30pm - Tea

3.30pm - 5.00pm - 4 Simultaneous Workshops

1. Fractured Modernity - Sheema Kermani, Meghna Guhathakurta, Anagha Tambe

2. Labour and Migration - K Bindhulakshmi, Meena Gopal

3. Food and Health Security - Ilina Sen, Asha Achuthan

4. Manifestations of Violence in State, Social, Cultural, Economic and Political Institutions- Lalita Ramdas, Karamat Ali

5.00pm - 6.00pm - Report Back From Workshops

7.00pm - 9.00pm - Informal Discussion with Delegates with the Local Participants and Resource People followed by Dinner

7th December - Day 3

9.30am - 11.00am - Plenary 4

South Asian Networks and Country Contexts

Speakers - Jatin Desai (Chairperson), Gajanan Khatu, Nimalka Fernando, Saloni Singh, Taran Khan, Meghna Guhathakurta, Karamat Ali.

11.00am - 11.15am - Tea

11.15am - 1.30pm -The Way forward for an Imagined South Asia Free of Violence and Misogyny

Speakers - Lalita Ramdas (Chairperson), Karamat Ali, Ilina Sen, Admiral Ramdas, Varsha Rajan Berry



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