

WOMEN DEVELOPMENT CELL

The Women's Development Cell (WDC) comprises of representatives from the faculty teaching (Dr Renu Shah (Convenor), Dr Smita Bammidi (Member), non-teaching (Ms Sandhya and Mr Pravin) and students (Ms Suprita Dutta (MSW II) and Ms Kavita Aggarwal (BSW III)) of the college. This body/committee consciously works with the students to build gender awareness and equality in the college campus through mindfully planned activities and observances of important days, and the program budget is approved by the principal every year.

In the first semester of the academic year two events are planned and taken up, i.e. a talk or panel on topic related to values of friendship for the college students and various activities to celebrate the valuable ties of friendship on the eve of friendship day in August month. In the month of October the committee brainstorms and comes up with a significant topic for which resource person is invited/ film reviews are undertaken and critical discussions are held for students awareness and action in that regard. In the month of January, coinciding or around the 3rd, conducts the Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Phule Lecture series commemorating her Birth Anniversary and an esteemed speaker delivers a lecture on a relevant topic and also touch upon the life and work of Savitribai that we can connect with in the field of social work and the committees work comes to a grand close with the observance of the International Women's Day in March as per the theme assigned globally. This academic year the 11th Kranti Jyoti Savitribai Lecture Series and the International Womens Day with theme #BreakTheBias were sponsored by RUSA funding.

1. Gender Discrimination in Sports in India (Online Event)

Talk by: Ms. Meha Bharadwaj, Sports Presenter

Date: 11 Oct, 2021; Time: 4 to 6 PM

Gender discrimination in sports that Ms Meha can talk of are in terms of the discrimination that she faced as a women sports presenter and what she has known in close quarters are the discrimination faced by the women sportspersons in India.

She shared that when she began as a sports presenter, she was in a designation/profession that is male dominated as the field of competitive sports presenting is often considered as a job that can be done well by men and not to be trusted with women. Even if a woman is a presenter for sports, she is stereotyped to

have certain feminine qualities and behave in a coy manner, she is made passes at, seen as an eye candy so to say; not to be bold and talk sense. As an example Ms Meha shared that when she was covering the women hockey team at Tokyo Olympics, 2020, as a presenter while doing her job she was not given any due recognition and what was expected of her (women presenters) instead was to look stylish and glamorous and leave the talking to men. Her work in first decade of her career meant covering men sports persons, as women sport persons were not taken seriously or were invisible. When women won a game, there were few lines informing the same to viewers.

Ms Bharadwaj realized that she did not receive appreciation for the work well done by her, instead, few of the senior editors asked her to glam up, not to come across as intelligent and to talk less on the screen. As she strived (as a woman) to be an outstanding sports presenter and not be coy and dumb, she missed many opportunities. But she went on to carve a niche for herself, evolved a style and aimed at unapologetically doing her job. Hence, she faced several challenging experiences in her years as a sports presenter for cricket, badminton and other sports where people tested her, ignored, did not accept her fully, but she kept on sticking to her true self.

She then went on to source from her observations, interviews and conversations with famous women sports personalities to highlight instances of discrimination based on gender that is rampant in the sports sector. With women getting into sports played by men, the sports authority had to make changes in order to accommodate training, coaching, housing needs of women sports persons; but they took a very long time to materialize- such as women's toilet, locker room, sick rooms, practice equipment, testing norms for drugs, and the number of games they play. This is an objectionable scenario.

She shared about the incident with the women's boxing sensation Ms Mary Kom, who won bronze for India in London Olympics; The second Indian woman to win a medal. Ms Mary Kom felt pressured as a woman than a sports person for not being able to deliver her best. She broke down in front of the national media and apologized for winning bronze instead of being proud of her achievements. She being from an impoverished background, having no support systems, and as a mother of two; she has to be proud she won the bronze medal and there is no scope for guilt. Had she been given proper coaching and enough compensation, encouragement, equipment, practice, she surely would have performed in an outstanding manner. She narrated stories of mothers standing up for their daughters, for e.g. Ms Lovlina Borgohain and commonwealth medalist tennis player Ms Monika Batra, against all odds so that they can fulfil their dreams of playing sports and making a great career of these outstanding skills. Instances where mothers accompanied the daughters for more than a decade, who wished to play sports and the facilities were far away from where they lived.

She stated that women sportspersons for e.g. female cricketers are paid half of what the lowest paid male cricketer makes, though they put in the same efforts and dedication. The excuse given is that women have just entered sports, they are not seeing it as a career yet, hence they are not getting the focus, facilities and pay yet. This is not true because women sportspersons are not having anything easy and have to fight for every single thing with the system of the sports authority. If they are given facilities, coaches, good nutrition and equipment, young women are as passionate as any other male sportsperson and give much more.

There are good things happening for women in Sports in India. The viewership of the T20 women's increased to a record number. Within total viewers, the number of women viewers has increased. Hence legitimacy of women in sports as players and as a career is going to grow in a large way.

Meha ended with famous quote of Serena Williams where she said 'The cycles of poverty, discrimination, and sexism are much, much harder to break than the record for Grand Slam titles' which is entirely true in context of women sportspersons, not only in India but worldwide.

2. 11th Kranti Jyothi Savitribai Phule Lecture Series (Hybrid Mode)

Talk by: Ms Rasika Agashe

Jan 5, 2022; 2 to 4 pm

Theme Based Fillers by NN Students: A group of students from MSW I and II sang the activism songs that Savitri and her team would sing back in the day to which the audience joined. There were two pre-recorded solo performance videos that were sent in by students that were presented as fillers that shared facts about Savitri's life.

Pre Recorded Experimental Play: Backdrop of the play that it was written and directed by Ms Raskia Agashe and practiced at her studio, Being Association, Mumbai was provided. Men Against Violence and Abuse collaborated with the actor, writer, director to create and showcase the play in order to raise the issues of gender inequality, discrimination and violence against women, and the notions of toxic masculinity that most of us are unaware about. The purpose of the experimental play is to use theatre as an impactful medium to reach to as many and change the attitudes of as many persons and to smash patriarchy. The play was to be enacted in the offline mode by the acting crew but had to be shifted to online mode due to 3rd wave of the COVID pandemic. The experimental play captured the life of a man who is trapped in manifesting himself as per toxic masculinity, travails of a gay or a transgender person, the violence faced by women, references made to women in foul language, and how this has been happening and continues to happen in India. A round of applause was given at the end of the screening of the play. The Master of Ceremonies acknowledged the impact of the play in terms of the message and clarity about how patriarchy burdens men and discriminates men and persons of genders other than the gender binary.

Lecture by Ms. Rashika Agashe on Gender Representation of Women in Indian Films/TV

Ms. Agashe thanked the college for inviting her and she acknowledged the greatness, at the same time simplicity of the life of KJ Savitribai Phule. She shared that she is mesmerized by the way that in those days, Savitribai was able to take up these controversial and complicated issues, talk about them and also work towards women's and caste reforms. That women are being educated and being independent in the society now is because of her efforts back then. She reiterated that media and entertainment industry influence the members of the society greatly, and hence the entire media and entertainment industry have a responsibility to reflect on what they are making and showcasing in the movies, advertisements, television, news and so on. This entire industry is instead turned into an institution that help maintain patriarchy and toxic masculinity in our society.

Very few in the industry are really genuine and showcase stories that convey rational messages, rather than stick to formula for making money. She spoke from her experience how she sees in mainstream films and television women are portrayed in terms of what they do, how they have to behave and what is expected of them. Women are shown as being shy, emotional, dependent, doing certain kinds of chores and activities, at receiving end of violence, discrimination, and worse is that all of this is normalized. We often do not remember names of lead roles who are women, but remember the lead roles who are men. Women are portrayed the way men want to see them to be entertained, and to make money. Even women writers, directors and actors tend to write and direct stories and have women act, dance to songs as per the male gaze. These aspects are all internalized by the members of the society, is not a healthy trend at all and perpetuates a gender unequal society.

Agashe felt that there are many ways and it will take time for movies to be written and directed in a rational manner, showing all genders as equal and as per female gaze. The consistent appropriate representation of all genders and how each gender see themselves and their life story is the only way we will reach the realistic and equal representation of persons in a story.

3. International Women's Day Program

Theme- Gender Equality- Today for a Sustainable Tomorrow

Break the Bias

Date and Time: March 8-9, 2022; 2.00- 5.00 pm

Reading out of the Pledge on 8th March 2022

Though the IWD program was schedule for 9th March 2022, the WDC cell of the College had planned to read out the IWD pledge on 8th March 2022 to commemorate the IWD and express our

solidarity towards the same as college. The pledge was read out by Ms. Suprita on central sound system to reach out to all the classes in college.

BREAK THE BIAS (STAMPING 9.00 am to 1.00 pm)

The events for International Women's Day program on 9th March 2022 with the # Break The Bias stamping as put on hands of students across the classes. This was a gesture to mark and commemorate International Women's Day and also express our solidarity towards the cause of elimination of all forms of discrimination against women in society. Ms. Suprita developed the stamp and both the students' representatives of WDC were putting the stamp for students and staff during the morning hours of college.

Her-story of Feminism in India

Dr. Vibhuti Patel addressed the audience on the topic and presented a very powerful address and covered a range of topics within the herstory of feminism in India. She reiterated the fact that our history has always been a HIS-STORY, it is essential that HER-STORY of history is presented to our young generation and the contribution of various female unsung heroes is brought to the forefront. In her story she talked about glorious legacy of feminism in India, feminist foremothers, global feminism, suffrage movement & collective struggles of women workforce in USA and Europe, women freedom fighters in India, women social reformers and also the contribution of various women in economy of country and also in framing of the constitution. She also provided insights on international feminist movements and different phases in the evolution of feminist movement at global level. Towards the end of her presentation, Ms. Suprita opened the floor for discussion and comments. There were questions and comments raised by students which were addressed patiently by Dr. Patel. Thereafter Ms. Suprita extended heartfelt gratitude to madam for an excellent and insightful presentation on trends of feminism in India and at world level.

Intersectionality of Caste and Gender

Ms. Meena Kotwal, Former BBC journalist was invited to present her thoughts on the issue. Since Ms. Meena was doing her presentation in online mode, there were few technical glitches from our side due to which she could speak only for a brief period. She presented a very experiential session on the basis of her experiences of gender discrimination being a Dalit female journalist at BBC and at very levels. She reiterated that it is a double burden for them and they have to fight at all levels and always prove themselves. She is a founding editor of 'The Mooknayak', a YouTube channel and Web Portal. She is living in Delhi. Her stories basically based on Dalits (unprivileged community), Muslims and Women, advocating for their rights and working towards ensuring justice to the women at margins. Her insightful and experiential submissions were highly appreciated by all and a need was felt to invite her for full session in near future.