First-Ever Fest With A Cause Rocks Delhi University

Report of the Gender Mela

Venue: Miranda House, Delhi University

Date: Feb 11-13, 2016 10 am-6 pm

Partners: MenEngage Delhi, Miranda House WDC, OBR, CFAR, Action Aid, WFS, Nazariya, ITVS, KRITI, CEQUIN, Action India, Jamia Milia Islamia, Ambedkar University of Delhi, Prayatn, UN Women, Centre for Health and Social Justice

Run up to the Gender Mela:

The college fests are the biggest attraction of Delhi colleges during the months of January and February, bringing together all the students for some camaraderie, learning and sharing. College festivals are largely planned and promoted as cultural extravaganzas, in addition to other activities such as games, debates, sports, etc. This year MenEngage Delhi, Miranda House Women's Development Cell, One Billion Rising, CFAR, Women's Feature Service, CHSJ and many other civil society partners and colleges decided to expand the canvas by bringing in issues of gender, social justice and masculinities to the fore. The Gender Mela was planned as a 3-day event to be held in Miranda House where participants would come in to have fun and dance and sing without inhibitions while engaging with complex issues and trying to unravel concepts and ideas around gender. This fest with a twist had discussions, debates, stalls, games, cultural performances and much more. It was a jamboree organised around issues of Gender, breaking stereotypes and setting new examples.

The Gender Mela started attracting eyeballs a few months in advance through an innovative promotional campaign both on the ground and online in the social media. Its thought-provoking posters and posts immediately caught public attention.
A press conference held on Feb 10 spurred the buzz around the event, leading to the much-anticipated opening of the Gender Mela the next day.

**Day 1, Feb 11, 2016**

**Inauguration of the Mela: 10:00 – 10:30 pm**

The three days Gender Mela, organized by Miranda House, MenEngage Delhi and the One Billion Rising Campaign, with support from several other media, women and community groups, saw a convergence of gender rights organisations, dalit rights activists, youth-led campaigns, sexual minorities rights groups and others. They interacted with a cross-section of young people who used the platform to express themselves in different ways. A vibrant mix of male and female students converged at the mela to participate in the discussions, join in film screenings, interactive games, theatre performances, debates and dances that were all nuanced towards leading to a deeper understanding on issues of gender. The principle aim of this innovative initiative was to address and engage young people on concerns relating to gender, the need to break stereotypes and also to share new ideas and concepts for dealing with gender concerns and issues. The Gender Mela provided scope for discussions, debates, stalls, cultural performances and many more activities. Experts presented papers on surrogacy, sexual choices, violence and discrimination against women, while several civil society organizations such as Action India, CFAR, CHSJ, CEQUIN, Prayatn and KРИTI had put up stalls.
The Mela was inaugurated with a ribbon cutting ceremony by an eminent group of people comprising Dr. Pratibha Jolly, Principal, Miranda House; Kamla Bhasin, feminist-activist; Rukmini V Rao, Gramya Resource Centre; Abhijit Das, Director, Centre for Health and Social Justice; and Bijaylaxmi Nanda, Miranda House WDC.

**SEMINAR HALL 10:30 am – 1:00 pm**

**Session: Gender, Masculinity & Sustainable Development**

The first day of the Gender Mela opened on vibrant note in the Seminar Hall of Miranda House, in New Delhi as the first session for the day saw enriching discussions by a panel of experts from civil society on the theme of Gender, masculinity and sustainable development.

Head of the girls institution of Miranda House, Dr. Pratibha Jolly in her welcome address deliberated that colleges are places to be ‘reflective’ and the Gender Mela has brought in a synergy of groups to reflect on the significant theme.

Setting a lively tenor to the discussion, noted feminist activist, Kamla Bhasin of Sangat South Asia reflected that the Gender Mela is a ‘confluence’ of spaces, civil society, networks, NGOs, colleges and bastis, issues etc. Moreover it is a confluence of celebration - celebration of global solidarity as the issues the spaces and networks are taking up are connected. She added that Gender is a social construct and boys and men are also gendered and patriarchy is the root cause of this ‘Gendering’.
Delving into Masculinities, she outlined that masculinity and femininity both are mirror images and it is the quality that society wants to see in one. Nature makes us only different and diverse, it does not establish hierarchies. She added that where patriarchy is giving men certain privileges it also robs them of certain things; and that boys and men are also vulnerable, as statistics suggest that boys are also sexually abused. There is a need to question the stereotypes of girls/boys. Establishing an inter-linkage between sustainable development, gender and masculinities, she noted that there is enough data to prove that ‘Equality’ is good for development and that without equality development cannot be just. Exhorting the audience to take on a gender-just stand, she made the participants cheer the discussion with animated sloganeering of ‘jeetenge’ (we shall win).

Taking on the baton of discussions, Abhijit Das, Director, CHSJ established the connect between gender and masculinity in terms that the idea of patriarchy and masculinity is rather enduring. Making the discussion participatory, he asked the audience if they thought men should change and what change they perceive of in men. With 3/4<sup>th</sup> of the audience responding affirmatively to the question, he said that there is an underlying desire that men should change, however, men are not changing substantively. He opined that if Masculinity has to change, it needs a mirror and all of us have to be the mirror. He reflected that 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been outlined by the UN for development and of these 17 goals reduction of inequality, access to justice and achieving gender equality goals are significant to change masculinity and foster sustainable development as well as encourage men to be partners of change.

Rukmini V Rao, from Gramya Resource Centre stressed upon the need to understand all the patterns of development at different levels, such as at the level of household, livelihood, agrarian sector and in the global landscape to understand the burden of climate-change on women. Citing examples of development from global and local contexts such as Australia, Bangladesh, Peru and Telangana (India), she outlined that women are at the receiving end with change in development patterns and alteration in livelihoods across the globe and that the climate crisis has severe repercussions for women in particular.

Rakhee Bakshee, Director, Women’s Feature Service stressed upon the need to create dialogues in all spaces with young men and women and the need to involve men in development. She said
that there is a need to come out from straitjacketed gender roles and establish deeper complexities and also that there is need to make the media too gender sensitive.

Smita Khanijow from Action Aid shared experiences of the 'Beti Zindabad' campaign which champions the cause of empowering girls and women. She added that examples from study carried out by Action Aid in Punjab suggest that development has rooted out women from the agriculture scenario in Punjab as they are hardly involved in agriculture work as compared to earlier times. The mechanized technology has overtaken the agrarian sector in Punjab which has reinforced the image of macho- masculinity. Similar examples can also be given from Himachal Pradesh where pine cultivation by the forest department has rooted out women from the agriculture sector. She added that gender is not about binaries alone, we need to look at it from a life cycle approach, and we need to question the notions of equality and inequality.
STALLS

The Gender Mela was a coming together of researchers, students, NGO members, activists and practitioners. The event not only created a sustainable dialogue between parties but also made a colourful and impactful impression on attendees. A large turnout of students thronged the colorful stalls put up by organizations that are leading the gender equality campaign in Delhi. Messages and resource material on gender, particularly the importance of involving men and boys in gender issues, took centre stage amidst a carnival atmosphere.

Action India had advocacy material against violence displayed at their stall. It had some interesting and colourful sketches dealing with issues like domestic violence and consent. Their vibrant pink stickers that said “Mubarak ho! Beti hui hai” (Congrats! It’s a girl) were particularly attractive and a thoughtful way to challenge the obsession for a boy child over a girl child. KRITI had a colourful stall that attracted people with several products including items made from recycled material. The stall had a variety of products ranging from jewellery to bags and decorative material. UN Women’s HeForShe stall displayed beautiful pink badges that were being distributed upon registration and were quite popular with the young crowd. Prayatn, another member organisation of the Wajood consortium also put up a stall at the Gender Mela. They displayed attractive and informative IEC material.

What also struck a chord among the youngsters were innovative the advocacy based merchandise by MenEngage Delhi at the CHSJ stall. Mugs with messages like ‘Aggressive Masculini Tea is injurious to health’ and another that gave a thumbs up to ‘green tea’ and a thumbs down to ‘gender Inequali Tea’. Shirts with messages such as ‘This is Raju. Raju Thinks: Mard Ko Dard Nahi Hota. Raju is wrong. Mard ko dard hota hai, Rona bhi aata hai aur Darr bhi lagta hai. Don’t be like Raju!!!’ and ‘This is Munni. Munni badnam hui. Because she expresses her love and is unapologetic about relationships. Munni believes that her life is not your business. Munni is damn cool. Be like Munni!!’ There were bags that carried the message ‘Desi Mardaan Ghee
Sehat ke liye hanikarak hai’ and a picture of a desi ghee container with a moustache on it. The stall also had a lot of advocacy material on masculinity and gender.

The focus of CFAR’s stall was on sharing the findings of a study that was conducted by young boys and girls on the issue of ‘Violence against Women’. The “CFAR Youth Express”, as the stall was named, had on display a matrix of the news the youth had monitored from three newspaper - Dainik Jagran, Navbharat Times and Amar Ujala- along with the IEC materials like flash cards, pamphlets and games. The monitoring was done for 41 days from January 1-10 February 2016.

The young people, who were manning the stall, also initiated discussions on issues, which were directly or indirectly related to the subject of violence against women; in an effort to find possible solutions to prevent such violence. The members also asked students, Professors and other representatives to mentor them in this initiative. The Principal of the Miranda House appreciated this effort by CFAR’s Youth Express and declared Suraj, aged 12 years, ‘the vibrant symbol of the Gender Mela’.

The Centre for Equity and Inclusion (CEQUIN) had a handicrafts' fair in their stall. Prayatn also had a stall displaying their advocacy material.

**CATCH VOICES FROM THE GENDER MELA AT THE LINK BELOW!**
http://www.menengagedelhi.net/

**SEMINAR HALL 1:30 – 3:00 pm**

**Session: Understanding Queer**

In a time when most of us have misunderstood the ‘Q’ in LGBTQI, a session on 'Understanding Queer' organized by Nazariya was something to look forward to. **Rituparnah Borah** from Nazariya as the facilitator along with panelists Aditi A (queer poet) and Jaya Sharma (queer kinky activist”), made up for an exciting panel.
Starting from the origin of the word ‘queer’ to how, today, it “is a way of reminding us how we are looked at by the world”, Borah kick started the discussion. Giving an extremely vivid example of how the margins in a notebook are always considered the place for all the messy work to be done while the answers lie outside the margins, Borah reflected on the marginalization of the ‘queer.’ It was repeatedly iterated by the three speakers that it is important to understand that not all LGBT people are ‘queer’ because a lot of them give in to and conform to societal norms.

**Jaya Sharma** took over to say ‘queer’ can’t be seen as an ‘umbrella term’ for sexual and gender identities and that it has a meaning even without bringing in LGBT. With this, she went on to say that BDSM is not what Fifty Shades tells us and that ‘consent’ is a central force. In her well-worded poetic monologue, she affirmed that “Maybe I feel kinky is queer because the dominant can dominate only when I submit..” and talked about how BDSM is considered regressive even by a lot of feminists because of the assumption that “humiliation can’t be hot.” She mentioned that it is commendable on the part of the MH administration to host the Gender Mela but it is important that is supports the Pinjra Tod movement. She closed with a list of pointers in order to “qualify for queerness.”

**Aditi A** opened with a beautiful elocution of how, in order to understand the meaning of words, we are coded to be “dependent on what they are not, to know what they are.” She then went on to say that the word ‘queer’ for her is a “third space, outside the binary.” She talked about how she maintains a distance from the academic and theoretical approach to ‘queerness’ and how there is a need to challenge/attack the campus politics. She then split up between her lesbian identity and her queer identity; the former speaking of her sexual orientation and the latter of her activism. Going to an all-girls’ convent school, she highlighted how the game of ‘hide and seek’ with the usage of pronoun ‘she’ in her first poem, queerness and poetry went hand in hand for her from the beginning. She called for a more engaged and aware approach to surroundings for one to be ‘queer’ and not just attending Gender melas. She ended with her poem titled ‘Privilege’:

**Privilege**

*They always ask us so who’s the man who’s the woman I tell them,*
Listen, I don’t think we have the privilege to pretend to be what we’re not when we’re too busy being people we really are

Listen, I tell them I don’t think we have the privilege to play with things we don’t believe in when we’re too busy feeling, fighting breaking, breathing and believing

When they ask us so who’s the man who’s the woman

I say, listen we don’t have the time to live in boxes when we’re too busy gazing the skies

You don’t have the privilege when you’re too busy digging burrows you call homes and we call burying holes

Listen, we’re too busy fucking and fucking your gender roles.

The session ended with a round of questions and comments from the audience. To one of the questions, Aditi replied that being queer is a big responsibility and you wake up every morning with the thought, “What more should I queer today?” To a question that said “In a nutshell, can it be said that queerness is subjective?” Jaya Sharma replied that it is but she’d still defend her idea of queerness. And I’d like to add to it by saying that defending one’s own idea of queerness is welcomed and justified when one is also welcoming enough to let others justify/defend their stand because ‘queerness’, out of all else, doesn’t work on the basis of exclusion or set standards. As Borah said, “It isn’t about mainstreaming LGBT, but about bringing queer in the mainstream.”
Inter College Debate on 'Religion Adversely Affects the Status of Women'

An inter–college debate organized at the Gender Mela saw students from various colleges of Delhi hit the topic 'Religion Adversely Affects the Status of Women'. The participating colleges were JNU, PGDAV, Jamia Milia Islamia, Jesus and Mary College, Lady Hardinge Medical College and Motilal Nehru College.

A host of students for the motion including Shivani Roy, Bhargavi Das, Chandrashekhar and others brainstormed on different aspects in which religion has been denigrating the status of women in society. Participants deliberated that as viewed across religions, the high posts of priests and cardinals have never been occupied by women. Religion restricts the entry of women in places of worship, and apart from this it impedes women from pursuing education and also contains the rights of property and ownership to women, they added.

Taking a different stance, participants including Kaushiki, Srikumar, Mehjabi and others speaking against the motion reflected religion is intrinsically not anti-women. All religions talk about equality and but religion as interpreted through ‘patriarchy’ is the root cause of the secondary status accorded to women.

The judges for the competition were Sanyogita of CFAR and Abhijit Das of CHSJ.
SEMINAR HALL 3:15 – 4:30 pm

Session: Multiple Masculinities in an Urban World and Implications for Struggle in Gender Justice

The session saw experts from civil society platform and MenEngage Delhi platform deliberate on the theme of multiple masculinities in an urban world. Suneeta Dhar from Jagori set the background for the discussion on the involvement of men in the struggle for gender justice. Satish Singh from CHSJ outlined that it has been discerned from CHSJ’s work that the biggest challenge that remains in the struggle for gender justice is ‘Patriarchy’ and ‘Hegemonic Masculinity’. Patriarchy exists because of hegemonic masculinities. Adding on to the discussion Manak Matiyani from YP foundation reflected that there is an assumption that ‘masculinity’ gives power but it does not give one power instead it gives ‘entitlement.’ Hegemonic masculinity is about feeling entitled to power but not having the power. Ahmad Faraz coordinator of the MenEngage Delhi network illustrated through the interaction of the network across colleges in Delhi that urban settings like Delhi have multitudes of masculinities which are drastically different and diverse. The notions of masculinity are deeply rooted in practice and discourse. The discussion wrapped up on a note that the whole work of masculinities is focusing on inclusiveness.

FIND THE VIDEO OF THE SESSION ON ‘MASculinities in an Urban World’ AT THE LINK BELOW

http://www.menengagedelhi.net/day---1-multiple-masculinities-in-an-urban-world.html
Session: The CFAR Youth Express

One of the highlights of the Gender Mela was the experience sharing session that was conducted by the youth, who were manning the “CFAR Youth Express” stall. Mentors like Bijayalaxmi Nanda, Professor, Miranda College, Rakhee Bakshee, Journalist, Women Feature service and Babita, Professor, Laxmi Bai College, along with a number of college students and representatives from civil society organizations, attended the session.

During this session, members of the “CFAR Youth Express” from - Saboli Khadda, Kalyanpuri and Nangal Raya - shared their learning on the issue of violence against women during the course of the monitoring of media reports for 41 days from 1st January 2016 to 10 February 2016. All the mentors and others present at the session praised the members of the “CFAR Youth Express” for collecting, analyzing and sharing the data. Some of the young people also shared their own personal experience of dealing with domestic violence.

Rakhee Bakshee said that, “The insights shared by the members of the “ CFAR Youth Express” is indeed very important and very useful for all of us and it will definitely help us to find out why cases of dowry and domestic violence are being given inadequate importance by the media” She added that, developing the habit of reading newspapers every day and gaining knowledge is a very good pursuit as knowledge is power and that Women Feature Services welcomes members of the Youth Express who want to learn more about the issue and the role of communication.”

Meanwhile, Babita expressed her appreciation to Miranda House and other civil society organizations’ for hosting the Gender Mela and said, “Domestic Violence is happening not just in slums and poor communities but also among the middle class and the well to do We have to work together to eradicate the issues of violence against women from society.”

One of the student's said, “It is very important for women to raise their voice against any injustice or discrimination in the family or society because no one will help anyone unless we want to help ourselves. ”

A street Play on “Domestic Violence” that was performed by young people brought out their conviction and understanding of the issue and the laws that have been framed to reduce and
prevent domestic violence. On popular demand the play was also performed on the second day and was watched by nearly 350 students. Many of them remarked that after watching the play they had gained a new perspective and understanding of the PWDVA 2005.

**Audience Feedback**

“The whole event was informative. It provided a platform to discuss major issues and get more awareness about them. We would like to be a part of it in the future.” – *Karthik Saini, Ramjas College and Shubham Pilania, Ramjas College*

“This issue requires more attention than issues like corruption. Because it is having a catastrophic affect on society and youth”.

“The Gender Mela was a really innovative attempt, especially the play. I would also like to say that what I liked best was the enthusiasm it created among youth and it’s connect with the slums, community school students and local people. I would like to be a part of it, willingly”. – *Annu, Miranda House*

“I liked the initiative and was inspired by the way things were planned and shaped”.- *Dolly Verma, Miranda House*

“It was an incredible show, full of confidence and creativity. Thank you so much for your time and for educating us about various forms of violence”.

“You are doing excellent work in this field. I hope you will get help from many more NGOs. Although you are working in the slums, I am getting knowledge from you. Thank you for this amazing session. I just loved and enjoyed your songs and performance. All the best for the future”.

“A really innovative and encouraging initiative. Keep up the good work!! We will be happy to come along with you in this noble mission” – *Deepti Sharma, Miranda House, Delhi University*

“The CFAR Youth Express initiative is a great and unique effort in itself. Empowering and enlightening youth and children of slums or other backward areas is a good step towards change. Change starts at the ground level and the roots of a society are its children and young
people. They will be able to speak up against harassment, violence and rape only if they are educated and I can see the CFAR Youth express as once such initiative”. – Rimpi, Miranda House.

“Thank you so much for your presentation, God bless you! Shandar, Zabardast, Zindabad! “

“This initiative is very promising and I’m convinced that it is very strong and impactful. CFAR has done a great service by addressing the issue of domestic violence and women’s security. I will be very happy to help. Good luck to the team”. – Aditi Choudhary, Miranda House

“CFAR you are doing a great job. I wish there were more people to see and be inspired by the efforts of these kids. This is true activism that you people are doing and it has been an inspiration for us. Thank you for conceptualizing the Youth Express initiative. We would love to work for you. The nukkad natak was a bang on!” – Adishi Gupta, Feminism in India, Writer and editor.

“It is a great initiative though we need to look into why these things are happening. But we will be able to create change only when we understand the psyche of the male and the female world”. – Megha Kaushik

“Loved the performance! We support you in our cause. May we rise high and empower each other”. – Soumya

“A very good initiative. We support you in your cause. All the best!” – Arushi.

“All of you are wonderful. You are doing so well”.

[Image]
NESCAFE LAWNS 5:00 – 06:00 pm

Cultural Performance by Goonj

Students grooved to the music of Goonj a Sufi rock band based in Delhi. The band played soulful music in a modern contemporary rock version. The band included Rohit Joshi (RJ) on the lead vocals, Ronit Sharma as the bassist, Rishabh Sharma on the lead guitar, Natansh on the synthesizer, Rey on drums and table and Aman on the rhythm guitar. Goonj had volunteered to perform at the Gender Mela after seeing the buzz around the event on social media and with a desire to do their bit for the cause.

DAY 2, Feb 12, 2016

SEMINAR HALL 10:00 – 11:30 am

Roundtable: Convergence of Contemporary Youth Led Campaigns

A plethora of youth led movements took center stage on the second day of the Gender Mela giving it a fiery impetus. Discussions focused on what was unique about these movements like Happy To Bleed, North East Network, Joint Action Committee and the Rohith Vemula campaign
and how they were not afraid to challenge authority. “We are important voices of dissent that must be recognized as for the first time in the campus students have come together cutting across colleges and movements in solidarity with the issues we represent,” said Shambhavi Vikram, a young activist from Happy To Bleed. Kawalpreet from JAC said, “Yet, our posters and other material are torn down and we are not allowed to express ourselves.” North East Network’s Tara Amrapali said, “These movements are also struggling to be accepted by the older movements and gain the credibility that they deserve.”

**STUDENT ACTIVITY CENTRE 11:30 – 01:30**

**Film Screening of 'Mardistan'**

A documentary named 'Mardistan' was screened by the team of KRITI. The documentary encompassed the various dimensions of masculinity and was a good way to orient students about the various aspects of masculinity and how it works in our society. The documentary covered aspects of masculinity under caste and class, dominant masculinity portraying men as the inheritors/protectors and the women having to conform to the norms to be able to fit under the “good woman” tag. How some men indulge in domestic violence only to gain acceptance in the society where beating/abusing your wife is considered a measure of your masculinity.

It talked about the struggles of a homosexual who was forced to marry in order to get acceptance in the society and the kind of harassment he had to face once he decided to come out of the closet and declare his sexual preference. Even though he had his wife’s support, he was subjected to mockery and insults on a daily basis.
Very interestingly the documentary also highlighted the thought process of young college boys who have a single point agenda of creating a good first impression on the girls and the sooner one gets into a relationship the more masculine he is considered to be in his friend circle. The constant peer pressure and the inability to befriend a girl often results in the aggressive behavior of the boys with the girls around them trying to prove their masculinity.

Another issue highlighted in the documentary was that of the caste/class based masculinity where sodomy/male rape was used as a method to exert power. It was seen that boys who have undergone violence in their childhood tend to indulge in domestic violence or drug use as adults.

The documentary shed light on some important issues which show the current manifestation of masculinity and helped the students to develop a perspective on the issue.

**STUDENT ACTIVITY CENTRE 1:15 pm-3:15**

**Film Screening of ‘Danish Girl’**

Mela-goers witnessed the screening of ‘The Danish Girl’ organised by Miranda House WDC. The film screening saw a fairly good participation... Amidst all that this movie is being lauded and criticized for globally, it is an undeniable fact that it sparked some discussions and dialogues around the much-less talked about trans community.
Games on Gender

A variety of interactive games provided a riot of fun to all at the Gender Mela. A life size Snakes and Ladder game provided insights into social norms. The Balancing Balloon game reflected on child rights and child care. There was active participation by members from communities in which International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) is running programmes.

STUDENT ACTIVITY CENTRE 3:15 to 05:00 pm

Session: Intersectionalities of Caste and Gender

A session that strikingly brought to light the intersectionality of women’s movements was the one conducted by the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). Tribal scholar and activist Abhay Xaxa gave a brief introduction to the session, saying that the NCDHR had been formed with the agenda of bringing to light caste based violence and, over time, also found itself involved in advisory work because of resistance from the government. It then began collaborating with other human rights groups. Xaxa's introduction was followed by Dyuti, a researcher at NCDHR, starting the discussion by simply (yet powerfully) asking the audience what caste is according to them. And from there, with the help of PowerPoint slides, she expanded to how we are always taught to believe that caste is a simple hierarchisation and most of us grow up believing that farce.

After Dyuti, NCDHR’s Nidhin Shobhana explained how there is an aspect of the division of occupation and as one keeps going down the hierarchy, the option of ‘choosing’ an occupation
for oneself also sees a decreasing trend. He then explained how marriages in most Indian cultures are supposed to be within the same sub-caste and caste but outside the gotra (that is, ‘exogamy superimposed by endogamy’). And from there, he connected how marriages are a way to control women’s sexuality, which in turn ensures sustenance and reproduction of further caste systems.

A documentary titled, “I’m Dalit, how are you?” was then screened, highlighting the state of Dalit women, children and men and how they are made to indulge in manual scavenging even till today, despite it being abolished in 1993. The documentary also highlighted how Dalit women are ‘Dalits within Dalits.’

Shobhana then talked about the startling statistics representing the access of Dalits to higher education and highlighted how there was a mass capturing of vacant posts in most institutions by the Savarnas, post-independence. He then moved on to discuss the intersectionality and inclusivity of anti-caste movements and activists. Saying “even if we are not affected by caste, we are all beneficiaries of the anti-caste movements,” he reflected on how public utilities are ‘public’ because of anti-caste movements. He explained how Horizontalism, a very significant social relationship, is in opposition to vertical hierarchies and people from different social movements interact; stating the recent #OccupyUGC movement as an example.

It is significant to identify the importance of giving voice to organisations like these through sessions and stalls during events like the Gender Mela in a society where patriarchal systems affect people in more ways than one. It ensures that there is move against all levels of oppression which in turn leads to a more intersectional, unified and strengthened fight.
**NESCAFE LAWNS 3.15-4.30**

**Nukkad Natak Competition**

A vibrant Nukkad Natak Competition with closely competing groups from Daulat Ram College and Rajdhani College riveted all attention.

The judges for the competition were Shilpi Marwah of Asmita Theatre and Jagdish Lal of CHSJ.

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**NESCAFE LAWNS 4.30 - 05:00 pm**

**Flash Mob performances by CEQUIN and OBR** set to foot tapping music created awareness on issues of gender rights and justice, attracting a large crowd of youngsters.
Cultural performance by Dhruv Visvanath

One-man bands are hard to come by and Dhruv Visvanath is a welcome breath of fresh air in the indie music scene. The Delhi-based percussive guitarist is one of the finest musicians and composers in India. He was recently named as one of the 30 Great Guitarists ‘Under 30’ in the world by Acoustic Guitar Magazine USA, alongside artists like Ed Sheeran, Newton Faulkner and Sungha Jung and was the only Indian on the list. At the age of 24, Dhruv has already completed over 300 performances and is a regular in the NH7 Weekender line-up. His music had the swaying crowd at Miranda House asking for more.
To open the session, three extraordinary women from the organization People’s Action for People in Need (PAPN) based in Sirmour District Himachal Pradesh, provided an insight into some critical issues affecting women and marginalized communities in the region. **Sumitra** from PAPN spoke of how the division of resources along class, caste and gender lines. The government is allotting land to the ‘original owners’, but it recognizes only those who owned land before 1950, and these are comprised mostly of rich, upper caste men. The poor and Dalits are completely excluded. Even the compensation received by families in lieu of land acquisition for power projects, names only men as ‘owners’ even though it is women who tend to land. Women’s ownership of property is practically nil even though 80% of work in the fields is done by women. Other issues like child marriage, trafficking and poor educational opportunities for women are also prevalent in the region.

After providing this background, Sumitra introduced two women from the community who have been organizing others to respond to some of these challenges that women face. The first of these is **Sunita Thakur** who created a collective of women to have an alcohol shop demolished. Sunita explained that men were spending all the money that they earned on alcohol and not providing for household expenses. Therefore the women came together and against men’s opposition, led a non-violent andolan to catch the attention of the SDM and panchayat members. They took a petition to the SDM but when they were not entertained, they held a 5 hour chakka jam which forced the panchayat to take action. A resolution was passed by the panchayat to have the alcohol theka removed. In fact, now women’s permission is required before any additional theka is put up. Sunita highlighted that there were some men who supported them in their struggle, but the entire protest was led by women. Another woman from the community, a panchayat pradhan explained how in her village, they had raised awareness among women that they too can take work under MNREGA. Earlier women believed that this scheme was only for men, but after a lot of awareness-raising, women started taking work under the scheme. She said that this has led to economic empowerment and women are now able to stand up to their husband and say that ‘now I am also earning money’. She emphasized that she is also taking efforts to ensure that women participate in gram panchayats. In the past, women would not be allowed to come for panchayats, but now there is awareness and they also table their problems in the panchayat.
After the inspiring narratives of the sisters from Himachal, the session moved on to the panel speakers. **Bijayalaxmi Nanda**, head of the WDC in Miranda House introduced the three speakers.

**Gender and Climate Change**

**Aditi Kapoor**, journalist with two decades of experience in evidence based advocacy and research, works on integrating gender in the state level climate action plans. She is also co-founder of Alternative Futures, a development research and communication group.

*Linkages between gender and climate change:* Aditi Kapoor outlined the many facets and interlinkages between gender and climate change. To begin with, she stated that the burden of the impact climate change (lack of water, failing crops, access to resources and so on) is being borne disproportionately by women. Women have many more responsibilities both in terms of fetching water, fuel and so on, but also cultural responsibilities - decoration, religious requirements, procuring spices for cooking, personal enhancement and so on. In terms of assets and access to resources, women have none. But men have land, livestock, (IAY houses are also on joint name, not women’s), knowledge, credit and a health body! Women eat last, and eat the least nutrition food, they bear the burden of reproductive health and don’t seek health care when required. When there is food scarcity, women are affected most. When there is no water, men migrate but women cannot leave and they are left to deal with fending for the families, tilling the land, doing hard labour and so on. When money is less, they are left to take debts – mortgage their limited assets, jewellery and so on. Moreover, even the solutions that have been offered to mitigate the impacts of climate change unfairly burden women. Some kinds of Adaptive agricultural interventions (such as organic/NPM agriculture to restore soil fertility and retain soil moisture), require even long hours of work by women.
**Gaps in Policy:** Despite these close interlinkages between gender and climate change, Aditi pointed out that National Climate Action plan has only one para recognizes women’s vulnerability, but suggests nothing to address it. This gender blindness is translated into state action plans as well, which lack any analysis of the differential impacts of climate change on women and their differential capacities in dealing with them. The entire approach is technomanagerial and there is no scope for bottoms up learning from practice. Vulnerable studies only focus on physical natural resources, not on users and social stratification of the users. Structural essentials are missing – women’s strategic roles in decision making, participation at different fora, ownership and control of resources.

**Policy barriers:** This gender blindness stems in part from the government’s lack of capacity to appreciate gender, the low status of nodal departments. There is no capacity building/exposure on gender or climate change to government authorities. Further, there is no gender based natural resources policy and no gender-based disaster policy at all. Moreover, women related departments, plans, policies unconcerned with climate change impacts. Gender mainstreaming in climate change is a tall order.

Aditi also spoke about some efforts that her organization has taken to include gender in climate plans and governance structures. The policy ask is to include gender components in state climate plans, training of elected women panchayat leaders, inclusion of climate risks in gender empowerment policies. The successes of this work have been that now gender components are a must for all state climate plans. There is a training manual for women panchayat leaders and capacities built for over 150 PRI women in Bihar with PRI and agriculture department.

To conclude, Aditi emphasized that policy makers need to recognize that the loss/damage to women due to climate change is disproportionately greater and some adaptive interventions also require more investment of women’s time. Thus climate action plans must be made with a gender lens. In order to address climate change impact with a gender perspective, it is important to address some important underlying issues especially inequality in assets – land rights lease, livestock, forest/water rights for women must be realized. In terms of knowledge and skills, women must have access to technology to lessen labour, and should also be able to use of their knowledge especially because traditional knowledge is also what experts are recommending. Finally, even if women have knowledge, they cannot take decisions at home ( what
crops/seeds/livestock, what government scheme to access, what livelihood option to choose, to migrate or not? and so women’s decision making needs to be strengthened.

**Women Engaged in Sanitation Work**

Sanghamitra Acharya, CSMCH, JNU, in her presentation highlighted the collective impact of gender and caste on Dalit women, by reflecting on the condition of women engaged in sanitation work. She began by presenting data on the poor status of women in India, in terms of education, work and political participation. Apart from the fact that women do not get opportunities, she stressed on the problem of women’s socialization into gendered roles. It is telling that in terms of decision making, only one in four women participate in every decisions related to their own health care, purchases of large household goods, visit family and relatives, purchase items of daily use. There is also an urban rural divide in this regard – women who have spent more than 10 yrs in education, and are urban are more likely to participate in decision making. Son preference is also expressed by women themselves, due in part to the pressures that they face. Data shows that women with two daughters are more likely to want a third child than women with two sons. Even when it comes to violence, more than 50% of women themselves justify wife beating for reasons such as disrespect for in laws or neglect of house work or children.
Within this discriminated group, there are Dalit women. Almost half of India’s 160 million dalits are women. They comprise 16% of India’s total female population, and 8% of the total population. This significantly large group are isolated on various axes – economic, religious, political and ideological. Violence on Dalit women takes various forms but only 1% of cases end in conviction. The proportion of those in the lowest wealth quintile among Dalits is high (28%), second only to STs (50%), and proportion of highest quintile, is greatest in those from ‘other’ castes. Similarly, women exposure to media is much lesser among Dalits than other groups (except tribals). Thus Dalit women face a double burden – that of being dalit and women. They feel disconnected from the mainstream women’s movements, as very often, women academicians and forerunners of the gender cause consider women as a one homogenous group as far as the issues related to women are concerned. At the most disparities are superfluously addressed by way of socioeconomic hierarchies.

The case of women sanitation workers amply illustrates the impact of this burden on women. In India, sanitation workers are exclusively dalit. It is worth noting that sanitation is a priority development issue both in India as well as internationally. However, the thrust is on coverage of toilets. There is recognition of inequity in access to toilets between slum, non-slum, urban, rural and so on, but those who lend their lives for safe disposal are not within the purview of the MDGs or the Swacchh Bharat Abhiyan. This is work which is neatly linked to caste; if that wasn’t the case, only Dalits would not be doing it. The impact of the work on women is staggering, and much of it is linked to the poor working conditions. In contrast to other developed and even developing countries, India provides barely any precautionary measures for sanitation workers. The safety kit provided is inadequate and unwieldy. To add to this, the remuneration is a pittance. Yet, this important issue of who cleans India is lost in the Swacchh Bharat Abhiyan. On the one hand there is a lot of emphasis on picking up after oneself. We have seen photo ops of dignitaries sweeping the floors. But data does not really reflect this. The reality is that work is being done by a particular community, and mostly by women. In a digital India, we are talking of smart cities – but who is building these cities, what about smart sewers and smart drainage. Even though manual scavenging is banned by law, it continues and the people who do this work are not provided any safety.
Interactive session

After having listened to the two presentations, Sehjo Singh of ActionAid encouraged students to try and identify within their own lives, how they see intersectionalities playing out. Students shared examples of such intersections that they have seen or heard of. One student related how lower caste women in Gorakhpur are not allowed to cover their breasts. Another student pointed out the intersection of being poor, migrant and a woman. She related the example of a domestic worker who came to Delhi to work, was raped by her employer and then married off by her family to an old man. Another student pointed out how even in urban areas which are considered progressive, a house in a “Muslim area” costs less because it is assumed that Hindus would not want to live there.

Sehjo also encouraged students to think about the new fad of ‘sustainable development’ and reflected on how sustainability is becoming a concern for the world only when it comes to the development of the poor. When the rich were amassing wealth, there was no concern for the environment or the plant. But now when the development of the poorest of the poor is being spoken about, suddenly the burden of saving the earth is also being put on their shoulders. She encouraged students to think of this paradox.
Q & A

What is the impact of climate change on women in urban areas?

The responsibilities of women in urban areas are in fact similar to those in rural areas, but often not recognized. For instance urban farming is highly prevalent but there are no schemes or plans for urban farmers. Apart from this, the impact of climate change in the form of disasters such as floods also burden women in different ways. The Tsunami experience shows that women’s mortality is greater in disasters. Moreover, disaster management plans do not operate with a gender lens. If women lose their homes and have to live in camps, sufficient supplies are not provided for menstrual hygiene, reproductive health supplies etc. These are very important for women especially in the reproductive age group, but get missed out and women face the burden in the form of reproductive tract infections.
Session: Understanding the Perspectives of Sexual Minorities

This session brought together activists and representatives of collectives of sex workers and sexual minorities, children of sex workers, a transgender, a Hijra and a lawyer, all in one panel. The session was opened with great enthusiasm by the powerful elocution of the facilitator Amit Kumar from All India Network of Sex Workers (AINSW).

The session had five speakers Ms. Kusum (President, All India Network of Sex Workers), Ms. Seema (Durbar Mahila Samanvay Committee or DMSC), Maya Urmi Aher (Pehchan), Sintu Bagui (ANANDAM), and Tripti Tandon (Lawyers Collective).

**Kusum**, President, All India Association of Sex Workers, began by posing a question to the audience – What comes to their mind when they think of sex workers? Who are these women? Why do they do this work? Are they a stain on society? Are they spoiling the society? Should we be ending sex work? Students responded in different ways, some expressed that sex workers were not evil or a stain, but some are forced into sex work. Another student expressed how she used to think that sex workers were not good women, but when she went into red light areas, she realized how hard they work and they are also like others, trying to fend for their families. Ms Kusum clarified that not all sex workers are forced into sex work. Some do it of their own volition, while some are forced by circumstances. She stressed that most sex workers are happy doing this work. She emphasized that they do not do anything wrong – they don’t steal from anyone, they don’t force people to come. They only provide a service – somewhat like a doctor. People come to them voluntarily, some seek them out. Sex workers solicit in different ways – some stand on the streets, others are home-based. Not all of them are ‘out’. Some sex workers hide the fact that they do this work because of the stigma attached to it as well. In fact some families also don’t know that women do sex work.
Further, Kusum described how sex workers are exploited especially by the government and the police. She explained that the government as well as general people look for all sorts of ways to evict them – sometimes they build schools or mandirs near brothels and then expect sex workers to leave. Why do they not do a survey of the area before building schools and mandirs instead? It is only to harass sex workers. She also explained how as per policy, a child who is over 18 years of age is separated from the mother if she is a sex worker. When sex workers are raped no one believes them. In contrast to how society and police react when ‘respectable’ women are raped, the treatment given to sex workers is appalling. The police will say ‘Why did she solicit sex? It is her fault she asked for it’, as if a sex worker being raped is less reprehensible than any other woman being raped.

Kusum narrated how these problems faced by sex workers led to the formation of the All India Sex Workers Alliance. It is a network of 30 CBOs working with sex workers, who advocate collectively for their rights and against harmful government policies. It arose from the need to support each other and also advocate for the rights of their children.
Kusum then went on to describe the positive role that sex workers have played in government programs, especially in controlling HIV. As a result of their involvement, prevalence of HIV among sex workers is even less than the general population. Sex workers consider it their responsibility to inform their clients that they have to protect themselves. She said that the government has utilized sex workers to control HIV and we have cooperated with them. But if sex workers go to the government and ask for pension, the govt will say “madam you have earned so much why do you need a pension”. Why is that the case? Sex workers are also citizens of this country like others. They should get the same rights. Kusum ended by encouraging people to help eliminate the stigma around sex work. She encouraged them to join to struggle to decriminalize sex work and speak to people in their homes, schools about the issue and why it is important. It is important to bring the issue out in to the open and talk freely about it – “baat karne se baat banti hai”.

Seema, Durbar Mahila Samanvay Committee (DMSC) began by talking about the origins of the Durbar for sex workers which operates in Sonagachi. It began in reaction to the exploitation by police, who used to pick up sex workers and drive customers away. So they came together to defend and support each other.

One of the major contributions of the Darbar has been to create a bank to collect their money. The need for this arose because the police used to raid brothels and loot all the money. So sex workers decided to start their own bank, called the USHA multipurpose cooperative society in Sonagachhi. It has only sex workers money and has a turnover of Rs 21 crore annually. Seema then went on to talk about how DMSC has established an anti-sex trafficking ‘self-regulatory board’ constituted by sex workers, who themselves monitor if young girls are being forced into prostitution. They operate in 76 brothels since 1995, and have assisted the government with rescue of 1200 girls so far.

She ended by saying that sex workers must be given the rights of an entrepreneur. “Someone who drives a car, has a store, does some business is recognized as an entrepreneur. We also do hard work and we also have clients. If the government accepts them as workers, they should also accept us. The first step towards this would be to decriminalize the work that we do.”
Maya Urmi Aher belongs to the Hijra community and works with an organization called Pehchaan on the rights of Hijras. Through her talk, Maya provided the audience with a sense of what it means to live as a Hijra. She first clarified that Hijras and transgenders are different. Hijra is a distinct community with its own rules and customs. All transgenders are not Hijras. In common parlance, Hijra is used as a gali, especially to put down men. People have different experiences and perceptions of Hijras. Many people consider them dangerous and violent. That might be true for some people, but all Hijras are not like that. In fact sometimes when you see a Hijra ‘misbehaving’, consider that it might be a defence mechanism for the every aggression that they face. Maya narrated the kinds of troubles she faces in everyday life. For instance, in a metro, usually no one will occupy the seat next to her as if they will catch some infection from her. She urged the audience to imagine what it must feel like to live as an outcaste. The very blatant discrimination faced by the community is one of the reasons why they are not able to get an education, because schools and students don’t treat them well. She gave her own example – she is an MBA, but she did her course by correspondence because she could not face the everyday humiliation of going to college. She said that even though she is speaking at a panel here in Miranda House, she could never imagine being able to study here.

Maya explained how discrimination and harassment has become a part of Hijra lives. Sexual assault is extremely common, and especially by police. She recounted how she herself had been raped by police while standing on the road and soliciting. She was doing it because no one would give her work and so her only options were to beg on the street, or dance in a bar, or solicit sex
on the street. She was picked up by the police who did not charge her with anything but instead raped her.

While common people say all sorts of things about Hijras, and their peculiar occupations, there is a need to understand why they resort to these. “No one will hire Hijras even as a house-worker. If I open a parlour, they will say I am doing sex work under the pretext of a parlour. If I start a dance class, who will send their children to me?” Even when they go to doctors, they treat them but don’t touch them. Is that how anyone should be treated?

Lastly, Maya spoke of the NALSA judgment which has recognized a ‘third gender’. But she describes it as an ‘incomplete judgment’, because even though the law recognizes a third gender, it does not accept their sexual behaviour. Section 377 is still not decriminalized.

Sintu Bagui (ANANDAM), said she is the child of a sex worker and spoke about her life as a sex worker’s child and also as a transgender person. She described how in sex worker families, it is assumed that the daughter of a sex worker will be a sex worker and a son will perhaps be a ‘dalal’ (pimp). But sex workers have other aspirations – they want to educate their children, they want them to have dreams and accomplish their dreams. But society does not allow this to happen. Sex worker’s children face discrimination from various quarters. “Teachers look at us and say vaishya ka ladka hai. When we used to go for durga puja we were not allowed to mingle with other children. When I was small I used to think why was I born in such a place where my identity is so stigmatized. We used to tell our mother leave this work we will go somewhere else. Then we realized that our mother is working hard and she is doing a lot to raise us. Why can we not be proud of this?”
It was to respond to these problems that DMSC started a sex-workers' children's organizations. The organization works to encourage education, especially girls' education. They counsel students to study as much as they want and to pursue their dreams. Some children want to be police because they see police raiding the brothels! Others have aspirations such as wanting to become football players. In fact some have even become part of football teams and one is being mentored by Manchester United. “We want our children to play in the world cup!” she said.

The work has been able to show sex workers children that they too have a life and they can also fulfil their dreams like other children.

**Tripti Tandon**, Lawyers Collective, spoke of how we understand sex work to be a very gendered phenomenon. We believe that men seek sex outside of marriage and that is the basis of sex work. It feeds hetero-normative notions that the man is always out on the prowl looking for women to have sex with, and women will ‘offer’ the sex and hence they are subjugated in sex work. This is also why a lot of feminists also believe sex work to be oppressive by definition. Now that we have a greater understanding of LGBT rights we must also understand sexual diversity – she said that if a traditional institution like marriage can be opened up, then why can’t the conversation about sex work? Why can’t we broaden our understanding of sex workers? A lot of transgender persons are sex workers, but policies look at the sex worker as a woman. IPTA is gender neutral, but government policies do nothing for men and transgender sex workers. There are no protections for them. In the past, Tripti explained, that transgenders in our country were part of society with distinct roles - they were managers of the king’s harems, strategists accompanying the king and so on. Those roles were because the hijra was considered asexual and so they were put into these ‘safe’ roles like managing the harem. So traditionally, the hijra has been seen as asexual. The NALSA judgment also follows this tradition – it recognizes transgender persons, but wants them to continue being asexual. Even while doing advocacy, the government is open to giving them rights now, but they don’t want to acknowledge them as sexual beings and are unwilling to decriminalize their sexual behaviour. She ended by urging the audience to think beyond the binaries of gender and look at sexual diversity in its myriad forms – whether it is the recognition of transgender persons, or sex workers.
Q & A

The students asked a whole lot of questions and clarifications to the panel.

Q. To Sintu: Do a lot of children of sex workers become transgender? Sintu responded that being transgender is an awareness of one’s gender identity. It has nothing to do with being raised by a sex worker, or being raped or anything else – these are just stereotypes.

Q. Will changing the law and decriminalizing sex work change social perceptions about sex workers?

Tripti responded that we don’t believe that law should change only when society changes. Society has to change on its own. But with the 377 issue one can say quite confidently that even though the law has not changed, the social perceptions have. Therefore it is not about which comes before the other. Moreover, the legalization of sex work must not be just a notional thing – it must come with benefits.

Q. Should sex workers not pay tax?

Tripti responded that it is interesting that we talk of taxing sex workers before extending opportunities. Since the profession is criminalized, it is not possible to pay tax. But sex workers pay all kinds of ‘hafta’ to police and other authorities, which is perhaps much more than the tax they would pay. Further, Maya added that sex workers do pay tax – service tax, vat, property tax, water tax and so on – they just don’t pay income tax. So government services must be extended to them as citizens.
FIND BELOW COVERAGE OF THE GENDER MELA!


SEMINAR HALL  2:00 – 3:30

Film Screening of 'I Am A Girl'

Directed by Rebecca Barry, 'I Am A Girl' was screened by ITVS to an eager crowd. The film is the coming of age story of six girls. On the brink of womanhood, they become something extraordinary. As they come of age in the way their culture dictates, we see remarkable heartwarming stories of resilience, bravery and humour.

STUDENTS ACTIVITY CENTRE 2:30 – 04:30 PM

Session: Faculty and Practitioners' Meet
The faculty and practitioner’s meet organised by Miranda House WDC was attended by a relatively smaller group but was much successful in creating a dialogue on intersectionalities and various gender issues relative to diverse aspects of the society.

Moderated by Bijayalaxmi Nanda of Miranda House the session was held on the third day of Gender Mela. Nanda called out for creating solidarities through this meet. She added that the Gender Mela could be held chapter wise as well, it was a good start but had limitations. She called for coming together and taking the issues forward with research in form of compendiums, written and oral focusing on specific case studies; e.g. a child sex ratio compendium.

Vinita Bakshi, media person on women issues opined that they want to aim at a society which does not leave out the marginalized societies. She said that what makes human beings different from other species is culture. Do we attribute marginalization to culture, in which case to do away with marginalization would mean doing away with culture? She asked if culture is responsible for our status and what is the way forward. She added that we do not notice minute abuses like the abuses based on the private parts of women and even the blessings like, ‘Saubhagyavati Bhava’ or ‘Doodho nahao puto falo’. She said that it is necessary to question these as they are casting women in a mould that is numbifying.

Mansi Mishra, from Centre for Social Research, focused on pre natal sex selection and surrogacy. She questioned how girls are placed in the society. She brought attention to the fact that there is no training of practitioners from sex selection to ‘Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao’. She said there can be no empowerment if the people working on these issues don’t know the linkages and can’t get together to work as a team. She said there are pressures on the concerned authorities to show raised data on the number of girls going to school. The ratio in reality is not increasing. She also pointed out that the issue is not just about education; as in Haryana, where she works, people already send their children to school. Then what is this empowerment plan? She said that the parents ask what more can they do apart from send their children to school, to which there seems no answer under this scheme.

Talking about surrogacy she said that now it is being pushed towards a ban. Are we then aiming at an underground market? There is a tussle between Artificial Reproductive Technology (ART) and surrogacy now. She questioned what do we want in terms of sustainable development?
Researcher Sneha Banerjee said that there is a need to look critically at the work on surrogacy. How do we understand female body, technology and infertility? She urged to look at antenatal history. We want to control the reproductive aspects of a situation and it became an elite issue but is it? There is a need for a self-reflexive mode here. Industry does control the surrogate’s body but we need to disassociate from the ideology that sees women entirely as victims as did the first wave feminism in India. While making an argument for regulation of ART, it is important to keep in mind the alternate voices like the queer voices. Sexuality is subversive and it is important that a united voice does not exist. She called for a critical examination of solidarity. Is One Billion Raising representative of the same voices? Can feminism exist in isolation as a singular voice? Micro level studies also show the overlap of certain classes and castes, the how can so many voices on such huge level, as in One Billion Raising, be singular?

Nupur Rai, from the political science department of Kamla Nehru College, said she has worked on body and consent. She said there is a lot of limitation in the legal discourse on rights for women. Talking about sex work she said, “There is no criminalization but there is also no protection. Being a prostitute, what choices do I have? There is no exit policy from institutions such as prostitution or marriage. Then what choices do we really have?” She argued that the way women understand law and society depends on how they understand their bodies.

Babita Verma, from Laxmi Bai College, talked about the panchayat and political empowerment of women. Have women actually changed and become a part of the decision making process. She said the women who become sarpanch are mostly the oldest women in villages, the dais (midwives) as she helped in the birthing process of most of the village, or the previous male sarpanch’s wife. In many areas people don’t know the name of the woman sarpanch and use her husband’s name in relation to refer to her. A study over a gap of a year showed that these women became more empowered over time as they became better informed. It was also important to lose jargons while talking about empowerment and resistance to these women. These women can identify discrimination but all that is required is to talk in their language.

The 73rd amendment has helped achieve this and make women understand the importance of education as well. She also pointed out that the concept of PradhanPati, where in it is claimed that in reality it is the husbands who rule in areas with a female sarpanch, is a myth. She said that husbands help too in campaigning, consulting and encouraging. Women in panchayats also need
advice and there is nothing wrong if that advice comes from her family members. Male sarpanch would also need such support.

Rakhee Bakshee, from Women’s Feature Service, said they are a platform for all the researchers working on these issues and their struggles and welcomed the researchers to contribute and write for WFS. Kalpana, who is the author of *Love Forever @ Rajpath* is also a government employee and works on gender sensitization at work place. Her book also focuses on *Jabariya shadi* (forced marriage/ groom kidnapping) and sanitation.

Nanda said that it is important to see a link between all these various issues and build solidarities. We can see how we have had some male support too as was seen in the argument about Pradhan Patis.

Bakshee said that a woman’s body has never been her own. While making an argument for legalization of sex work it is important to question if that income will be taxable then. Rai added that if it is legalized there would be a contract but for e.g. in Germany there is legal sex work yet they have no dignity. There is a need to question the demand and not just the supply.

Banerjee called for problematizing dignity. She said let us not only use this word for professions related to the body. She said let us not have a moralistic eye as for some women choosing sex work over contractual work or domestic work can be a better choice for several reasons such as long work hours and minimal payment.

Rai added that it is important to delink institutional sex work from brothel based work. The sex workers want their kids out of this industry, they have very few earning years in this profession and the regularity of violence is huge. Critical look at the demand and invisibility of customers is
required. She said we have to debunk the structure but regulate the practice, as it is not just a working condition issue as is the case with other types of contractual work.

Nanda pointed out that it is important to know the views of a practitioner as well as researchers as that can paint a holistic picture. Mishra said with the education and empowerment of women, the demand for earning wives is going up. She also pointed out how can women make informed choices if they don’t know about technology and enter surrogacy. There is also a lack of social security for these women. How can we ensure their safety when they are forced to give birth to four children? She shared that case studies show that there are more Muslim women in the surrogacy business as they are considered ‘more fertile’. This thought process exists as Muslim women are generally married off at a young age and have more children at a young age.

Nanda said it is very difficult to work on choice in India. The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 is being used in the west to further the anti-abortion agenda.

Bakshee asked to also look at the invisible women who work from home and are involved in various types of work.

Kalpana, talking about the blessings, said that she pointed this out to her husband after marriage while she was being given sexist blessings and her husband did tell all the relatives to make a change in the way they blessed her. She said even though a small effort, these are the incidents that bring us to the point of MenEngage.

Mishra suggested that it is important to include male officers at the grassroots level in gender sensitization programmes as it makes a lot of difference.

Verma also added that she has seen sexism even in the lullabies sung to children and has made an effort to challenge those at a personal level. Nanda ended the session by requesting for another such meet that could lead to some collaborative research that can help researchers and practitioners from various fields equally.
NESCAFE LAWNS 4:00 – 04:30 pm

Performance of Play 'Daayr-e-Ulfat'

A play by Hansraj College - 'Daayr-e-Ulfat' - dealt with issues of gender, masculinities and violence against women in a gripping and innovative manner, conveying thought-provoking messages in a powerful voice. The play was directed and scripted by Sanjay Kumar.

NESCAFE LAWN 4:30 – 05:00 pm

Prize distribution for Nukkad Natak and Debate Competitions

Amidst much clapping and cheering, Bijaylaxmi Nanda of Miranda House WDC awarded 'Memesis', the theatre society of Daulat Ram College, the first prize for its nukkad natak named
'Humein Marammat Ki Zaroorat Hai'. Runner up Rajdhani College also received a token of appreciation.

In the Debate competition, first prize was bagged by Jamia Milia Islamia, while JNU came second and PGDAV came third.

NESCAFE LAWN 5:00 to 06:00 pm

Cultural Performance by Loknaad

The Gender Mela came to an end with the reflective and soulful music of the activist duo Charul and Vinay of Loknaad. Loknaad means 'people's voice' in most Indian languages. The progressive music band provided a cultural space for reviving sensitivity and dignity, with lyrics of peace, dignity and democracy that spoke of the plight and power of common people.

Considered to be a one of its kind musical duo, the songs of Loknaad's two dreamers were trilingual (Gujarati, Punjabi and Hindi). Charul and Vinay, who created the songs of hope and life that they sang at the event based on their own field experiences, had simple lyrics, stirring compositions and minimal instrumentation which lent an earthy feel to their music.

CLICK HERE FOR GENDER MELA AT THE MENENGAGE DELHI WEBSITE AND FACEBOOK PAGE

http://www.menengagedelhi.net/gender-mela.html
https://www.facebook.com/MenEngageDilli/?ref=tn_tnmn
PLEASE FIND BELOW CLIPPINGS FROM OUR SOCIAL MEDIA EVENT PAGE!

The All India Network of Sex Workers (AINSFW) called for decriminalizing of sex work and recognition of labour rights for sex workers at the Gender Mela.