

REPORT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATION 2022

Government General Degree College Mangalkote celebrated International Women's Day- 'Breaking the Bias' on 14th March 2022 through a Webinar organized by The Women's Cell in collaboration with National Social Service (NSS) unit and Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC).

The primary purpose of organizing a webinar with the theme 'Being Woman- From Theory to Praxis' was to discuss and understand the everyday negotiations and struggles of women as they oscillate in their locations in theory and realize their locations in practice. The position of women is evidently linked to the lived realities in which they find themselves in their daily lives, at the same time, these lived realities are deeply informed by the position of women in theory. As various societies develop various responses to the position of women in their midst, this played a role in creating the position of women in the realm of ideas. Although this realm may appear to exist beyond our empirically perceptible world, in truth, this realm of ideas asserts itself through intricate and invisible threads. Therefore, in order to find explanations for the variations in the positions of women in different societies, we return to this realm of theory and ideas. If we trace a trajectory of these ideas, theories and principles, we would thus also be able to find the trajectory of the location of women in praxis. Ancient societies have worshipped the divine female as a force of nature, with the worship of nature there exists the idea of reverence for the female being as the source of celestial power. With the coming of new ideas in medieval and modern times, there came the idea of controlling nature and seeing it as a readily available resource to be exploited for unbridled industrial production. The location of women in praxis has also displayed a concomitant transition including the states of being free, constrained, or liberated, associated with the nature of theory that was predominant in a particular place and time.

In this webinar, we have invited eminent speakers to elaborate on this connection between theory and praxis in the trajectory of the existence of women. We have explored how the being of women is shaped through negotiations with the ongoing ideas of a particular time and place and how these negotiations also manifest in empirical reality as forces that shape the locations women find themselves in. At the same time, we have explored how women have worked as a force of agentive power, be it through conscious compliance or conscious resistance. It is important to remember that agentive assertion lies not in unthinking resistance but rather in conscious action – be it complying or resisting. The history of action by women who have made their mark in society reveals such conscious action which has shaped the scope for women for generations to come. In this webinar, we have engaged in an appreciation of such conscious action by agentive women and thus commemorated International Women's Day as a celebration of women in their conscious and agentive being both in theory and in praxis.

The program started at 5 pm with the inaugural session where the Convener of Women's Cell Ms. Tahira Tashneem introduced the theme 'Being Woman- From Theory to Praxis' of the webinar and welcomed our honourable Chief Patron Officer-In-Charge Dr. Pradipta Kumar Basu and Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) Coordinator Dr. Debraj Biswal to inaugurate the program with their inaugural speech.

The inaugural session was followed by discussions on various topics related to the theme of the Webinar by three eminent resource persons each getting a stipulated time of 40 to 45 minutes to speak on their specific topic:

1. Dr. Rajarshi Chakraborty (Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of Burdwan) spoke on the topic 'Revisiting the Different Waves of Feminism- Understanding their Significance'. Dr. Rajarshi Chakraborty started his deliberations with the historical background of masculine superiority. According to him, one of the primary reasons for the patriarchal mindset of society began with the division of labour between men and women. Society developed in three definite stages- prehistoric society, the barbarian society and the civilised society. In a prehistoric society as there was no concept of the private ownership of the means of capital, there was no domination of the women by men. It was the barbarian society that saw the evolution of animal husbandry and agriculture where men were supposed to hunt, provide food, build dwelling houses and do all other field works and women were supposed to bear and rear children. This was the starting point of men owning the body of women. Dr. Chakraborty depicted women's position in Indian society through the historical time period, considering the fact that the contribution of women has always been ignored and thus, it has always been 'HIS STORY' and not 'HER STORY'. He talked about women's position in Indian society in ancient times, mediaeval times and at the time of colonial rule. To present his argument he gave references to Razia Sultana, Nur Jahan, and Rani Laxmi Bai. He also stated that even if some manage to secure their position in Indian history their contribution is always referred to or glorified with the help of masculine ideas. Dr. Chakraborty also very immaculately brought in the references of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, the references of *Sita* and *Draupadi* who were time and again made subject to patriarchal whims by men who came to be worshipped as Lords. The respected speaker also pointed out the differences between biological sex and sexuality as construed by the society that obeys the dictates of men. Through his discussions, he elucidated the different schools of feminism and feminist thinkers namely Liberal Feminism, Marxist Feminism, Revolutionary Feminism and Cultural Feminism. It was a very well-structured lecture combining both theoretical and practical learning.
2. Mr. Abhisek Das (Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government General Degree College Narayangarh) spoke on the topic 'I Choose to Unconform, I Choose to Unfollow- Social Constraints and Women Emancipation in India'. Mr. Das's discussion logically followed from where Dr. Chakraborty left off and he started with the epistemological difference between masculinity and femininity. This epistemological difference stems from the difference between the private sphere and the public sphere. The private sphere is the emotional sphere and thus belongs to women and the public sphere is the logical sphere and thus the domain of men. Feminists have actively agitated against this distinction for a long time. He talked about patriarchy as a political set-up deliberately designed to subjugate women. Professor Das also highlighted the phenomenon of biological determinism which considers men to be natural rulers and superiors. While discussing the different branches of feminism, our respected speaker drew on references from everyday life (mainly in the Indian society) to substantiate his discussion. For example, the public sphere is a combination of social, economic, religious and political domains and in each of these domains, women are victims of male dominance and dictates. Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, Radcliffe Richards, Susan Moller Okin, and others were discussed as important feminist protagonists. In the concluding lines, Mr. Das concentrated on the societal mindset that prevents any major changes in the position of women. He prioritised the need for spreading awareness about human

rights and dignity as such which in turn will logically talk about women empowerment.

3. Ms. Deblina Mukherjee (Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jhargram Raj College Girl's Wing) discussed the topic 'Dominated Consciousness to Critical Consciousness- The Changing Agency of Women Versus Unchanging Role Expectations'. Ms Mukherjee's discussions were based on awareness, consciousness and change as the primary motivating factors in women empowerment. Imparting knowledge does not automatically result in women's empowerment but knowledge needs to be imparted in such a manner that it resonates with logic, societal differences, cultural differences, the level of education and active participation of the women folk themselves. Imposing awareness without involving those for whom it is meant appears to be fruitless. Professor Mukherjee discussed the subjugation of women under three broad headings- power and decision making, power and agenda-setting and power and thought control. This is basically the society's mechanism to control its women. She drew on examples from the everyday Indian households to elaborate on her points: starting from female foeticide to denying education to the girl child, forceful marriage, denying financial independence and domestic violence. Women, from a very early age, are taught not to question the established norms. Claiming back their rights and rightful position, as Ms Mukherjee mentions, will be a long-drawn process entailing not only women not conforming to mainstream societal ideas and institutions but also men, be it father or brother or boyfriend or husband, coming forward to support their women.

After the discussions on relevant and significant topics were completed by reputed speakers, an interactive session of approximately 15 minutes started between the active participants and specific resource persons where critical questions were raised, opinions, suggestions were provided and discussed with everyone so that each and every active participant gets enlightened on various issues and pertinent problems related to women.

The last segment of the webinar ended at 8 pm with the formal Vote of Thanks given by the Head of Department, Political Science, Ms. Madhumita Chakraborty and the distribution of certificates to all the participants was done by the technical assistance team of the organizing committee of the webinar. Finally, feedback with positive suggestions was provided by all the participants for further improvement in future academic endeavours of the college.

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