



**International Conference on
Gender, Empowerment and Conflict
in South Asia
6-8 November, 2014**

Organized by

**Calcutta Research Group
&
Peace Research Institute Oslo**

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SCHEDULE

Thursday, November 6

Public Event: Panel Discussion

Venue: Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata

06.00 pm – 08.00 pm

06.00 pm – 06.05 pm

Welcome Address

Prasanta Ray

Professor Emeritus, Department
of Sociology Presidency
University and Secretary, Calcutta
Research Group

06.05 pm – 06.15 pm

Inaugural Address

Paula Banerjee

Associate Professor, University of
Calcutta and President, Calcutta
Research Group

Åshild Kolås

Research Professor, Peace
Research Institute Oslo

06.15 pm – 08.00 pm

Panel Discussion

Women in Peace: Men's Voices

Chair and Moderator: Ranabir

Samaddar, Director, Calcutta
Research Group

Speakers

Atig Ghosh

Assistant Professor, Visva Bharati
University and Member, Calcutta
Research Group

Bhupen Sharma

Professor and Director
OKD Institute of Social Change
and Development, Guwahati

Hari Sharma

Adjunct Professor, Nepal School
of Social Sciences and Humanities

Neingulo Krome

Secretary General
Naga People's Movement for
Human Rights

Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez

Director, Law School
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Sujato Bhadra

Human Rights Activist

Friday, November 7

**Project Partners' Research Presentations
(Partners Only)**

Venue: Hotel Monotel, Salt Lake, Sector 5

09.30 am – 03.00 pm

09.30 am – 09.45 am

Welcome address
Ranabir Samaddar

09.45 am – 10.00 am

Tea

10.00 am – 12.00 pm

Session 1

Presentations of Draft Book
Chapters
(Partners Only)

Theme: Nepal

Chair: Paula Banerjee

12.00 pm – 01.00 pm

Lunch

01.00 pm – 03.00 pm

Session 2

Presentations of Draft Book
Chapters
(Partners Only)

Theme: Northeast India

Chair: Anjoo Sharan
Upadhyaya, Adjunct Professor

Malaviya Centre for Peace
Research , Professor of Political
Science & Director Centre for
the Study of Nepal

Public Event: Roundtable Discussion
Venue: Presidency University, Kolkata
04.00 pm – 06.00 pm

04.00 pm – 04.10 pm

Welcome address
Sabyasachi Basu Ray
Chaudhury, Vice Chancellor,
Rabindra Bharati University

04.10 pm – 06.00 pm

Roundtable Discussion

***Experiences of Conflict,
Gender and Transnational
Justice: South Asia and
Beyond***

Chair : Anuradha Lohia
Vice Chancellor, Presidency
University

Moderator: Paula Banerjee

Speakers

Nergis Canefe
Associate Professor, Department
of Political Science, York
University

**Beatriz Eugenia Sanchez
Mojica**, Assistant Professor
Universidad de Los Andes
Bogotá, Colombia

Roberto Carlos Vidal Lopez
Director, Law School
Pontificia Universidad Javeriana

Åshild Kolås

Kalpana Kannabiran
Director , Council for Social
Development Hyderabad

06.00 pm – 06.05 pm

Vote of Thanks

Iman Kumar Mitra
Research Associate Calcutta
Research Group

Saturday, November 8
In-house Discussion & Participants' Paper
Presentations
Venue: Hotel Monotel, Salt Lake, Sector 5
9 am – 6.15 pm

09.00 am – 10.30 am **In-house Discussion on
Logistics and Publication**

10.30 am-10.50 am *Tea*

10.50 am – 06.15 pm **Participants' Paper Presentations**

10.50 am – 11.00 am ***Welcome address***

Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty
Eminent Historian and Member,
Calcutta Research Group

11.00 am – 12.30 am ***Sessions 1 & 2 (Parallel Sessions)***

Session 1	Session 2
<i>Revolution, Rebellion and Women</i>	<i>Gender, Sexuality, Dissent</i>
Chair: Khesheli Chishi Former President, Naga Mothers' Association	Chair: Ruchira Goswami Assistant Professor, National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata
Discussant: Shiva Kumar Dhungana Design, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, Search for Common Ground, Nepal	Discussant: Samata Biswas Assistant Professor, Haldia Government College Member, Calcutta Research Group
Speakers: 1. Amy Charlotte Soar , Assistant desk Officer, UN Political Team <i>A Postmodern Feminist Intrigue: Maoist Legal Discourse and Practice in Nepal</i>	1. R. Vaishno Bharati Research Associate, Aneka, Bangalore (Human Rights Organisation) <i>'Powering' Empowerment: A Case of Aravanis in Chennai</i>

<p>2. Amrita Pritam Gogoi, Dibrugarh University and PhD Fellow at TISS, Guwahati <i>Troubled Identities: Women Combatants in Post-conflict Nepal</i></p>	<p>2. Saayan Chattopadhyay, Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at Baruipur College <i>Realigning Agency: New Media and the Urban Women's Movement in India</i></p>
<p>3. Lorina Sthapit, Gender, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist, International Fund for Agricultural Development, Nepal <i>Roles and Experiences of Female Maoist Combatants During and After the People's War in Nepal</i></p>	<p>3. Sucharita Sengupta, Research Assistant, Calcutta Research Group <i>Freedom from the Closet? : Voices of the "Sexual Minorities" in Kolkata.</i></p>

12.30 pm – 01.30pm Lunch

01.30 am – 03.00 pm ***Sessions 3 & 4(Parallel
Sessions)***

Session 3	Session 4
<p><i>Militancy, Autonomy, Experiences</i></p> <p>Chair: Meenakshi Gopinath Honorary Director, Women in Security, Conflict Management and Peace</p>	<p><i>Spaces of Citizenship and Creativity</i></p> <p>Chair: Åshild Kolås</p>

Discussant: **Sumona DasGupta**

Scholar and Researcher on Kashmir

Speakers:

1. **Sarbani Sharma**,
Doctoral Student,
Department of Sociology,
Delhi School of
Economics, Delhi
*Finding Azadi in Kashmir,
Locating Gender Politics in a
Local and Global Kashmir*

2. **Bhavneet Kaur**, MPhil
Student, Sociology, Delhi
School of Economics,
Delhi
*Gendered Practices of Resistance
in Indian Administered
Kashmir*

3. **Seema Shekhawat**,
Independent Researcher,
Jaipur, India
*Condemned to be Invisible:
Locating Women in the Peace
Process of Kashmir.*

Discussant: **Sanjay Barbora**

Associate Professor, Tata
Institute of Social Sciences,
Guwahati

1. **Anungla Aier**,
Principal of Zisaji
Presidency Government
College, Kiphire, Nagaland
*Gendered Citizenship,
Representation and Peace
Negotiations in Naga Society*

2. **Jayanta Madhab**
Tamuly, Doctoral Student,
Department of Peace and
Conflict Studies and
Management, Sikkim
University
*The Silent Activists: Women
Writing for Peace: A North
eastern Experience*

3. **Atom Sunil Singh**, Post
doctoral Fellow, Jawaharlal
Nehru University, Delhi
*Geographical Significance of
Khwairamband Bazaar:
Rethinking the Emergence of
Women's Movements in
Manipur*

03.00 pm – 03.30 pm *Tea*

03.30 pm – 05.00 pm ***Session 5***

***Protest, Participation,
Agency***

Chair: **Paula Banerjee**

Discussant: **Kalpana
Kannabiran**

Speakers:

1. **Roma Dey**, Doctoral
Student, Centre for the Study
of Social Systems, Jawaharlal
Nehru University, Delhi
*Re-imagining the Protesting
Mother: Counter Narratives of
Women as Citizen*

2. **Dolly Phukon**, Assistant
Professor, Dibrugarh
University
*Contested Space of Democracy and
Women's Movement in Assam*

3. **Dolly Kikon**, Postdoctoral
Fellow, Stockholm University
*Memories of Rape: Cultural
Impunity and Politics of Agency in
Nagaland*

05.00 pm – 05.30 pm

Tea

05.30 pm – 06.00 pm

Valedictory

***Women for Peace: Many
Voices***

Chair: **Samir Kumar Das**
Professor, Department of
Political Science and Dean of
the Faculty of Arts, University
of Calcutta

Speakers:

Khesheli Chishi, Former
President, Naga Mothers'
Association

Mandira Sen, Director,
Stree-Samya

06.00 pm – 06.15 pm

Vote of Thanks

**Paula Banerjee & Debarati
Bagchi**, Research Associate,
Calcutta Research Group

06.30 pm onwards

Cocktail and Dinner

Welcome Address: **Ranabir
Samaddar**

ABSTRACTS

1. Amrita Pritam Gogoi

Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University and PhD
Fellow at TISS, Guwahati

Troubled Identities:

Women Combatants in Post-Conflict Nepal

The irony of war and conflict stands such that, apart from the many sufferings and victimhood, it opens up spaces for women's empowerment which are otherwise not available to them. In times of conflict, women come up to fill the social, political and economic vacuum in the family and community when men are forced to leave their homes. They become active agents of change by negotiating peace (in both formal and informal spaces of politics) and also by fighting violently for peace. Yet many a times, they fail to conceptualize and retain their activism in that aftermath of a conflict.

In the Maoist movement of Nepal women composed of nearly one third of the total combatants. The movement backed by left ideological apparatus tried

to do away with a number of patriarchal practices prevalent in the society and politics of Nepal. As for example, in 2001 it successfully changed the civil code to entitle women the right to inherit ancestral property. In 2003, it guaranteed women the right to abortion. Yet it is argued by many women combatants and scholars on the area that various patriarchal structures inhibited their capacities and role as agents of change. Moreover, the representation of these women combatants of the People's War of Nepal during the peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction of the society and policy making of the state was quite marginal.

It is in this context that the paper seeks to look into how women combatants of the People's War of Nepal looked into end of the decade long rebellion. Did they consider or experienced it as a time of opportunity or of loss? How the women combatants look into this phase of transformation of their identities? And, the various means and methods they adopted to negotiate with this shift in their identities and the harsh social rejection in the aftermath? The role of the United Nations and various other agencies

in helping them mitigate with and overcome such rejections will be taken into account. With the shift in their identities and conditions their emotional, political relations with colleagues and comrades too undergo a lot of changes. The paper would therefore try to locate the kind of relationship women combatants shared with their male counterparts. It would try to understand the kind of supportive structures male combatants created to help women combatants grow as active agents of change. The paper would also try to interrogate into how far were the male combatants considerate to the gendered needs of the female combatants during the post-conflict rehabilitation in Nepal.

2. Amy Charlotte Soar

Assistant Desk Officer, UN Political Team

A Postmodern Feminist Intrigue: Maoist Legal Discourse and Practice in Nepal

RESEARCH QUESTION

“Comparing Maoist legal discourse and practice: how do women feature in the Maoist design and what

commitments can be expected from the movement to push through a revolution in gender relations in Nepal?”

SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

This research speaks to feminists, not just through the content of assessing gender inequity, but also in exploring alternative methodologies, epistemologies and loci of female oppression. Ultimately, this work provides a unique analysis and encourages a critical review of entrenched feminist methodologies that could well be limiting the theory’s applicability and scope. By conducting research that is unique in its composition of theory, case, method and subject, it is hoped that the utility of Postmodern Feminism is made evident.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH/SOCIAL RELEVANCE

...the women seem confident, their body movements less heavy...They have a vision of a better future that comes through in the edge to their words...Their faith in this revolution gives them a physical confidence... (Onesto, 2004).

This is an example of pro-Maoist literature that implies an inherent commitment to female empowerment within the Maoist movement in Nepal. This research is intrigued by statements implying such a social transformation for women in the Maoists achieving their political goal, especially in a country that has such deeply ingrained patriarchal values. For thousands of women who have fled their homes to join the Maoists ranks to fight for a more gender equal future, this research aims to assess the Maoist movement for its potential as a driver of change. Crucially, the staggering number of women who joined the Maoist cause, hoping for liberation, has added a sense of urgency to this research. Now the country is officially at peace, thousands of trained, armed and expectant women are awaiting the freedoms that they believe were promised to them and the stability of post-conflict Nepal could be brought into jeopardy if women are not accurately and thoughtfully addressed. As a result, in the Maoists claiming female prosperity is “woven” into their ambitions, they have seemingly tied the liberation of

women to the stability and prosperity of post-conflict Nepal.

3. Anungla Aier

Principal, Zisaji Presidency Government College,
Nagaland

Gendered Citizenship, Representation and Peace Negotiations in Naga Society

Citizenship ushers in issues of inclusion and exclusion; power; rights and equality. Citizenship concerns the relationship between women, men, their ‘membership of a group or community that confers rights and responsibilities. . .’, (Meer and Sever 2004, 2 c.f. Caroline Sweetman et al 2011), and their relation in particular to the state. When we talk about citizenship we are concerned intrinsically about rights, and about equality. We are also concerned with the indivisibility of economic, social and political aspects of life¹ Following this understanding, the paper on ‘Gendered Citizenship, Representation and Peace

¹ Caroline Sweetman , Jo Rowlands & Lina Abou-Habib (2011) Introduction to Citizenship, *Gender & Development*, 19:3, 347-355.

Negotiations in Naga Society' discusses how the perception of citizenships are practiced and experienced by women in Naga Society. It elaborates on the construction of a system of representation based on agnatic kinship structure that successfully alienates women from participating in mainstream social and community issues and raises the question of the perception of women's citizenship or membership in a given tribal community. The article further discusses how Naga women have been making themselves heard despite the challenges and in what ways they have been contributing in peace negotiations at the local level. The article is drawn from the current research work on 'Naga Women's Participation in the Field of Peace: Obstacles and Achievements' under the Research project entitled Making Women Count for Peace: Gender, Empowerment and Conflict in South Asia.

4. Atom Sunil Singh

Post doctoral Fellow, Jawaharlal Nehru University,
Delhi

Geographical Significance of Khwairamband Bazaar: Rethinking Emergence of Women's Movements in Manipur

The study presents how and why the women come out the streets to protest against the system and how they start fight against the family, locality, society, state but also non-state actors. Khwairamband Bazaar is the symbolic place for women's empowerment. The place is still remember for the origin of the various forms of women's movement in Manipur including Nisha Bandh (anti-alcoholism) movement, Meira Paibis (Torch Bearers), Nupi lan (women's war) etc. Recently, the different forms of women movement are also emerged including Wakat Meeppham, Naked Protest at Kangla gate, Dharna, hunger strike, etc. Majority of Meitei Society, women looked after their family and women go to market for their sustenance. This is due to the fact that Manipur is the only in the world which has market exclusively only for the

women. It also gives a chance for gathering with a large chunk of women in Khwairamband Bazaar. The movement is not just started from issues in the Market areas. It comes out from the issues faced by them in their family. The violence in family and atrocities, family burdens, responsibilities and needs for their sustenance compels to move out of their home. However, women are not only meant for their subsistence, they are also taking a big role in the form of civil organization and also become a pressure group both against state and non-state to fight against every day crimes and killings, domestic crimes, rapes, deaths and various forms of violence. It also shows how Khwairamband Bazaar becomes the focus point for women communities in Manipur in one hand and geographical position is another factor why Khwairamband Bazaar is very significant for the origins of women movements.

5. Bhavneet Kaur

MPhil Student, Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi

Gendered Practices of Resistance in Indian Administered Kashmir

In this paper, I attempt to study the ‘political experience’ of women in the context of Kashmir. What has happened in Kashmir is that images and narratives of women’s victimization have become the symbolic representation of conflict, thus framing them as almost reified passive receivers of suffering; “used in particular to convey the depth of atrocities”. However, I intend to re-shuffle this frame and look at those narratives and images of the everyday that have been voiced, embodied and performed by women.

In doing so, I look at women’s resistance as a response to an everyday negotiation with the power relations they were embedded in. I do not take away from women their spectacular struggles and their active rapturous protests confronting the Indian state, rather in the context of Kashmir, I suggest that understanding women’s role in the resistance struggle

has to partake of the ambiguities and the rhetoric of the everyday: of the ordinary, the mundane, the scattered and the unconscious. What I emphasize is that there are a multiplicity of narratives that women live, perform, ruffle with and leave unfinished in the everyday, including grief and mourning. And I trace this through the life of a particular woman, Parveena Ahangar, who started a movement on Enforced Disappearances in Kashmir, after her own son was disappeared during the conflict in 1990; transforming a personal grief into a public campaign. So although most of women's narratives are woven around personal loss, i.e. the arrest of their sons or husbands, they become a part of the political consciousness or as we said earlier, 'political experience', and it becomes critical to understand the emotional force of this form of resistance. And to understand what takes a woman to transform herself in the violent situations of conflict. Primarily, what I attempt to do in this chapter is to undo the narrative that overlooks the complexity of women's lives in the face of violent political conflict and I identify them as active participants, agents and guardians of their society.

And through this I attempt to foreground that women in Kashmir have been as much political subjects of the violent legacy of this movement as have been men and therefore the resistance struggle unequivocally belongs as much to women. But because their resistance has played out more on the terrain of the everyday, or is caught in the contested discourse of being ‘trapped victims’, there is an invisibility of women in the political process and their resistance narratives remain, what Das describes as, “very much on the surface, yet there were fences created around them”.

6. Dolly Kikon

Postdoctoral Fellow, Stockholm University

Memories of Rape: Cultural Impunity and Politics of Agency in Nagaland

This paper will examine how rape survivors in Nagaland perceive notions of justice and agency in a political milieu that grants impunity to perpetrators. What do memories of rape and trauma inform us about the politics of agency? Specifically, this paper

will explore how the existing culture of impunity is founded on a history of state violence, militarization, and nationalism. This paper underlines how the history of absolving perpetrators and granting legal impunity under extra constitutional regulations like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (1958), has ushered a culture of impunity that legitimizes everyday violence against women and children. Through an ethnographic account about memories of rape and sexual violence in Naga society, this paper will describe how structural violence is produced in intimate spaces like the family unit, and argues that social relationships like the family unit and the community, once perceived to be secure sites, have increasingly become fraught with violence and hostility.

7. Dolly Phukon

Assistant Professor, Dibrugarh University

Contested Space of Democracy and Women's Movement in Assam

The yardstick of Indian democracy shows huge gaps between the haves and have-nots even after sixty-five years of almost uninterrupted democratic rule resulting to the emergence of social movements challenging the dominant liberal model of Indian democracy. The route for democratization of Indian polity can be traced back to India's movement for Independence. In order to understand again the long transitions in Indian history for democratization through social movements, it becomes pertinent to understand the nature of Indian civil society. The formation of civil society in India during pre-independence era can be said to be the turning point of democratic upsurge which uprooted colonialism from India and the right of self-determination was restored to the Indian people. But in no time, new types of social movements crept up like tribal, dalit, environment, autonomy and language movement

which exposed the multidimensional domination and oppression in independent India. These movements were targeted to open up consciousness of a new creative society. But in late 20th century, another contradictory trend in social movements was seen in Indian polity i.e. social movements targeting de-democratization of the national regime and the civil society was polarized, segmented due to the Hindu and Muslim social movement activity. Thus by the end of twentieth century, social movements had become available as vehicles of popular politics. They had adopted cultural forms and technical means that no nineteenth-century social movement activist could have imagined. Thus democracy, which ensures democratic participation of the people, gives space for people's voice itself at times becomes contested in the name of religious politics, identity politics etc. Within this context an endeavor is made in this paper to analyze the nature and trends in women's movement in Assam and how far it is able to establish its own space in this functioning democracy.

8. Jayanta Madhab Tamuly

Doctoral Student, Department of Peace and Conflict
Studies and Management, Sikkim University

The Silent Activists – Women Writing for Peace:

A North Eastern experience

Literature is the unique tool which harvests its yield by traversing through the raw experiential and existential dimensions of human reality at a micro and intangible domain. Social responsibility is an undeniable feature of literature irrespective of types and forms. Authors and their creations are always committed to the representation, introspection and evaluation of social phenomena. Unfortunately, while discussing the issues of peace or conflict, academicians often overlook the local and contemporary literature. In reality, literary practices of volatile vicinity, through the eyes of the writers and artists, capture more naked and insightful glimpses of the invisible or what Martin Buber aptly calls as “hallowing the profane”.

North East India has always been a significant resource of discussion on issues related with conflict,

violence and peace. The region has witnessed and experienced all possible forms of conflict and violence with untraceable impact. Simultaneously all possible efforts for peace have also been undertaken in the region. Numerous need assessment studies have also been available on these areas .But still there is the dearth of assessment of the role of literature in portraying ,evaluating and making people aware of the issues of conflict and peace ,with specific North Eastern context.

In contrast to the academic writings, literary works (especially novels, short stories and poems) are rhetorical, reactionary and evaluative responses to any social phenomenon. The literary works can probe more sensitively into the multilayered levels of issues on peace or conflict and their wider readership help spread them more among the common public. A dedicated group of women writers from the North Eastern region of India has been constantly dealing with these issues through their literary works. The later decades of the twentieth century witnessed a new wave of writings in the region where issues of ethnicity, identity, nationalism, immigration,

marginalisation or human rights replaced those typical issues of love and politics. Women writers of the region- Temsula Ao, Arupa Patangia Kalita, Mamang Dai, Easterine Kire, Ratna Bharali Talukdar, Bimbati Thiyam Ongbi, Irom Sharima, Anamika Bora, Mitra Phukan, Haripriya, to name a few, have been trying their best to highlight the protracted sufferings of the region which have always been remained as mere digression in the mainstream of the Indian nation-state – ironically, even in the mainstream arts that otherwise come across as very charged and political.

In this process, all these women writers are found to underline issues like violation of human rights, condition of women and children in conflict situation, displacement, refugee and migrants, health and hygiene, food security and human security- issues often ignored in state centric or “scholarly” initiatives for peace. These literary works also give a voice to the expectations and disagreements of the people of the periphery while making any decision for peace, whether it is a ceasefire, accord or economic policy. Being the worst sufferers and the direct observers of conflict, these writers express these issues with the

utmost sincerity and naked reality. Hence, these bold writings always stand for lucrative resources to look into the issue of peace and conflict of this region. With this aim, the proposed paper would look into the role of women writers of North East as agents and activists of peace through their literary works. In this process, the paper would basically examine six writers from three different states of Nagaland, Manipur and Assam.

9. Lorina Sthapit

Gender, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist,
International Fund for Agricultural Development,
Nepal

Roles and Experiences of Female Maoist

Combatants during and after the

People's War in Nepal

In war and conflict, men are generally viewed as the actors, perpetrators and agents while women are viewed as victims. But, women have also taken responsibilities as activists, combatants and agents of change. Such is the case in Nepal, where women had

a significant contribution in the decade long armed conflict (1996-2006) as fighters from both sides: Nepal Army and People's Liberation Army. This research article is based on the roles and experiences of 12 such female Maoist ex-combatants in Rolpa, Kabhrepalanchok and Kathmandu districts between October 2012 and January 2013. The study investigated the reasons and circumstances for women to rebel against their stereotypical roles as passive defenseless victims of armed violence and actively participated in the armed conflict as fighters. Among the most common reasons mentioned were, the Maoist promise to eliminate patriarchal exploitation and gender discrimination from the Nepali society, the fear of gender-based violence and to escape social pressures such as early marriage.

The results of their activism, unity and revolution resulted in powerful outcomes like recognition of women's issues, increased participation of women in politics and law, a greater sense of awareness of rights and a strong sense of confidence to fight against gender discrimination among women. However, the study reveals that the inability of the 'revolution' to

completely change the existing socio-economic structures plaguing Nepal has further resulted in conservative backlash against female ex-combatants as the result of reintegrating them into the pre-existing gender-based social order. Nevertheless, they feel a sense of pride and achievement to have fought for their rights and the sacrifice they made for their 'sisters' and the country. After reintegration, they are now fighting against stigmas, communities' lack of acceptance, disability, displacement and lost livelihoods.

10. R. Vaishno Bharati

Research Associate, Aneka, Bangalore (Human Rights Organisation)

'Powering' Empowerment:

A Case of Aravanis in Chennai

Empowerment, which has a very vast context specific definition, is a construct that can mean different things in different time and space for different people. This paper explores the processes that shape ideas of power and empowerment amongst transgendered

persons (male to female) and how these ideas influence their politics. A qualitative research methodology using a feminist approach with purposive sampling was used and six case studies of aravanis (transgendered women) residing in Chennai, Tamil Nadu was done. Drawing from the analysis, the paper attempts to ask questions such as how is power performed and can power be anything but repressive? How is empowerment defined and how do collectives provide the opportunity for an individual's empowerment? Is empowerment intrinsically a collective possession or can it also be individualised? The findings revealed the complexity of what was considered 'empowering', the differential understanding of 'empowerment' among the participants and its influence in their lifestyle and politics. Using a Foucauldian understanding of power, the analysis furthered the conceptualization of empowerment as being 'continuous' and not an end point. It was seen that the aravanis' understanding of empowerment, as a community, was very similar to the one adopted by women's movements. It was also seen that a strong sense of self when combined with

the support of a strong community increases the possibility of becoming empowered. The analysis explored the place accorded to them within the movement and the negotiations made by them within the movement as well as with the state. The politics of the aravanis and the women's movement in India has always remained separate except for the interaction within the LGBT movement. It was seen that empowerment is defined by the nation state, the society and the individual; factors which have been influenced by social, economic, political and historical factors that are interplayed with hierarchies such as class, caste, gender, religion, race, ethnicity and many others.

11. Roma Dey

Doctoral Student, Centre for the Study of Social
Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi

Re-Imaging the Protesting Mother: Counter Narratives of Women as Citizen

This paper attempts to study the category of “mothers” as citizens and political entities and their negotiations in the political sphere, which has largely come to be identified as the nation states. Mothers, carrying their breastfeeding children or holding the hands of the children, have been an iconic image in the colonial and postcolonial protests. History shows that Indian nationalist had promoted participation of women in protests but framing them within the nationalist frame of women as mothers.

The last few years saw an increasing rise in protest by “mothers”, a category in itself on different issues from their right to breastfeed children in public space, which is being perceived as indecent by airports and coffeeshops under the attack of the neoliberal market and commodification of the body, to their raising

concerns on the rise of violence amongst children in schools in the United States. “Mothers” as a category within the nation has also been utilised worldwide to stop violence, as in the case of South Africa or as harbinger of change through education and health in the case of India.

However, the protest staged by the Meira Paibis, literally ‘torch bearers’ and an women’s collective in the state of Manipur, against the rape of Manorama, alleged to be a member of the banned People’s Liberation Front , marks a rupture in the political imagination of women in the Indian democracy. Against the backdrop of AFSPA, “a state of exception” and the political upheaval and violence in the state of Manipur, it is a matriarchial society that brings to focus counter narratives that destabilizes the hegemonic notions of women and citizenship and makes available spaces for women to negotiate their rights as citizens. The paper tries to argue that it is these counter narratives that have helped women negotiate their rights in the modern political space of nation states.

12. Saayan Chattopadhyay

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Baruipur College, University of Calcutta

Realigning Agency: New Media and the Urban Women's Movement in India

The new media in India must be understood within the context of wider social processes such as globalization, changes in the sphere of cultural politics and the emergence of the transnational elites as agents of new forms of articulations of the politics of identity in a network society. In this paper, referring to the Pink Chaddi Campaign (2009) in the aftermath of the Mangalore pub attack and the Indian edition of Slut Walk, organised in Delhi and Kolkata (2011-2012) as case studies, I particularly focus on the intersection of the emergence of new media communication in India and the mobilization of urban women's agency through social media, blog and other networked communities. In this paper, I explore the interrelationship between the urban Indian women's use of new media, and the

intervention of the paternalistic nation-state, to question the emancipatory sphere of social networking in relation to women's movement. Extending these arguments, I try to question, in what way the "agency" of the woman is located in new media communication and through what trajectories that agency may reconfigures itself. How do we understand this apparently "successful" feminist demonstrations and urban women's movement, especially operated primarily on emerging social media in India? The paper seeks to explore the implications for the mobilization of women's agency in the online public sphere of India. Although, both the movements received adequate media attention, but to what extent has their agenda been reflected in news coverage of the movements? Whether, women, especially in the urban regions, are increasingly adapting the new media and using it as a potent tool for women's place-based politics in developing countries, in spite of the limitations and apprehension around access and control. I attempt to discuss, whether urban women's movements like these to a certain extent disseminate women's collective

experiences and invest in the realignment of the political domain for gendered social change. By focusing on particular blogs and social media sites, this paper broadly seeks to explore how a specific community, predominantly consisting of urban women, can come together, collaborate and take collective action using online media and in what way, for the Indian women, the online media and the web services provide the space and tool respectively for advocacy, where the personal can truly be political.

13. Sarbani Sharma

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Finding Azadi in Kashmir, Locating Gender Politics in a Local and Global Kashmir

Post-colonial South-Asian history is characterized by multiple and diverse struggles by different ethnic communities that seek to assert, revive and establish their identity in terms of nationhood and autonomy within and sometimes outside the federal structure of the state. Though the geographical area of military

confrontation, intensity of conflict, and local and regional consequences vary significantly, they affect both men and women. Insights into the consequences of violence on women, inflicted and induced both by the men of their own community as well as by the agents of the state and the resultant construction of her identity to intersect with the needs of “nationalism” are thereby of significance for any comprehensive understanding of conflict zone.

The attempt here is to bring into question how a people struggling for nationhood and autonomy, with its own mapping of demography and territory, look at the gender boundaries and equations within this quest for a larger identity, which assumes ‘oneness’ as an essence for its victory. Women who have featured in the respective movements and wars, either in the margins or at the center of the process, face the dilemma of bringing social justice and transforming their lives and their community on the one hand. On the other hand, framing a discourse within which they must play an important role as activist or even militant negotiating with the framework that is patriarchal in method, ideology and leadership.

The ethnographic data in the backdrop of Kashmiri historiography seems to suggest to me that the nature of debate and meditation on this discourse no longer limited to only the Islam vs. Modernity dichotomy but also towards far more critical debates on forms and content of life practices, sociality of the language of articulation for Azadi and frequencies of individuality in the waves of secularism and capital.

Translation of these regular and irregular everyday choices and necessities can help us explore the nuances of these articulations, their circulatory nature and its impact. The Everyday micro-politics offers several discourses and rhythms of life and events in Kashmir which are essentially endowed with characteristics of multiplying itself on multiple axes but also routinely collapsing into a singular unit. Through an analysis of technologies of protests, everyday life in a women's hostel and a biography of hijab this

14. Seema Shekhawat

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Condemned to be Invisible?: Locating Women in the Peace Process in Kashmir

Amidst the fierce debate on women's association with peace being rooted either in their nature or nurture, it is disturbing to note their near total absence from the formal peace processes globally. Isn't it a dichotomy that women are generally considered peaceful but they are denied due space in negotiating formal peace. The Kashmir case provides ample evidence of the prejudiced nature of peace making, which glorified women as linchpins of the movement for independence from India but later did not hesitate in pushing them to the fringes of the peace process. In this paper, based on my decade-long research experience, I will posit the question - Where is the locus of women in the peace building process in Kashmir?

In the late 1980s militancy started in Indian side of Kashmir. Kashmiri women played a significant role in the initial phase of the separatist movement. Though

they did not participate directly in the combat operations but contributed in many other ways. In terms of material support they carried out a variety of tasks ranging from intelligence work to nursing, from feeding combatants to providing shelters, and from acting as couriers to being spies. They, among others, also acted as mobilized masses and transmitters of group values. It is widely perceived the militancy in Kashmir could not have sustained long without women's participation. Kashmiri women multi-tasked but without due credit. In the peace process initiated after the violent militancy women are conspicuously invisible. The 'face of militancy' had been denied the opportunity to become the face of the peace process. Militancy that was at its peak in the mid 1990s is in decline as perceptible by the substantial decline in the number of violent incidents in the state. In this overall scenario the government of India has initiated a process of engaging the separatists by negotiating with them on various fronts. The process is entirely masculine. Kashmiri women do not constitute part of any formal peace talks initiated to address the conflict. The impressive list of peace attempts

notwithstanding, both women and their concerns are evidently absent in these attempts. Prominent women separatist leaders have been either co-opted by the masculine separatist leadership or sidelined when, if at all, they raised their voice against the male hegemony. Gender exclusion from the peace process is by and large justified on flimsy grounds such as women are apolitical and apathetic, they are busy in household chores or they are saved from several risks by maintaining a distance from peace politics. There is a need to highlight this neglect not only for the purpose of filling the void in the existing literature on conflict in Kashmir, but also to ensure women's due inclusion in the ongoing peace building process.

The aim of sustainable peace cannot be realized when the peace making process is exclusive and discriminatory. The peace building process has to include women beyond victimization and customary charting out of policies to 'help the vulnerable.' Gender should be mainstreamed as early as negotiations and throughout policy-making, implementation, and evaluation. But, is it happening in Kashmir?

15. Sucharita Sengupta

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Freedom from the Closet ? : Voices of the "Sexual Minorities" in Kolkata

The paper situates itself in Kolkata, at the aftermath of a landmark judgment in 2009 when the Delhi High Court consented to de-criminalize homosexuality by accepting a petition filed by the Naz Foundation to re-read the section 377. The paper seeks to explore that, while this calls for a legal transition, whether that changes anything in the way the Indian society by and large perceives the issue. This paper thus tries to unveil the process of transition that the homosexual community among the sexual minorities in Kolkata went through after the Delhi High Court Judgment. Whether this fostered in any kind of change in their lives and most importantly how the movement against IPC 377 is manifested by them who are alienated from the 'mainstream' population for being 'different' or 'Queer, especially when the Supreme Court in another judgment in 2013 has overturned the High Court's Judgment. The question in the title

of the paper also calls for this introspection. The point argued is therefore, transition is a value laden word, one which has more than a legal implication. It is a process, which includes larger societal goals. A legal codification can at best lay the foundation for a change but it does not necessarily entail one. The paper thus is written from three vantage points:

The first section of the paper deals with implications and oppositions to IPC 377 and functions of different NGOs in Kolkata; their aims and movement while the second broadly examines views of the sexual minorities on their lives, insecurities, dilemmas and whether the High Court's verdict spelt any change for their lives and in the third, the nature of movement and the everyday violence that the LGBT people face and their constant fear of violence. The paper also revisits in this context the traditional stigmatization of homosexuality in the Indian society, which posits much more difficulty for the sexual minorities to come out in the open. It is also imperative to mention at this juncture that the paper deals only with the homosexuals that is, the gay and Lesbian people although the term 'sexual minority' encapsulates

issues of Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgender and Hijras, Kothis. The gays and lesbians also suffer from an inherent jeopardy. In one hand they are constantly fighting against the marginalization imposed by the majority and trying to merge with the larger society, on the other hand the 'imposed identity' of being a minority is their only instrument, kind of a foothold, gripping which they can demand from the state and society to not treat them as criminals. Bargaining for one's cause, for a larger demand like right to property of the partner and efforts at 'normalizing' a same-sex relationship through normative institutions like marriage only reinforces their claim to 'minoritization'. The paper tries to address these issues at length.

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