

Sorofest



Silver Jubilee Magazine of SI Bombay Chembur
October 2022



E D U C A T E

E M P O W E R

E N A B L E

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Sorofest is a commemorative volume brought out by Soroptimist International Bombay Chembur (SIBC)* to celebrate the 25th anniversary of its charter.

Soroptimist International is a global volunteer movement working to improve the lives of women and girls through programs leading to social and economic empowerment. It has a Consultative Status as a non-governmental organization at the United Nations. SI is organised into five federations and several national associations. The National Association of Soroptimist International – NASI of India has 19 clubs in its fold and is a part of the federation SI Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI).

This volume features snapshots of SIBC's journey and the work done in the service of the community. It also features short articles written by women and men from diverse backgrounds; telling stories and voicing opinions on women's struggles, endeavours, dreams and desires.

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contents

Messages in Friendship ——— 05

SI President – Maurine Maguire
SIGBI President – Cathy Cottridge
NASI President – Dr. Achina Kundu
SIGBI FCC – Margaret Clark
SIBC Founding President – Dr. Daphne Pillai
SIBC President – Namrata Saxena

Down Memory Lane ——— 11

How the Journey Began
The Charter Ceremony
The Journey – Some Snapshots

Programme Action Review ——— 29

Adult Literacy Drive
Skill Development
English for Specific Purposes
Toilet Building
Soroptimist Excellence Awards
SASHAKT
ADARSH Village Adoption
Outreach During Covid
Fundraising with a Social Twist

Partnerships ——— 47

Institutional Partners
Friendship Links

Articles --- 57

Hello, I am a Soroptimist
Nisha Ghosh

Savitiribai Phule – Resonance of Soroptimism
Dr. Celina Joy

Perin Mistri: a Trailblazer
Dr. Smita Dalvi

Zero Waste and Waste Pickers
Jyoti Mhapsekar

Women on the Threshold: The Katkari Experience
Rev. Dr. Barnabe D'Souza

"I'm a Referee, Not a Female Referee"
Lorenzo D'Ilario

Indian Picture Books for Children
Dr. Nina Sabnani

Woman Is As Woman Does
Nancy Adajania

Women in Gaming
Akanksha Mishra

The Personal is Political
Dr. Smita Desai

Gender: Then and Now
Dr. Daphne Pillai

Tweaking the Language for Inclusivity
Noopur Gosain

Pink and Blue: Mirroring Gender Stereotypes
Dr. Reni Francis

Misogyny and Me Too
Nitya Nair

Women's Issues and Challenges
Dr. Rema Ramchandran

Weaker Sex?
Dr. Betty Sibil

Are We True Feminists?
Yvette Lee



Messages in Friendship



Maureen Maguire
Soroptimist International
President 2022-23

Congratulations to SI Bombay-Chembur

May I offer my congratulations and that of the Directors of Soroptimist International on reaching the 25th Anniversary of your Club.

As you celebrate this significant milestone, it is important to remember and thank those members who have served during these 25 years. Members have been and always will be your Club's greatest asset.

This souvenir magazine displays how your members have over the 25 years, inspired action and created opportunities to transform the lives of women and girls, through many projects that have involved issues around education, health, poverty, climate change, environment and many more that affect women and girls. Moving forward, may I ask you to continue to create a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, where every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally, and where every family has the hope of a strong and sustainable future.

Thank you for your continuing service to Soroptimist International.



Cathy Cottridge
SIGBI President
2021-22

Many congratulations to S.I. Bombay-Chembur on its Silver Jubilee

The club's programme action is extensive, as well as your education and skills development projects you continue to celebrate International Women's Day, International Day of Women and Girls in Science, International Day of the Girl Child, and World Human Rights Day; UN Days which are of great significance to Soroptimists everywhere.

The development of a Soroptimist Excellence Award is a superb way to raise awareness of our wonderful organisation as well as the many issues facing women and girls today.

Your influence is far reaching, including speaking at the Commission for Status of Women (CSW66) in March this year.

I hope you all have a wonderful time together, as you celebrate your Silver Jubilee year on 15th October and every good wish for your future success.

Happy 25th Charter Anniversary!

I convey my greetings and heartiest congratulations, to the President and members of Soroptimist International of Bombay Chembur, on the occasion of the 25th Charter Anniversary of the Club. On this occasion, you can look back on what you have done with great satisfaction and happiness because you have always done your best towards fulfilling the mission of the Organisation in educating, enabling and empowering women. May you continue your journey of success, with love in your hearts and pride, in the coming years.

As Mother Teresa had once said, "It's not how much we give, but how much love we put into giving." I believe that the best way to find ourselves is to lose ourselves in the service of others because an effort made for the happiness of others lifts us above ourselves. Good actions provide strength to ourselves and inspire good actions in others.

Congratulation SI Bombay Chembur on the 25th Anniversary

How proud you must be, to know that by 'Spreading Happiness the Soroptimist Way' over the years you have released the potential of so many women and girls,

Recalling memories of fun and friendship being with Dr. Daphne Pillai speaking at the UN in New York where the concerns of women were powerfully voiced and advocating for change. At the CSW62 she not only supported Soroptimists but as a Soroptimist shone her light supporting other NGOs and received an invitation to attend a meeting with the Holy See, most prominently positioned!

SI Bombay Chembur are friends the world cannot be without. You are all shining stars and a gem in the Soroptimist Crown. I recall the wonderful times spent in India in February 2018 when I saw first-hand the amazing work you are doing. When life changed with COVID crisis, SI Bombay Chembur's work never stopped.

Wishing you every joy and happiness challenging the future together.



Dr. Achina Kundu

President and
Federation Councillor,
The National Association
of Soroptimist
International (NASI) of
India (2020-22)



Margaret Clark

SIGBI Federation
Consultative Councillor
(FCC)



Dr. Daphne Pillai

Founder President, SIBC

Greetings to Soroptimists around the world!

It's with great fulfilment that I look down memory lane and refresh my mind with the myriad activities conducted by the Soroptimist International of Bombay-Chembur (SIBC) in the past 25 years.

From the charter celebrations held on March 2, 1997 to this day, SIBC has steadily matured into an organization which has impacted the lives of thousands of girls and women through their various initiatives in the areas of education, health and hygiene and economic empowerment. The Club's ongoing programs like the "Adult Literacy Drives" and "Skill Development programs" have given women a second chance in life to become financially stable and socially acceptable.

I wish SIBC all the very best in the years to come to continue their work in their quest for the upliftment of women through their goals of educate, empower and enable.



Namrata Saxena

SIBC President
2022-24

Namaste!

It is a great honour for me to be the President of SI Bombay Chembur in its Silver Jubilee year.

Founded in 1997, SIBC has traversed a worthy journey in successfully reaching out for education of women, enabling and empowering them to take a lead role in society!

With bringing out SoroFest, we hope to take this moment to pause and remember that SIBC has a compelling narrative of positive change. Praise and thanks must be attributed to our Founder President, Dr. Daphne Pillai who laid the foundations and all members who served the mission of SIBC during the Odyssey.

We move forward with greater enthusiasm, as the Silver Jubilee elevates the spirits of all and inspires to strive further for the betterment of society.



Down Memory Lane

SOROPTIMIST INTERNATIONAL



Soroptimist International certifies
that the Soroptimist Club of
Bombay Chembur

having agreed to be bound by the Constitution and
Bye-laws of Soroptimist International of Great Britain
and Ireland, which agreement is evidenced by the
acceptance of this Certificate, has been duly formed
as a Club in association with

Soroptimist International

provided that the Membership of such Club does
not at any time fall below fifteen

Date MARCH 2, 1997.

Countersigned:

D. Pillai
President DAPHNE PILLAI

J. Kattas
Secretary

Oliver R. Newre
President of Soroptimist International
of Great Britain and Ireland

K. Howard
Administrative Officer, Soroptimist
International of Great Britain
and Ireland

How the Journey Began...

I was introduced to Soroptimism by a diehard Soroptimist, Antoinette D'Costa in the 1990s. We were part of a social circle which met on occasions. At every party or social gathering, Antoinette would gravitate towards me and speak about Soroptimism. To be frank, every time she started the subject, I would try to divert the conversation to something which was more generically aligned. But back she was at her persistence after I had my say. To cut a long story short, Antoinette felt that I was already doing all that Soroptimists are expected to do, so why not start a Soroptimist Club and bring in like-minded people and structure our activities the Soroptimist way.

So, though the SIBC was chartered in the year 1997, our activities as Soroptimists started a couple of years earlier. Our mentor Club was Soroptimist International South Mumbai and we had 3 Soro stalwarts- Antoinette D'Costa, Anna Kurien and Sarah Chandy who would visit Chembur and brief potential members about the importance of doing our work towards women's empowerment under a single platform i.e. Soroptimist International, an international women's organization which had a voice in the United Nations.

So that's how our journey began. I had already begun my doctoral research on the 'Gender Bias in English poetry.' and got my Ph.D. in English Literature specializing in the feminist aspects of poetry. I faced a lot of barriers and attempts to thwart my writing on this particular subject. A lot of my writing was taboo in those years, but I persisted in my path.

My research gave me the strength to put all my theory into practice; women's upliftment and women's empowerment was the answer to free women from the subjugation faced for ages.

'Soroptimist International of Bombay Chembur' was born as a result of this!

Dr. Daphne Pillai

Founder President of SIBC

The Charter Ceremony



The charter ceremony begins with the lighting of the lamp by Elizabeth Hughes, senior Soroptimist from SIGBI.



Ms. Elizabeth Hughes pinning the Soroptimist club president badge on Dr. Daphne Pillai.



The freshly inducted members of the newly chartered SIBC.



The maiden Executive Committee was:
Dr. Daphne Pillai – President, Dr. Neelam Rane – Vice President,
Sharda Khattar – Secretary, Saira Sunil – Treasurer,
Sudha Hatiskar – Program Action Coordinator

A Member Reminiscences...

The day of 2nd March, 1997 is vividly etched in my memories. On this day, Soroptimist International Bombay Chembur (SIBC) received its charter and I along with my friends, many of them from the teaching profession, were inducted into the mission of soroptimism.

Dr. Daphne Pillai, then the Head of the English Department at Hinduja College, Mumbai and the Jt. Secretary of Mahatma Education Society, Chembur was instrumental in setting up this new club and became its founder president. Her words motivated us to join this new adventure. Under the leadership of Dr. Pillai, we newcomers were very excited to join this movement and dedicate a part of our professional abilities to a social cause.

The Charter Ceremony of the Club was conducted at the able hands of Elizabeth Hughes, senior soroptimist from SIGBI. The ceremony commenced by lighting the ceremonial lamp. Ms. Hughes pinned the SI badges to each one of us and inducted us in the newly formed club. This was followed by the oath taking ceremony by the new members. Rendition of the Soroptimist prayer created a solemn ambience filled with warmth and camaraderie. Ms. Hughes spoke to us about our potential as educators and the things we could do as a team.

With an objective of reaching the unreached, a number of meaningful projects were taken on board by the president and the members of SIBC. To name a few, we initiated skill-oriented projects such as tailoring and beautician classes, product making out of waste material etc. One key project we launched at the outset was for Adult Literacy and that has continued ever since.

Over last 25 years, SIBC has taken on many initiatives and added several projects to address the issue of English literacy, computer literacy and legal awareness of rights, in sync with the objectives of Soroptimist to 'Educate, Empower and Enable'.

Today, as SIGBI celebrates a centenary and SIBC its silver jubilee of community service, I feel blessed to be a part of such a vibrant, worldwide organization.

Dr. Sunita Wadikar

Past President SIBC (2001-03), Extension Officer, NASI (2014-16)

Former Principal, MES's Pillai College of Education & Research

Past Presidents



1997-1999	Dr. Daphne Pillai
1999-2001	Dr. Lata Krishnan
2001-2003	Dr. Sunita Wadikar
2003-2007	Ms. Rema Suresh
2007-2009	Dr. Padma Rangan
2009-2012	Dr. Jayashree Ramnathan

2012-2014	Ms. Parveen Arif
2014-2016	Dr. Reni Francis
2016-2018	Dr. Celina Joy
2018-2020	Ms. Yvette Lee
2020-2022	Ms. Yvette Lee
2022-present	Ms. Namrata Saxena

Some Milestones...



The start of the 'Adult Literacy Drive' in March 1998 -- for those women who missed out on the first chance in education. This remains one of the flagship programmes of SIBC over the last 25 years.



NASI of India awarded Dr. Daphne Pillai with the NASI 'Achiever Award' for her contribution and excellence in the field of Social Service, Profession and Business on 2nd December, 2012.



Soroptimist Welfare Association was registered as a Trust under the Bombay Public Trusts Act and Society Registration Act on 16th April 2012. In this year, we also created our website. It was launched by Dr. K.M. Vasudevan Pillai, Chairman of MES – our institutional partner.



On International Women's Day, 8th March 2016, SIBC launched the Soroptimist Excellence Awards to honour exemplary women who have impacted society through their outstanding work in various sectors of industry.

Visit of SIGBI President to SIBC, 1998



SIGBI President Pamela Lee visited our club in 1998 and participated in a session of the skill development programme.



Ms. Pamela Lee with the SIBC members.

Hosting A Delegation from Pakistan, 2004



SIBC hosted a delegation of visiting Soroptimists from Pakistan, mainly lawyers and doctors, to promote international goodwill and understanding.



Actor and social activist Shabana Azmi was the chief guest at the fellowship program held for the visiting delegation at Star's Parade, Chembur, Mumbai.

Project Water, 2009



Project – WATER' was implemented jointly by SI Chembur and SI Dortmund Hellweg, Germany. Drinking water facility was provided to two villages— Khnava village and Umroli village in the Raigad district of Maharashtra. This was followed by an International Goodwill and Understanding Meeting organized by SI Chembur. The Soroptimist International clubs in attendance were SI Dortmund Hellweg, Germany, SI Pune, SI Bombay West and SI North Bombay.

Silver Jubilee of NASI of India, 2014



SIBC hosted a fellowship dinner and organised an international conference in September 2014, in association with NASI India – to celebrate the occasion of completing 40 years of Soroptimist International in India and 25 years of formation of NASI of India. The theme of the Conference was "Women Lead to Change". The speakers were from the SI Board, NASI Board, SIBC members and a few eminent persons from the city.

Hosting NASI of India – AGM 2009



The AGM in progress in Panvel.



The Soroptimist oath being recited.

Hosting NASI Executive Meeting, Installation 2016



NASI of India executive meeting begins.



Installation ceremony of SIBC member Dr. Lata Krishnan as NASI President for 2016-2018. Cake cutting with the new NASI board.

Participation in Conventions



India delegation to SIGBI Conference- Cardiff 2009.
From L-R: Dr. Lata Krishnan, Nasi President Sheela Rao, SI President Hanne Jensbo, Promila Khandelwal, Dr. Daphne Pillai.



India delegation at SIGBI Conference - Manchester 2010.
Dr. Lata Krishnan with other delegates.



SIBC members Dr. Sunita Jain and Dr. Reni Francis in attendance
at SIGBI Conference - Harrogate 2014



Installation ceremony of NASI president Shreelata of SI Chennai
graced with the presence of Ann Hodgson, Vice President of SIGBI,
Dr. Daphne Pillai, Founder President SIBC, Lata Krishnan, NASI
President Elect, Sunita Wadikar, NASI Extension Officer, Ms. Seeta
Desai, and other Soroptimist members. (30th Nov. 2014)

Participation in Conventions



Dr. Daphne Pillai was selected to be a delegate of SIGBI at the UN's Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62), 2018 at the New York City. Her blogs on various sessions in which she participated were published in the SIGBI newsletter and the SIGBI website. She is seen here with Ms Margaret Clark during one of the sessions.



SIBC Members in attendance at the Soroptimist International Convention 2015, held at Istanbul.

From L- R: Aishwarya K., Lata Krishnan, Seeta Desai, Celina Joy, Yvette Lee, Daphne Pillai.



SIBC delegation at the Istanbul convention which was attended by more than 1500 soroptimists around the world.

SIBC Members Speaking at Various Fora



At CSW 62, in 2018, Dr. Daphne Pillai was one of the speakers. she spoke on 'Challenges and Opportunities in achieving Gender Equality and Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls'.



Dr. Daphne Pillai was also a speaker at UN's CSW 65 & 66, held online in 2021 and 2022 respectively. In March 2022, she spoke on the topic "Water: Climate Change and Life Chances for Girls and Women".



Soroptimist International of Americas Founder Region District II invited Dr. Daphne Pillai and Dr. Celina Joy to speak on the special challenges women face in India. The convention was held in San Francisco in February 2016.



Dr. Daphne Pillai was one of the five panellists on the theme of Education at the Soroptimist International Convention held in Istanbul in July, 2015. She spoke on the topic- "The Power of a Second Chance".

We Work and We Play



Dr. Daphne Pillai, Dr. Lata Krishnan, Seeta Desai, Dr. Celina Joy, Yvette Lee and Aishwarya Krishnan touring the ancient Roman site of Ephesus in Turkey after the Istanbul convention.



SIBC fellowship meet in a resort in Lonavala in January 2017. A day of fun and frolic, games and lots of food. The bus journeys rang out with songs and limericks.



A few SIBC members went on a 3-day trip to Goa. The fun started from the time they boarded the Tejas Express and continued at the ancestral house of Dr. Daphne Pillai. They visited the historical sites, churches and of course frolicked at the famed beaches.

Girls Just Wanna Have Fun!

As a 16-year-old teenager, my life had just started taking the turn, with new experiences ahead of me, one of those was the trip to Istanbul with my mother, for The Soroptimist International Convention, 2015. It was an opportunity to seize, as I was looking forward to this vacation, considering back then I wasn't very familiar with the organization and was waiting to witness them in action.

We were a group of 6 high-spirited women, namely, Dr. Daphne Pillai, Dr. Lata Krishnan, Mrs. Seeta Desai, Dr. Celina Joy, Ms. Yevette Lee and me. I was fascinated to be in presence of women around the world, all there for a cause.

The city of Istanbul was a beautiful combination of East meets West. A perfect amalgamation of the virtues of both the cultures functioning in perfect harmony. I distinctly remember the smell of freshly ground spices, the glistening mosaic lights, the decadent lip-smacking Baklava, all being hustled in trade at the Grand Bazar. As we walked around the Grand bazar, our tour guide was telling us about the cultural and political history of Turkey. At this point, I could actually contribute to the conversation recalling the Late Mustafa Kemal Pasha, the founding father of the Republic of Turkey. I've got to thank SSC 10th grade history for that!

Some more of these experiences also included the waft of the cool crisp breeze at Lake Iznik; The tart pomegranate molasses on shaved ice, that was served to us on the Cruise, while we glanced at the city's landscape, beautifully lit at twilight; the serene tranquility of the Blue Mosque, close to where I might add, I've had the best freshly squeezed orange juice till date. I still remember Seeta Ma'am taking a sip and smacking her lips going "tch tch tch"

We also visited the Hagia Sofia mosque, where we saw the coexistence of the Islamic and Catholic faith, under one roof. We visited the ancient city of Ephesus and Smyrna Agora Ancient City and marveled at Izmir's medieval architecture. At Ephesus, we visited the Stone House by Saint John which was the house of Virgin Mary where she lived for the remainder of her earthly life. In a way, each location we visited and experienced almost symbolized the energy of each one of the women on this trip, with their strong will, varied perspectives and sheer zest for life.

We traveled between locations, with Bollywood music blazing in the background, and almost every time all of us broke into song. Smiling, rejoicing, having the time of our life, cause sure us girls just wanna have fun!

Adv. Aishwarya Krishnan Lata.

SIBC Today



SIBC Today





SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS





Programme Action Review

Adult Literacy Drive



The launch of Adult Literacy Drive in 1998.



The beneficiaries of the literacy drive in 1998 with their teachers, Dr. Daphne Pillai and other Soroptimists.



The participants of the literacy drive posing with their course completion certificates alongside their soroptimist teachers.



ALD class in progress at Chembur.

Adult Literacy Drive

The Power of a Second Chance

The Adult Literacy Drive which has been the flagship program of SIBC has impacted the lives of hundreds of women over the years. The project which is called "The Power of a Second Chance" gives opportunities to women and girls who missed out on the first chance in education due to various factors like poverty, early marriage and patriarchal mindsets that restricts education for the girl child. Women from working class or lower middle class have been enrolling for courses geared towards Income generating skills and English-speaking skills.

The program offers various skills to those who wish to improve their financial standing and social mobility. English for specific purposes is conducted for those who wish to take up careers in specific skills like beauticians, nurses' aides, etc. They are taught the technical terminology and the etiquette needed for these skills. Training has also been given for skills like tailoring, embroidery and the making of creative handicrafts to help these women.

The impact of SIBC's 'Adult Literacy Drives' is visible in future generations as the beneficiaries of the ALD ensure that their girls are sent to school and finish their schooling. On the part of the SIBC enablers it is a modest goal to pull out women from the poorest level to a self-respecting, more dignified, self-sustaining life.



Valedictory function of the Adult Literacy Drive session of 2017-18. Certificates were handed over to successful participants. They also presented dance and music performances. We had SI sisters from Israel, Ms. Aliya Kedem along with a few members in attendance.

Skill Development Programs:



Pamela Lee, SIGBI President (1998-99) with the skill development students who welcomed her with a dance performance



Diya making project in 2002-2003



Toy making project in 2002-2003



Chalk making project 2002-2003

Skill Development Programs:

The Power of a Second Chance

Literacy alone cannot aid in the empowerment of women. Women's economic participation and empowerment are fundamental to strengthening women's rights and enabling them to have control over their lives and exert influence in society.

Towards this aim of financial independence SI Bombay Chembur added Skill development programs as a part of their Adult Literacy Drives. Over the last 25 years various batches of women have been trained in chalk making, diya making, soft toy making, handicrafts, jewellery making, beautician courses, tailoring, and most recently computer skills. These programs were often supplemented by soft skills and English speaking skills.



Teaching basic computer skills to women

English for Specific Purposes



Kick-starting the 'English for Specific Purpose' programme at Rasayani for vocational skill students, in 2016 by Dr. Lata Menon.



Spoken English skills being taught by the soroptimist members to students enrolled in beautician's course.



A class in progress where the students are encouraged to practice conversation in English.



Students perform skits and other cultural programmes to showcase their talents.

English for Specific Purposes

The Power of a Second Chance

The 'English for Specific Purposes' programme was launched on 2nd December 2016 for the girl students pursuing the Skill Development courses at Rasayani. While the girls were acquiring skills to pursue various employment opportunities through their courses, there was a need to equip them with soft skills and English-speaking skills to enhance social mobility and improve their confidence in dealing with customers.

The sessions conducted by members of SIBC included self-introduction, asking and giving advice, telephonic and course specific conversations. Health and hygiene sessions, preparations for interviews and motivational talks were also conducted to build their self-esteem.

This programme was conducted every year from 2016 to 2020 until the pandemic disrupted the same and is all set to be relaunched in 2022.



Valedictory function of "English for Specific Purposes program" in 2019. A total of 55 students completed their vocational course and it was heartening to witness the built up of their confidence when they performed a skit in English, a skill they learnt during the programme.

Toilet Building Project

The Government of India's 'Swachh Bharat Abhiyan' was a trigger for SIBC to venture into a toilet building project. The team helming this project visited many villages in rural, urban and tribal areas in and around Navi Mumbai to identify sites to build toilets. They finally identified a Zilla parishad school that was in dire need for clean and good toilets.

Research showed that 33% of Zilla Parishad and residential schools for tribal schools do not have separate toilets for girls. Students, especially girls drop out of schools after puberty due to poor toilet facilities. SIBC partnered with Mahatma Education Society's Pillai Group of Institutions for constructing 5 toilets and 5 bathrooms for girls of the Varavane Shasakiya Ashram, a residential school for tribal children in Pen, Raigad District, Maharashtra.

This has resulted in a complete stop of open defecation, reduced instances of illnesses, improved class attendance of girls and increased enrolments.



Dr. Daphne Pillai being felicitated by the community.



SIBC members celebrating the hand-over of the completed toilet block to the community.

Soroptimist Excellence Award

On International Women's Day, 8th March 2016, SIBC launched the Soroptimist Excellence Awards to honour exemplary women who have impacted society through their outstanding work in various sectors of industry in the service of humanity. This award carries a citation, a trophy, and a small donation to the cause espoused by the respective awardees.

The awardees in the various years are:

2016

Ms. Farida Lambay (Co-founder of the NGO, Pratham) for her contribution to the education sector and **Dr. Armida Fernandez** (Co-founder of the NGO, SNEHA) for her contribution to the health sector.

2017

Ms. Flavia Agnes, co-founder of 'Majlis' and **Ms. Priti Patkar**, founder of 'Prerana'.

2018

Ms. Shaheen Mistri, founder of Akanksha Foundation, an Indian non-profit educational initiative in Mumbai and Pune and is also the CEO of 'Teach For India'.

2019

Ms. Jyoti Mhapsekar, Co-founder and President of 'Stree Mukti Sanghatana'.

2020- COVID PANDEMIC SO NO AWARDS WERE GIVEN

2021

Ms. Nidhi Goyal, disability and gender rights activist, founder and executive director of NGO 'Rising Flame'.

2022

Ms. Lara Jesani, an independent litigator in Bombay High Court and National Green Tribunal, taking up cases of human rights violations, project-affected communities and civil society organizations.

SASHAKT



Session on 'My First Period' being conducted by SIBC member Ms. Munawira Kotyad, 2019.



Pre-marital Counselling for young girls in association with Stree Mukti Sangathna, 2018.



Session on Love and Infatuation for students of Grade 8-10, being conducted by SIBC member Ms. Preeti Pawar, 2019.



Session on Addictions for Grade 11 & 12 students, 2019.

SASHAKT

Aligning to SDG's 3, 4 and 5 of the United Nations, SI Bombay Chembur launched a project named SASHAKT in 2018 to advocate and create awareness on many taboo and less discussed topics. As a part of this project, a series of sessions on 'Gender, Rights and Sexuality' for girls and women, Sessions on my first period, reaching puberty, substance abuse, safe and unsafe touch, gender rights, rights of married women, sex and sexuality, pre-marital counseling, among others were held for age specific audiences. More than 1500 girls and women ranging from the age groups of 10 to 25 years were trained over these last few years.



Session on 'Safe and Unsafe Touch' with students of Chatiyara Football Academy, Kerala, 2021.



Session on Safe and Unsafe Touch for students of Grade 5-8, by Yvette Lee, 2022.

ADARSH: Village Adoption Project



Need Assessment with the villagers of Warwaalwadi, held at the local school, and Blanket Donation Drive, 2021.



Session by SIBC ,members on menstrual hygiene with women and girls, 2021.



Distribution of books to the village children, 2021.



Health Camp and eye checkup camp at the village, 2022.

ADARSH: Village Adoption Project

In the year 2021, SI Bombay Chembur has adopted a village named Warwaalwadi, an Adivasi village in Taluka Pen of District Raigad, consisting of 35 families.

Our aim over the next five years is to help the village resolve water problems, improve sanitation, empower children to pursue higher education and help in skill-building for sustainable livelihoods; thus turning it into an 'Adarsh' village.

As an initial step a need assessment survey and discussion was conducted with the villagers to understand the various issues affecting them especially problems related to lack of access to water. Subsequently, tree plantation drives, awareness sessions on menstrual hygiene, health and eye camps were held. Advocacy sessions on changing the mindsets and attitudes for gender parity and equality is on the anvil.



Tree plantation drive in the village Warwaalwadi, 2021. Fruit bearing tree saplings were procured by us at the request of the villagers.

COVID Outreach Activities



Distribution of donated ration packets at Don Bosco, Nerul, 2020.



SIBC members sorting food materials raised through Amazon Registry, led by SIBC member Reni Francis, 2020.



Oxygen Concentrator and ration packets donation, 2021.



Blanket collection and distribution drive, December 2020 and 2021.

COVID Outreach Activities

The pandemic and the subsequent lockdown did not stop our members from reaching out to marginalized populations in Mumbai. So many people, particularly daily wagers and migrant workers were deprived of income and were in dire need of monthly rations for their families. Like many other service organisations, we also responded to this urgency of the day, in our own way.

With the help of online fund-raising portals, SIBC was able to raise around Rs. 2,25,000/- which was distributed among NGOs such as Don Bosco Nerul, Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar Panvel, St. Adores Foundation, Prerana Naunihal Children's Home, Manav Jeevan Seva Trust, Navjeevan Centre for children and the Lockdown Project to provide food grains and oxygen concentrators.

In addition to this, SIBC in association with Pillai College of Education and Research, Chembur collected food grains worth Rs. 81,200/- through an amazon registry which was also donated to the above-mentioned NGOs. Two micro businesses run by women were mentored and supported financially to kick start their businesses again after the lockdown.

For last two years, Mumbai and Navi Mumbai witnessed particularly cold winters. SIBC members mobilised a collection drive for blankets and the same were distributed to pavement dwellers in a few identified localities.

Fund Raising with a Social Twist



Fund Raising with a Social Twist

Jumble Sale

Holding a Jumble Sale has been a fun-filled fund-raising activity for the members of SIBC, now for many years. We hold it around the festive months of October or November at the Chembur and Panvel campus of MES, our institutional partner.

Items that are old but usable and in good condition – such as sarees, clothes, bedsheets, shoes, bags, toys and other household items are collected as donations by our members. These items are then sorted and arranged in a Bazaar like setting and sold at marginal prices ranging from Rs.10 to Rs. 300. This annual sale has become very popular among the helpers in the campus and to the slum communities in the surroundings. They often arrive with their children and pick up interesting items of their choice at throw-away prices. We encourage browsing and haggling by the customers and in turn enjoy making sales pitches in our roles as sellers. The funds raised from the sale are used for various social welfare activities of SIBC. The unsold items at the end of the day are donated to the SEAL Ashram in Navi Mumbai.

Newspapers Drive

We involve student communities as well as housing societies in our social cause and collect old newspapers (raddi). Small donations by many individuals when piled together yield a good amount of raddi to be sold for generating funds.



Partnerships

Partnership With MES

Mahatma Education Society (MES) is an organization based in India for over five decades and currently runs 48 educational institutions. Over the years, MES has rendered yeoman service to society through its numerous social welfare and community service initiatives such as tree plantation drives, healthcare camps, adoption of rural villages, cleanliness drives and building of toilets for rural schools among others. To this end, MES has also collaborated with NGO, Soroptimist Welfare Association (SIBC) to strengthen its commitment towards social work. Education, environment, sustainability and economic growth are crucial to development and by forging partnerships like these, we can get the outcomes we desire.

On the occasion of SIBC's silver jubilee, I congratulate them for their dedicated service to the community and their continued support to MES.

Dr. K. M. Vasudevan Pillai

Founder and CEO

Mahatma Education Society's Pillai Group of Institutions



Dr. K. M. Vasudevan Pillai inaugurating the SIBC Website and launch of newsletter on 29th June 2012.

Partnership with SNEHA

Soroptimist International Bombay Chembur (SIBC), Mumbai, began their collaboration with SNEHA (Society for Nutrition Education and Health Action) in 2016. During this partnership, more than 300 young women from vulnerable communities were taught soft skills through the personality development workshops conducted by SIBC at the centres in Santacruz and Govandi. SNEHA imparts vocational training through its eight-month Nurse Aide Training Course to young women from vulnerable families. This skill training was supplemented by SIBC with sessions on spoken English skills, how to study, grooming, etiquette, writing a good resume and preparing for job interviews. Sessions on time management and stress management were especially beneficial in helping the students learn to manage their responsibilities at home while ensuring efficiency at the workplace. We are extremely grateful and thank all the SIBC volunteers who supported this initiative.

Ms. Ujwala Bapat

Program Coordinator – SNEHA Shakti (Swasthya Sevika Nurse Aide)
SNEHA (Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action)



SIBC members Seeta Desai and Betty Sibil conducting a session at the Santacruz centre of SNEHA



SIBC member Sunita Jain conducting a session at the Govandi centre of SNEHA

Partnership with Stree Mukti Sanghatana

We curated the Shashakt programme in 2018 with an aim to provide awareness on less discussed and taboo topics in the areas of gender, sexuality and rights for girls and women. Our search for a likeminded partner to deliver these expert sessions ended with our collaboration with Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS).

Over the past few years, we have jointly conducted many thought-provoking sessions on gender equality, sexuality, women's rights, pre-marital counselling and de-addiction with SMS providing the resource persons. They also worked with SIBC to set up a family counselling centre in our premises for girl students and their mothers facing domestic violence. Sessions on Superstition and Science and Waste management are some of the other areas that we have worked together on. Our partnership with SMS has yielded remarkable results in advocacy work among girls and women.

Ms. Preeti Pawar

SIBC President Elect (2022-24) and Co-ordinator of Project Shashakt



Mr. Chandrakant Sarvagod, resource person from Stree Mukti Sanghatana addressing around 150 boys of classes 8th 9th and 10th on the topic of Sex & Sexuality.

Partnership with

Don Bosco Development Centre

The Don Bosco Development Centre Nerul seeks to catalyze social and economic transformation in the marginalized communities of Navi Mumbai by enabling their girls and women realise their fullest potential. Training them in myriad skills over the past 12 years, the Centre has ensured them opportunities for higher income generation, besides giving them a voice in matters that affect their lives.

Over the past decade, our partner, Soroptimist International Bombay Chembur has helped us bring about a dynamic transformation in the lives of destitute girls and women from the marginalized communities. During the pandemic support in the form of oxygen cylinders, funds and food grains was received. They have helped micro businesses helmed by poor women to restart after the pandemic with financial aid. We congratulate SIBC on their silver jubilee and look forward to continue working together for the service of the poor.

Assumption George

Don Bosco Ambassador

Don Bosco Social Development Services



Distribution of financial aid to a beautician at the Don Bosco Centre to restart her business

Messages from Friendship Links

Silver Jubilee! Huge Congratulations to SI Bombay Chembur

This momentous milestone merits a great celebration and a pause to recognise all the great work you do. I have seen first-hand your commitment to support the lives of women and girls in Mumbai and I feel hugely privileged to have played a very small part in some of your work, specifically your work with Prerana. The time I spent with you and the girls at Prerana will always be remembered by me with great fondness. I remember feeling a great sense of solidarity and a true Soroptimist sisterhood with you and the girls. I remember feeling our collective desire to make a difference, to show the girls we stood with them and that we recognised their challenges. We had fun, we laughed and had very important debates about who was the biggest hero and heroine in Bollywood!

India is my second home and I love it. It's therefore hard sometimes to read about the ongoing challenges faced by Indian women and girls. However, the work of SI Bombay Chembur is a beacon for hope for advocacy and change alongside other SI chapters in India. I wish SI Bombay Chembur a very happy Silver Jubilee and I toast to your next 25 years and your continued success in the fight for equality, health and safety for all our sisters in India.

Andrea Sinnott
SI Amounderness, UK

The President and members of S.I. Llandudno & District send you greetings and congratulations for your Silver Jubilee celebrations. We all hope that you will have an enjoyable celebration to mark this special event in the history of your Club, S.I. Bombay Chembur.

Llongyfarchiadau a phobhwyl a bendithareichdathliadau.

[translation from Welsh to English: Congratulations, blessings and good wishes to you]

S.I. Llandudno & District
UK

Congratulations on the 25th Anniversary of SI Bombay Chembur from SI Plymouth and District, and on the project work you have done in that time. I really enjoyed your welcome when I visited a few years ago.

Jill Lane
SI Plymouth

Greetings from your friendship link, Soroptimist International of El Cerrito. On behalf of all our club members, I wish you all the very best on the occasion of your SI Charter Silver Jubilee. I recall with great pleasure my visit with Daphne and several of your club members in 2017 when I attended your annual day of service and talent show celebration. What fun that was and how much I appreciated the honour bestowed on me of being your great guest at the event.

Our club is currently in our 65th year and looking forward to celebrating our diamond anniversary in 10 years. And, of course, we have all celebrated Soroptimist International's centenary as we have been able during the pandemic over the past two years. How proud we all are to be part of such an important and vibrant organization. Once again, our sincere congratulations!

Barbara Lanier
Friendship Link Chair, SI of El Cerrito, US

Friendship Links



Ms. Andrea Sinnot and Ms. Alexa from SI Amounderness and members of SIBC visiting Prerana, a shelter for girls for project work.



Ms. Jill Lane meeting our Club members on 15th November, 2016.



Ms. Barbara Lanier, Friendship Link Chair of SI of El Cerrito with staff and students on Community Service Day in January 2017



Dr. Madhu Chaku from S.I. Llandudno & District on Community Service Day in January 2016



Articles

Hello, I am a Soroptimist

Nisha Ghosh

Hello I'm a Soroptimist.

What really is Soroptimism – rather what is the Soroptimist organization about? Is it just an NGO with a difficult name that begs explanation?

No, we are a global voice for women that has a special status with the UN. Yes, we are more than 100 years old and yes, we are present in 121 countries. But the question always asked is why we are so little known? – and there's no simple answer to that.

Did the initial movement in 1921 keep a very strict eye on who could join, or the label of being an organization for business and professional women make it exclusive? Perhaps, now hundred years later much has changed, membership has opened to all women and girls, and all are welcome. Diversity, and inclusiveness marks the international nature of this organization.

So how do Soroptimists in India play out their roles as volunteers?

Membership is largely educated, qualified women, some working and some retired. The latter bring in a wealth of experience. Empty nesters, or women looking for networking with other women in a constructive way, bring in energy. All are volunteers. All humans at some point feel the need to give back to their community and here is the platform – a perfect place where you can be an advocate, a mentor, or just a listener to those who are less privileged.

Being a Soroptimist is quite different from being a social worker. You come with whatever are your skills and put them on the table of the club you belong to. How your skills can be employed for the work of the club is up to you and how much time and passion you can add to that. Doctors, educators, lawyers, trainers, media persons, they find niche in the organization that become their *raison d'être*.

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My favourite part is the bonding Soroptimism provides. Friendship was one of the key elements that bound our founding mothers and continues to do.

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As a member, each day is a learning, not just about your surroundings and the projects your club does but as one member said, it's like an MBA of sorts! You learn to recognize the challenges and set personal goals. Our founding mothers worked on friendship but kept social issues in focus, whether it was environment, violence against women, or human rights.

My favourite part is the bonding Soroptimism provides. Friendship was one of the key elements that bound our founding mothers and continues to do. The little Soroptimist badge that I wear, is assurance that Soroptimists across 121 countries will open their home and heart to me – You have friends everywhere, on facebook, on your travel, for your projects. As I say often, women are the best ambassadors of peace – woman to woman for better understanding.

Soroptimist is like a beautiful fabric with the colours and designs of different countries, different regions, and different cultures.

As members, we become a part of this inclusive diverse fabric where every weave, every stitch, comes together to make a beautiful whole. Each member adds her texture, design and colours to this fabric, as she joins the weft and warp at this Soroptimist loom.



Nisha Ghosh is the Founder President of SI Pune Metro East. She was first from India to be at SIGBI Management Board as Director of PR and Marketing; and has served at various posts at the Federation as well as National Association of Soroptimist International, India.

Savitribai Phule –

Resonance of Soroptimism

Dr. Celina Joy

Indian history is replete with examples of pioneering women in various spheres who have forged the path for future generations with their sheer will, grit and determination. They went about their task with an attitude that things got to be done and if anybody was going to do it, it might as well begin with them. None of them thought of themselves as trail blazers. One such exemplary woman was Mrs. Savitribai Phule, a prominent Indian social reformer and educationist who is considered to be the pioneer of India's feminist movement. She was far ahead of her times in her beliefs, thoughts and actions. She played a significant role in women education and empowerment when it was a huge social taboo to send girls to school.

Way back in mid-19th century, in Savitribai's work, we can see a resonance of the simple, all-encompassing tagline of "Educate, Enable and Empower" of Soroptimist International with which we are familiar today. In her case, marriage to Jotiba Phule was the transition point in her life and access to education was the catalyst. She was married off at the young age of ten to a boy of thirteen, in line with the tradition and practice of child marriage at that time. Over the few years, seeing her interest in learning, he educated her and the rest as they say is history.

**In 1848 when she was still in her teens,
Savitribai Phule founded the first indigenously
run girl's school in Bhide Wada Pune**

In 1848 when she was still in her teens, Savitribai Phule founded the first indigenously run girl's school in Bhide Wada Pune with Jotiba, Sagunabai Kshirsagar (another revolutionary feminist) and Fatima Sheikh her close associate. She regularly met parents at parent-teacher meetings to advocate the importance of education. Such was her determination to spread literacy, that she even started the practice of giving stipends to children for attending school to stem the school dropout rates. Being a poet herself, she encouraged creative pursuits like writing and painting. She campaigned relentlessly for the emancipation of society from the social evils like child marriage, caste system, untouchability, sati and strongly advocated widow remarriage.

She had many firsts to her credit. She formed the Mahila Seva Mandal for creating awareness on women's rights. She set up an infanticide prevention home so that pregnant widows and rape victims could be cared for. She started a night school for farmers and laborers so that they could access education after their daytime work. She worked closely at 'Satyashodhak Samaj' a social reform society founded by her husband in 1873 to free the marginalized women from being exploited. She arranged many low-cost marriage

ceremonies sans the evil of dowry. She worked tirelessly to help people when a famine struck in 1876 and opened a clinic to treat victims of the worldwide bubonic plague in 1897.

Unfortunately, she was ostracized by society for her radical views and open-minded thinking. The atrocities and humiliation she faced while cow dung, mud and stones were hurled at her as she walked to the school to teach each day did not deter her from her pursuit for a reformed society free of caste and gender discrimination.

Looking back at the social construct of India at that period of time, we see her today with renewed respect and marvel at the sheer courage, fortitude and dignity with which she led her life. In her journey from an illiterate child to an undeterred, strong, independent thinking, staunch social reformer lies a message for women all over the world. In many ways, Savitribai's farsightedness, resilience and struggle to bring a positive change in society embodies the Soroptimist spirit of service for the betterment of womanhood.



Dr. Celina Joy is a Chartered Accountant and a former General Manager of Trident Udaipur, an Oberoi group hotel. She is a Past President of SIBC (2016-18) and currently a Professor at Pillai Institute of Management Studies and Research.

Perin Mistri, a Trailblazer

Smita Dalvi

Where are the women? This question struck me like a bolt a few years ago when I saw a large sheet displayed by my students to depict well-known architects of India. Several men and their masterpieces adorned the panel, but no women. The students were not at fault. The historical discourse on any subject, including architecture, happily ignores women and this is thought to be on par by everyone.

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She was the first to open the doors for women in a profession totally dominated by men.

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From a commemorative magazine of Sir JJ College of Architecture, Asia's first architecture school, I found the name of the first woman ever to qualify as an architect in the region. Her name was Perin Mistri who graduated in the year 1936. Nothing more on her or about her work was forthcoming. Maybe she retreated into a domestic life and did not pursue a career?

Well, the real story is very different. Perin joined her father J. P. Mistri in his firm – Mistri and Bhedwar – a well-established practice in Bombay and had an illustrious and long innings as an architect till her passing in 1989. She was the first to open the doors for women in a profession totally dominated by men.

Perin was also responsible for bringing soroptimism to India. She was the founder president of the first soroptimist club in India, SI Bombay, chartered in 1974. In a press interview at that time, she listed main objectives of the club as advancement in the status of women, maintaining high ethical standard in professions, and taking up environmental issues. Clearly, here was a trailblazer whose professional and social commitment set examples for others. She is known in the Soroptimist circles by her married name Perin Bhiwandiwalla, but she continued her maiden name for her professional work.

“ Why do we know so little about a woman architect who had a flourishing career of five decades? ”

Perin was also the first woman member of the Indian Institute of Architects (IIA). She was a member of the committee of IIA that organised the 1937 'Ideal Home Exhibition' held in Bombay, an influential event that shaped discussion around designing residential architecture. This was the time when bungalows and apartment blocks began to be built using the modern RCC technology in a style which later came to be known as Art Deco. This was all about modern living and Perin was a staunch advocate of modernity. She believed in modern design and also felt that it had a role in liberating women from the drudgeries of housework.

We know from the research on women architects in India by Madhavi Desai and Mary Woods that as a partner in Mistri and Bhedwar, Perin handled projects ranging from houses, factories, office blocks and hospitals. Research organisations such as Art Deco Mumbai are looking into the archives of the office to dig out more definitive information on her role and the buildings designed by her. The picture emerges of a woman who was a force to reckon with.

Why do we know so little about a woman architect who had a flourishing career of five decades? For a start, we can blame the tradition of naming and associating a firm after male members only. This is seen the world over and carried on for many years until now. Many women architects' contributions have gone unacknowledged even when they were the partners with their fathers or husbands. It was easy to assume that they played subordinate roles in family firms.

This is slowly changing. Women architects are far more visible today than before, as proprietors or partners of architectural firms, receiving due credits for their contributions. Many more Indian women are walking the path of leadership in architecture profession charted by Perin Mistri, the pioneer, and the soroptimist movement is thriving in the country.



Dr. Smita Dalvi is the Communication Officer of SIBC (2022-24). She is an architect and has been teaching architecture and aesthetics in Navi Mumbai and Mumbai for three decades.

Zero Waste and Waste Pickers

Jyoti Mhapsekar

Ideal waste management is achieved when the waste is transformed into a useful resource without exploiting the planet or the people. The current waste management system involves a non-cyclic process of extraction, production, consumption and dumping. This results in greenhouse gas emissions, ground water pollution and an ever-increasing strain on natural resources. We must try to transform this non-cyclic process into a cyclic process through a decentralized waste management system. In doing so we can reduce the expenditure of a centralized process and the increasing strain on our natural resources. We have to look at the 'Zero Waste' concept in this context.

Zero waste means returning the wealth of nature back to nature in the right form. Zero waste is a holistic outlook towards waste disposal. It means Recycling of dry waste, converting wet waste into manure or biogas and scientific disposal of hazardous waste. Zero waste also means changing your life style, changing habits, self-discipline, instilling values of public hygiene, behaving responsibly. Zero waste is a critical strategy to hit GHG reduction targets. Zero waste helps cities to become more resilient in the face of accelerating climate disasters. Zero waste can

bring about a just transition to more and better green jobs, reduce poverty, strengthen local economies and more.

The Municipalities in developing countries do not do any recycling recovery on their own. They continue to view solid waste management through the conservative (traditional) lens of waste collection, transportation, and disposal. Until recently, architects and urban planners did not look for alternatives to dumping grounds for solid waste management. This needs to be changed to

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Waste pickers is an invisible force of mostly dalit women, who play an important role in the urban solid Waste management.

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include resource conservation and recycling, which will reduce the huge amount spent on dumping the waste. It will also give equal weight to formal and informal stakeholders including waste pickers working in the waste sector.

Waste pickers is an invisible force of mostly dalit women, who play an important role in the urban solid Waste management. The significant contribution of waste pickers to the city is:

- Reduction in municipal waste-handling and transport costs which means saving tax payers' money
- Supply of raw material to the recycling factories
- Space saving at the dumping grounds
- Resource recovery in the form of valuable compost and conservation of the environment when trained in these alternate skills

Stree Mukti Sanghatana (SMS) – Women's Liberation Organization – established in 1975 has directed its efforts towards the upliftment of women primarily by creating awareness in the society about women's issues and issues related to equality, peace and development. For the last forty-seven years, SMS has carried out various activities like Family counseling centers, day care centers, adolescent sensitization programs publication of books etc.

When SMS started working with waste pickers (Parisar bhagini- PB) through the program 'Parisar Vikas', in the beginning, self-help groups of PBs were formed. SMS also started health and

education initiatives for waste pickers and their families. Soon SMS realized the environmental importance of their work and designed environmental entrepreneurship (training) programs for them. Parisar Bhaginis started learning composting, maintenance of bio-gas plants and gardening along with maintenance of dry waste centers and fine sorting techniques.

Over last two decades, SMS trained approximately 4000 waste pickers in Mumbai and four other cities to provide solid waste management services and alternative skills. Several large and small housing campuses were made zero waste by Waste picker owned cooperatives thereby reducing Green House gases. SMS's approach in Parisar Vikas was found to be sustainable because it provided beneficiaries with knowledge and skills, advocated for their rights, and assisted them in becoming organized. It integrated the three pillars of development; Economy, Empowerment, and the Environment to bring about sustainable changes. This provided the Parisar Bhaginis with more bargaining power, better social inclusion, higher income, and self-sufficiency.

As the income increases, waste generation and the apathy about the waste also increases. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the affluent class to segregate their waste at source so that the people working in the waste sector will get clean waste in their hands and they can lead better and healthy life with dignity.



Jyoti Mhapsekar is a renowned playwright, former librarian and the founder and President of Stree Mukti Sanghatana, an NGO which has been working for women's empowerment since 1975. She is a 'Nari Shakti Puraskar' awardee.

Women on the Threshold: The Katkari Experience

Rev. Dr. Barnabe D'Souza

Gender equality is an imperative for a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and sustainable society. Despite untiring efforts over the years by government, non-government, public and private agencies, this area continues to present challenges – in the form of pervasive discriminatory laws and social norms –which have led to under representation of women at all levels of political leadership, decreased education and work participation, increased incidence of physical and sexual abuse and other similar injustices.

Circa 2003: Scattered mud huts in hamlets located on the hills, lack of water nearby, no electricity, extreme illiteracy, a subsistence level of economy as hunter gatherers, frequent migration, early marriage, high rate of alcoholism, women behind closed doors, rarely seen or heard, their ongoing survival threatened by systemic exploitation, prejudice, abject poverty and loss of their traditional lands...

This was what confronted us when we first started work with the Katkari tribals of Pangloli and

Kunegaon near Lonavala, Maharashtra. We strove to address the prevalent gender inequalities by promoting access, opportunity and dialogue among the Katkari women and girls, to help build up their skills and confidence to achieve their potential, to have more control over the decisions that affected them. However, our initial forays were met with wariness and a deep-rooted suspicion of outsiders. Arranging meetings with them meant overcoming a wall of resistance from their patriarchal society. Yet we were determined to provide them access to government schemes, education and skill training, leadership, entrepreneurship and income generation opportunities, in the firm belief that they would be the changemakers and could not be left behind.

Now, almost two decades later, our efforts have witnessed a dynamic transformation in the Katkari village. Where once most girls were not permitted to pursue education after menstruation, many have now completed their SSC, a few of them graduating with a BSc in Computer Science from Pune. The

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Earlier relegated to tending home and hearth, these tribal women have now gained a measure of financial self-sufficiency, and have the power to make family decisions on children's education and nutrition, savings for the future, etc.

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fervour for education has propelled the villagers to build a two-storey school building at Pangloli, while our tailoring classes have enabled women to obtain a regular income sewing kindergarten school uniforms for the local Parish School. Earlier relegated to tending home and hearth, these tribal women have now gained a measure of financial self-sufficiency, and have the power to make family decisions on children's education and nutrition, savings for the future, etc. Delaying of the age of marriage, growth of female entrepreneurship (start of small businesses like vending, poultry farming, grocery stores) and getting access to government schemes which supply the women with tailoring machines and solar lamps exemplify the extent of change brought about.

A decade ago, Heera was just another Katkari girl from Kunegaon. A few years back, she entered the political fray by standing for local elections, an unheard-of possibility when we first started our work with them in 1999. They now take an active role in the village Panchayat. When threatened with demolition of their homes, the women of Pangloli formed a human barricade against the bulldozers and forced them to retreat.

This quiet yet meaningful transformation bears witness to the success of our initiatives and is a prerequisite to the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Mahatma Gandhi has rightly said, “To call woman the weaker sex is a libel; it is man's injustice to woman. If by strength is meant moral power, then woman is immeasurably man's superior.” (Mahatma, Vol.3, p.33).



Fr. Barnabe, currently Rector, Don Bosco Nerul, is the Founder/ Director of the Community Development and Adolescent Alcoholism Prevention Programme, Don Bosco's Research and Documentation Centre, Maria Ashiana Street Youth Drug Rehabilitation Programme, Social and Financial Inclusion Programme and many other initiatives.

“I’m a Referee, Not a Female Referee”

Lorenzo D’Ilario

Women competing in football strain the typical constructions of masculinity and infringe the boundaries traditionally associated with femininity. Thus, it is no surprise that the inclusion of women has been opposed by men since the origins of modern football. In 1921, the Football Association banned women’s clubs from playing official competitions stating that the sport was dangerous for women. This reasoning, obviously, was just a ruse not to admit that women’s football was a threat to the idea of football being a man’s game.

Football refereeing has historically been a profession reserved exclusively for men. In fact, for a woman to make a career in such a male-dominated field is such a challenge which their male counterparts cannot truly understand due to the unique forms of discrimination that female referees experience.

The major barriers preventing women from pursuing a career as a referee include sexism and discriminatory cultural stereotypes – beginning with the misogynist assumption that “a woman’s place should be in the kitchen and not on a football field”. Moreover, it is frequently assumed that male players need male referees because they are faster, stronger and more skilled than female players. Hence, female referees would not possess the physical abilities to keep up with the play and ensure optimal positioning in making correct decisions. As claimed by female referees, “when you make a mistake, the first thing you hear is related to your gender. It’s because you’re female and not because you’re a referee”. These and many other persistent attacks negatively impact the performance of women while officiating in matches.

When you make a mistake, the first thing you
hear is related to your gender. It’s because you’re
female and not because you’re a referee

On one hand, male coaches and players find it degrading to be officiated by a woman and make them much more difficult to gain respect and recognition. On the other hand, female referees constantly feel intimidated and lose confidence in their calls.

However, it should be also pointed out that football refereeing has been on the front line in the fight for gender equality in sports over the past three decades. In 1991, for the first time in a professional sport setting, FIFA employed three female referees for an official tournament. In 1994, four female referees were appointed to the FIFA list. Since then, women's football refereeing has seen an impressive rise.

Another important milestone has been just achieved. In May 2022, FIFA announced that female referees are to officiate in a men's World Cup for the first time, with three female assistant referees joining them. Specifically, Stéphanie Frappart of France, Rwanda's Salima Mukansanga and Yoshimi Yamashita of Japan have been included on the list of 36 referees who will take the field in Qatar in November and December 2022. According to FIFA's head of refereeing, Pierluigi Collina, the selection of officials was made irrespective of gender. "This concludes a long process that began several years ago with the deployment of female referees at FIFA men's junior and senior tournaments. In this way, we clearly emphasise that it's quality that counts for us and not gender", Collina said.

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Football refereeing has been on the front line in the fight for gender equality in sports over the past three decades.

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Lorenzo D'Ilario is an Italian sports journalist and football referee. He is also President of Panathlon Club Junior Roma and works as press officer for District Italy of Panathlon International, an IOC-recognised movement for the promotion and spread of culture and sporting ethics.

Indian Picture Books for Children

Dr. Nina Sabnani

Had someone told me that bookstores in India don't have any Children's books that are Indian in content and form, some decades ago, I would have agreed, but not today.

It is true that it will be hard to find picture books from Indian publications in large stores. Not because they don't exist, but because publishers of Children's books in India, do not have deep pockets to give their books on credit for long stretches of time. So, looking for children's books from India in big stores will most likely draw a blank. But just look on the internet and you would be delighted to find vast numbers of published authors and illustrators of children's literature in India, with Indian content and images that Indian children can identify with. Many of them are also women!

There are a fair number of publishers in India that produce amazing picture books that are sensitive to Indian children and their varying contexts. Notably amongst them are Pratham, Tulika Books, Amar Chitra Katha, Tara Books, Karadi Tales, Ektara, Eklavya

and several others. Their books are available in several Indian languages and English and sometimes also available in audio formats as well as digital stories.

To promote and distribute the books, there are keen but small enthusiastic bookstores that obtain and distribute books from Indian publishers. Bookstores like Kahani Tree, Eureka Books, Bahari and Sons, Lighthouse, Champaka, Kids2day, Comet Media, to name a few, not only actively seek and stock books, but also organise activities around the books with authors, illustrators and their readers. Bookworm Goa, which has a massive library of Children's books from around the world including a large number from India, curate books and activities through their mobile library with volunteers and local schools. Besides this, they organise workshops for school librarians from remote places to create awareness about children's literature in India.

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Indigenous art needs to enter the general visual vocabulary of children's picture books.

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Authors and illustrators are invited for show and tell events in Children's lit fests across the country. Among these, Bookaroo and Neev foundation attract large numbers of authors and illustrators. NBT (The National Book Trust) also organises several events where they bring together children with content creators in India and South East Asia. Awards like the Big Little Book award are instituted by TATA Trusts for Indian authors and illustrators to recognize talent and promote the discipline. Riyaz Academy offers training opportunities for learning illustration for working individuals.

I know all this, because I am a part of this small but significant community that is vibrant and productive. I was initiated into illustration by Radhika Menon of Tulika Books who had more faith in me and my potential to be an illustrator than I was ready to believe. It is to her credit that my work has received the visibility and accolades over time. I started by making my animation films into picture books but soon grew confident to illustrate and author books that were not films to begin with. My

research engagements with indigenous artists led me to collaborate with several artists to create books like -- Its all the Same (Kaavad artist, Satyanarayan Suthar), My Gandhi Story (Warli artist Rajesh Chaitya Vangad), A Bhil Story (Bhil artist Sher Singh Bhil), and We are the Dancing Forest (Gond artist Venkat Shyam). The idea of such collaborations was hugely supported and encouraged by Tulika Publishers who resonated with my belief that indigenous art needs to enter the general visual vocabulary of children's picture books. Children may be initiated to such books so that they are familiar with the art and find such illustrations normative rather than odd or exotic.

The indigenous ways of seeing and representing has a lot to offer children in terms of understanding and appreciation of diversity, different ways of thinking and multiple ways of being. Children's picture books in India are thriving because of the passion and motivation of its close-knit community to create meaningful content. All need the recognition, support and appreciation for their commitment and exuberance.



Dr. Nina Sabnani is an artist and storyteller who uses film, illustration and writing to tell her stories. Retired from IDC School of Design at IIT Bombay, she currently teaches at Srishti Manipal Institute of Art Design and Technology, Bangalore.

Woman Is As Woman Does

Nancy Adajania

When Mr. Mukherjee, the Director General of CSMVS Museum, Mumbai invited me to curate an exhibition devoted to Indian women artists to celebrate the museum's centenary, I mulled over the various ways in which this mandate could be met. Could this have been an exhibition devoted to a few star artists? That is the default format of the art world, which I wished to avoid. I have spent nearly three decades in the art world and as someone trained in the social sciences and film-making, I am always saddened by how the artworld emphasizes the cult of the individual artist over the interplay between the individual and collective from which all culture is truly produced.

Mr. Mukherjee has famously described CSMVS as a 'people's museum'. In that spirit, I have proposed this exhibition, which contextualises the work of five generations of Indian women artists, in terms of the large-scale women's movement that was galvanized by the 1970s with the Mathura rape case and gathered further momentum through successful protests for legal reform in the 1980s. Also, integral to the exhibition is the Chipko Andolan and various initiatives to safeguard individual liberties. Women have been at the forefront of many of these movements. It is this sense of agency that I wish to emphasise through the title of this show – *Woman Is As Woman Does*.

**My emphasis is on female artistic labour—‘doing’
as achieving the impossible, whether
incrementally or through radical gestures.**

I also reference here a book that I read in my early twenties and has been very important to me – Radha Kumar’s seminal 1993 book, *The History of Doing*, which historicised the Indian women’s movement across the 19th and 20th centuries. My emphasis is on female artistic labour—‘doing’ as achieving the impossible, whether incrementally or through radical gestures.

The exhibition takes the form of an inter-generational mapping. The oldest artist represented is Zarina Hashmi (1937-2020), and the youngest is Al-Qawi Nanavati (born 1995). ‘Woman Is As Woman Does’ does not treat gender as a static identity. These artists belong to different classes, ethnicities and caste groups. Those born to privilege are shown alongside those of Dalit or Adivasi origin. Artists who have concentrated on studio practice appear here with artists who produce zines and graphic novels, collaborate with subaltern artists, local communities, farmers, activists and grandmothers. To emphasise an intersectional feminist politics, I have paid homage to the pioneering feminist activist Kamla Bhasin in this show. Her azaadi slogans urge us to denounce all forms of oppression including patriarchy, and forge solidarities with the Dalit, Adivasi and workers’ communities.

I wanted the viewers to be immersed in the debates and discussions emanating from this show at a visceral level. Although by temperament I prefer the classical approach, I have used speech bubbles to underscore the different decibel levels in the show – the spiky bubble to present the declamatory tone of the protest songs by women’s groups in Gujarat or the squarish one to portray the thoughts and feelings of artist Durgabai Vyam about the humiliation faced by the Adivasi and Dalit communities.

(The Exhibition was on display from 12 August to 16 October, 2022)



Ita Mehrotra,
Forest Song: A
Chipko Story,
2014, a comic
scroll



Nancy Adajania is a cultural theorist and curator based in Bombay. She has curated a number of major research-based exhibitions including the Nelly Sethna retrospective (Chatterjee & Lal with Cymroza Art Gallery, Bombay, 2021) and the Sudhir Patwardhan retrospective (NGMA, Bombay with The Guild Art Gallery, 2019).

Women in Gaming

Akanksha Mishra

Like many others, gaming is a male-dominated industry. Most would say that's largely due to women being disinterested in video games as a hobby, but that's a surface-level observation, made with the prejudice and stereotypes that society hands out to us.

For years games have been targeted towards a male audience, so it's no surprise that the end product is enjoyed mostly by men. The storylines in most games the female characters are either damsels in distress snatched by the villain or stuck in the role of the supporting character whose only purpose is to motivate her male counterpart; sometimes via her untimely death. Multi-player games scenario is a whole different ball game where many women have reported to facing misogynistic comments when interacting with random players and experiencing verbal sexual harassment at least once.

Despite this all, video games have been one of my great childhood passions. I used to dutifully sit and watch my older cousin play games since I was three. His excitement infected me as well and over the years I collected multiple consoles and CDs for my computer, thanks to my parents who indulged me. But my all-time favourite came to me at the awkward age of 13. The sci-fi adventure series called Mass Effect had everything I needed – a grand epic story about saving the world, action packed combat and well written characters that could be one's fictional friend or rival, based on one's choices.

But the best choice that the game provided, right at the very start, was to choose the gender of your protagonist – a choice that didn't change anything else for the rest of the playthrough except the immersion of the player. I related more to the character and was inspired by their strength and leadership. The effect wouldn't have been as poignant if I was playing as another stoic male hero archetype.

I related more to the character and was inspired by their strength and leadership. The effect wouldn't have been as poignant if I was playing as another stoic male hero archetype.

A simple change like that opened doors for inclusivity. Since then, having protagonists of both genders is a much more common practice in games.

With the desire to be a part of making such changes and telling similar empowering stories to others, I started working in the gaming industry in 2018. More dramatically, even though the player base among the gamers is 40% women in Asia and the US, the gender ratio among developers is skewed to 1 woman for every 9 men. The ramification of this is that the women in the company attract more attention, some of which is hardly the positive kind. The biggest gaming studios in the world have had women come forward with reports of sexual misconduct in workplace. Then, there are day to day putdowns that swing from questioning their capabilities to discrediting their success, attributing it to favouritism or the company fulfilling its agenda to be 'woke'.

However, one can see a change taking place. Having an open dialogue about such topics is now acceptable leading to at the very least an understanding on how to right a wrong. Efforts are being taken to hire more women into the workplace and anonymous tiplines are set to report any unsavoury incidents.

Many companies resort to face value actions like herding women into a group for a photo-op to post on their social media, bragging about their diversity. Such hollow gestures make women feel like promotional tools instead of valued employees. What is required is more tangible and substantial for actual reforms.

Generations of exclusion and missed opportunities has led to this gender imbalance in the gaming professionals. The amends we choose to make this right have to do more good than harm. Because every choice we make matters, regardless of how big or small.

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**Every choice we
make matters,
regardless of how
big or small.**

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Akanksha Mishra is one part gamer and one part artist, who mixed her two passions into a career and have been working as a 3D Artist in gaming studios. Based in Mumbai, she is an avid traveller.

‘The Personal is Political’

Dr. Smita Desai

In her book *Sexual Politics* (1970), Kate Millet defines power in terms of the political. The exercise of patriarchal power by a man upon the woman within the home is political, which Millet described as ‘Personal becomes Political’. Alarming issues in the personal domain, like domestic violence, marital rape, female foeticide, and women’s control over family resources, can be effectively viewed through this lens.

The notions of private and public are based on the individual’s relationship with the state. The public sphere continues to be represented as superior to the private which receives far less importance. The private-public dichotomy is known to deny the right to equality for women as it has created a sexual division of labour, both in the home and public realm. This divide has resulted in unpaid work for women in the family and issues like occupational stereotyping

“ **The private-public dichotomy is known to deny the right to equality for women as it has created a sexual division of labour, both in the home and public realm.** ”

The ‘Personal is Political’ was embraced as a slogan by feminists to express the various challenges faced by women across political, social and economic spheres. This slogan drew people’s attention to the private-public dichotomies in the daily life of men and women. It also motivated women to view personal issues like matrimony, education, reproduction and more as conscious social decisions that impact public domain activities.

Feminists have challenged this private-public divide, considering it discriminatory and responsible for the exclusion of women from the public sphere. They strongly feel that public interventions such as laws on rape, abortion, inheritance, and the sex-based division of work at home and the workplace have structured what happens in the personal domain. Feminists have also concluded that the private-public fields are interrelated and cannot

exist as separate arenas. The family unit as the nucleus of civil society, if not nurtured, will lead to a breakdown of the larger social structures.

So, using the lens of the personal as political, (how) can the family unit as the nucleus of society role-model some changes in the public sphere? It is an acceptable presumption that what happens in the home will inevitably be projected outward and impact the spheres of polity, economy, law and the general society.

At the outset, the distinction between the private and the public, regardless of gender, needs to be questioned. This inquiry will only happen if we recognise the individual's personal and public life as closely related rather than separate. Gender discriminatory laws relating to inheritance, marriage, reproduction and wage labour are inherently related to the division between private and public spheres. We need to recognise the impact of the social processes of marriage/cohabitation, parenting and family dynamics on the workplace, economy and political structures.

While women's presence in educational institutions, governance, affirmative action strategies of quotas and reservation policies are essential, they are of little use if we cannot address familial hegemony and pathways to liberation. To do this, we need to take affirmative actions that will oppose the patriarchal structures within our homes. While public interventions will undoubtedly improve the personal conditions of women, focused efforts must have their genesis in the private arena too.

Educating men regarding their role, both in the oppression and liberation of women, must begin in childhood. It can start at home, and the school can play a critical supportive role. A separate gender studies curriculum using the life skills approach is needed to achieve this goal, given as much importance (if not more) as the Sciences. The school, where girls and boys coexist on equal terms, would be an excellent nurturing ground for feminism.

According to the book by Chimamanda titled, *We should all be feminists* (2014), if we want to reduce this inequality narrative, men have to be a significant part of women's liberation from oppression. All, regardless of gender, need to be held responsible for respect and equity in our relationships. We must nurture a mindset of the private and public as being connected and related rather than a dichotomy.



Dr. Smita Desai is a psychologist and special educator. She is the founding director of *Drishti*, a leading children's mental health services provider. She has served as a consultant to government policy panels.

Gender: Then and Now

Dr. Daphne Pillai

My research on Gender studies goes back to the early 1990's when I was working on my Ph.D. on the topic 'A study of the Gender Bias in English Poetry. 1918- 1988.' I carried out a feminist study of English poetry for a period of 80 years, from 1918 the year that marked the end of the First World War, till the year 1988, a year when the second wave of Feminism was raging all over the world.

This study took me on a journey from the start of the Feminist Movement, the struggle, the uprising, the suffragist movement which was the fight for women's right to vote and the glaring disparities between the genders and their gender roles.

I still remember how my male colleagues and male superiors used to look aghast when I mentioned my topic to them. I used to read books like 'The Second Sex', 'Writing and Sexual Difference' in the staff room and my male colleagues used to shrug their shoulders and look at me strangely. I also remember vividly one of my male mentors telling me to abandon my topic when I had nearly completed half of my research work.

Well, I persisted, and got my Ph.D. from the University of Mumbai on the same subject. In those years, it was a path breaking topic, especially as in my thesis I took on celebrated poets like T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats and Robert Graves and condemned their derogatory references to women in their poems. Well, if you have the courage of your conviction, you will be able to do it. The more I was asked to change my topic, the more I was determined to bring in more evidence to back the position that I was taking.

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It was during this same period that I was introduced to Soroptimist International, an international women's organisation which has consultative status in the United Nations. Soroptimist means 'the best for my sisters'. Soroptimist International Bombay Chembur was chartered in those early years when women were trying to find a voice.

Today 25 years later, I can see the shift in in the world scene on gender roles and balancing them. Men have come forward and responded to the feminist movement in different ways. Governments, activists and NGOs like SIBC have worked towards addressing these issues. There is more understanding towards gender equality today, though the progress is still slow. Factors such as education, new family structures, economic empowerment, legal enactment, media, etc. have contributed greatly to the changing attitudes towards gender and their roles.

In our fight towards balancing roles, we should not forget the LGBTQ Community i.e. the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer community. Though in India and a few places elsewhere, transgenders are referred to as third sex or third gender, many do not like the title and wish to be referred to either male or female depending on their specific orientation. Many of them have undergone surgeries to become male or female and are offended to be called the third gender. Some individuals do not conform to a fixed gender. Individuals are free to shape their identity as they see themselves. We need to have this inclusion in our studies of gender.

Creating awareness on gender equality, whether it is he, she or they; social inclusion of all gender variants is important to bring about social transformation in societies.



Dr. Daphne Pillai is the Founder President of SI Bombay Chembur. She is the Chairperson of the Management Board of Mahatma Education Society and the President of The International Women's Federation of Commerce and Industry (IWFCI), India Chapter.

Tweaking the Language for Inclusivity

Noopur Gosain

Unlearning centuries of patriarchal dogma is undoubtedly a mammoth-sized issue we sometimes forget about because it's so deeply ingrained. While some of it you can catch on to quickly, the one thing that took me a bit to recognize is the bias present in everyday language. From motivational quotes to general explanations, our narrative is skewed towards the cis male point of view. And maybe it's because I'm a writer by profession, here's a few notes that have stuck with me.

Becoming a more inclusive writer is not easy. It's something that requires constant adjustments, revisions and considerations. Even with all our best intentions and sincere efforts to be more inclusive, it can be difficult to avoid our own inherent biases. But it's a challenge worth taking up; after all, we want readers to see themselves in the stories we create. Writing characters who don't fit the cisgender, heterosexual male standard isn't as simple as swapping "he" for "she" or vice versa. There are

numerous considerations that writers must take into account when creating new characters or revising old ones. With these tips, you can make your writing more inclusive of everyone regardless of their race, gender identity, sexual orientation or physical ability.

Be mindful of your pronouns

The language we use to refer to people is important. How we refer to individuals could indicate their relationship to others — or, in some cases, their relationship to society at large. For example, an individual's pronouns can show their gender identity — as well as their relationship to other people. There are many ways to refer to people. Below are some examples of how you can avoid using gendered language and suggesting a gender to your characters: Use the pronouns your character chooses — While this may not be applicable to every character, it's worth bearing in mind. For example, if you're writing about a transgender person, it's important to use their preferred pronouns.

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There are many words and phrases that may seem harmless to you, but could be harmful or offensive to others

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Use language that's inclusive by nature.

Certain words and phrases are inclusive by nature. They don't rely on stereotypes or assumptions about certain identities. Words like “everyone”, “no one”, “no matter what” and “anyone can” are inclusive by nature. They're not attached to any specific identity. Instead, they reflect the idea that anyone can do it. These words can be used as substitutes when you're not 100% sure of what you want to say. When you're not sure of the best word to use, try substituting one of these inclusive terms. Doing so can help you avoid stereotypes and assumptions.

Avoid problematic words and phrases.

There are many words and phrases that may seem harmless to you, but could be harmful or offensive to others. Words like “mankind” are problematic because they don't account for people who are women. Words like “chairman” and “businessman” are problematic as they imply that such a profession is only held by men. Using these words could suggest that only people who identify as men can do these jobs.

Wrapping up

Writing inclusively can be a challenge, but it's worth it. As a writer, you have the unique ability to create new worlds full of magical, wondrous characters. One way to make your writing more inclusive is to become more mindful of your diction and your metaphors. Words and phrases can be harmful or offensive, even if they're not meant to be. As a writer, you have a responsibility to write inclusively. With these tips, you can make your writing more inclusive of everyone regardless of their race, gender identity, sexual orientation or physical ability.



***Noopur Gosain** is a writer and a content strategist. She has been a fan of varied forms of the written word for what seems like forever.*

Pink and Blue:

Mirroring Gender Stereotypes

Dr. Reni Francis

As soon as we know that our close relative has delivered a baby at home, the first question is If the baby is a boy or a girl? this is a preliminary question for the bigger task lying ahead – shopping for the new born. The shopping list includes dress, towels, socks etc., but the question is which the colour – we end up buying pink for girls and blue for boys. For years we have been blindly following these structured, conventional stereotypes that have become the normal practice.

Mirroring gender stereotypes can be seen in our society through the various gender specific or

gender designated roles in our daily life. Dolls as toys for girls, cars as toys for boys. Men are strong and bold; women are weak and emotional. These gender stereotyping is ingrained so deeply in our mind that we fail to see beyond them.

Gender stereotypes continue to exist and are transmitted through media, social gatherings, educational and recreational activities, thus promoting gender prejudice and discrimination.

Dolls as toys for girls, cars as toys for boys. Men are strong and bold; women are weak and emotional. These gender stereotyping is ingrained so deeply in our mind that we fail to see beyond them.

Few examples that showcase genders stereotypes:

Media:

Eye opener: An advertisement of a new car launch highlights the features of the car as sturdy, fuel efficient, modern design etc. but the person driving the car most of the time is a male. Today, women are also in the forefront in driving vehicles, but media rarely depicts it.

Turn around: Advertisement need to be gender sensitive and not gender dominated.

Education:

Eye opener: In a class when asked to pair – Samir, Anita : Cook, Engineer. The responses were Samir: Engineer and Anita: Cook. These answers are most of the time pre-determined and fixed. We need to focus on changing mindset and perspectives among students.

Turn around: Educators need to focus on gender neutral teaching-learning and also encourage adopting gender reversal roles thus sensitizing gender identity.

Changing mindset about gender stereotypes through:

Think laterally: Quite often gender roles flow from Top Down, decisions are taken by men (patriarchal society) and women are expected to follow them strictly. There is a need to change from vertical thinking to lateral thinking by providing decision making opportunities for all.

Adaptive Change: Changes in the society reveal the nature and culture of the society, educational and job opportunities, status of women in the society. These adaptive changes form the force of every human being and nation.

Gender neutral actions: Media, social gathering, recreational activities should highlight gender neutral actions. Since these have a great impact on young minds it is important to foster positive gender roles and echo the importance of men and women in contributing to global culture, international progress and human rights.



Dr. Reni Francis is SIBC member and a past president. She is the Principal of MES's Pillai College of Education and Research, Chembur. She has authored 26 books and has been granted two Australian and one German patent.

Misogyny and Me Too

Nitya Nair

The Indians collectively cheered when Harnaaz Kaur Sandhu was crowned Miss Universe in December 2021. Harnaaz brought home the title of Miss Universe after 21 long years and thus it was a proud moment for India. A few months later, when Ms. Sandhu arrived in India and started with her media interactions, she had to face her worse nightmare. The cheers disappeared overnight and were replaced by brutal trolls and criticism; just because she had gained a little bit of weight since winning the pageant! She was body shamed, asked to return her crown, called 'Aunty' etc. by nameless, faceless people on social media. Ms. Sandhu had no option but to speak out and tell the world about her very personal battle with 'celiac disease' that contributed to her weight gain. This painful incident is simply one in hundreds of such incidents that show the collective mentality of the society towards women.

The representation of women in media has always been highly skewed. Earlier, women were cast in films only as an accessory to her male counterparts or as a sex symbol. In advertisements, women were cast only in those for the household products – portraying their place as women is in the kitchen and home. When it comes to journalism, again, women were mostly confined to reporting weather and soft news

and were made to wear short skirts. Though the scenario is different today in terms of representation and inclusion, the opposition towards it is very strong. Whether it be films, advertisement, journalism or social media; every woman who dares to break the glass ceiling is intensely scrutinized by the media and public and their every move is subject to criticisms, trolls and memes.



Every woman who dares to break the glass ceiling is intensely scrutinized by the media and public and their every move is subject to criticisms, trolls and memes.



Priyanka Chopra, one of the most successful actors globally was trolled by people when she met Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi. The critics said it was wrong of her to wear a skirt and show her legs while meeting the PM. Recently, an Anchor and actor by the name of Anasuya was age shamed and called 'Aunty' by the fans of a popular actor named Vijay Deverkonda as the former had tweeted an indirect comment on the latter's movie. The most shocking incident of all happened recently when a professor of St. Xavier's University in Kolkatta was forced to resign because she had posted on her private Instagram account some pictures wearing bikini while vacationing. The professor says, she was morally policed and interrogated for hours by the college authorities before being forced to tender her resignation. When, she filed a lawsuit against the university, the university counter sued her asking her to pay up for tarnishing the university's reputation.

It is said that 'Art imitates Life'. The above incidents reinforce what happens when media represents women as an inferior being whose actions need to be kept in check. This is what happens when the society celebrates highly misogynistic movies like 'Kabir Singh' and make heroes out of characters who are narcissistic, toxic and chauvinistic. As the cultivation theory suggests, people who are regularly exposed to media for long periods of time are more likely to perceive the world's social realities as they are presented by the media they consume, which in turn affects their attitudes and behaviour. This could be the only explanation of what went wrong with the recent Supreme Court of the United

States verdict of overturning Roe v/s Wade judgement thereby snatching away from women, their rights to have abortion. This is a very important incident as being a hegemonic power, this verdict of the United States Supreme Court could potentially be used as an international precedent by courts worldwide thereby, jeopardizing the reproductive and sexual health of women globally.

It is indeed shocking that the Roe v/s Wade verdict overturning came from the same land that sowed the seeds of a global movement empowering women called '#Me Too' just two years prior. This movement helped women across the world stand up to their oppressors, both, in professional and personal life. Today however, the movement has had a decline and is now used as a joke by the media. In the war between Misogyny and Women Empowerment, I feel that Misogyny is steadily gaining the upper hand. It is thus imperative now more than ever that we work towards positive representation of women in media and call out misogynic representation loudly.



Nitya Nair works as a senior faculty for filmmaking and media courses in Mumbai. She is an avid reader and travel enthusiast.

Women's Issues and Challenges

Dr. Rema Ramchandran

We live in an advanced world where several inventions and developments have taken place. All these do make living more comfortable and easier. However, certain things are yet to progress or see a change. In some parts of the world women are restrained from driving cars, pursuing education, dressing in modern clothes, or working for a living. In India too, in some states, recently girls are being denied access to schools and colleges for wearing a

pilots, scientists etc. doing pioneering work and carving a name for themselves in a man's world. These cases are very few and far between. While inclusion and diversity has become mandated at organizations, we are yet to see a clear practice of the same.

It is a pity that the establishments in power do not give enough emphasis to address the issues and

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Giving Education to women means giving education to the whole family.

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head-scarf. Patriarchal world will keep telling women what to wear and what not to wear. Female participation in the workforce has steadily declined in India in the last few years. These certainly do not point to a progressive world. Women are denied a right for self-development and self-expression.

In a striking irony, we do see examples of women who are on top of the corporate ladder, women

challenges faced by women. We do hear of stray stories of woman empowerment. However, the large majority of the problems remains unaddressed. A lot of reforms are required to make it an equal world in all parts of the world.

Having said the above, we cannot forget to mention Raja Ram Mohan Roy who founded the Brahmo Samaj, which sought to break the shackles of the

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Let us create a world in which no children, girls or boys, are denied access to school and education.

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caste system and the fight against the custom of Sati that saved the lives and helped change their lives for the better.

Manockjee Cursetjee started the first English school for girls in India in Mumbai in 1859.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the architect of the Indian constitution, was responsible for the introduction of the Hindu Code Bill which gave women the right to file a divorce petition and the right to inheritance.

Education is certainly one sector which needs focus as giving Education to women means giving education to the whole family. It plays an important role in building self-confidence among women. It also enables changing her status in society. Education enables and builds confidence to make decisions in a better way. Let us create a world in which no children, girls or boys, are denied access to school and education.

In India particularly where the female population is 669 million, more legislations and statutes need to be passed to protect their rights and also enable higher empowerment.



Dr. Rema Ramchandran is NASI – PAC, Director SIGBI Trading Ltd. and Past President SI Bangalore.

Weaker Sex?

Dr. Betty Sibil

Research has proven that biologically men are weaker than women then why is it that women are commonly referred to as the weaker sex? When nature has bestowed two XXs which is a more rigid and robust combination to women, then why is it that women are unable to cope and survive at the workplace? When nature is on the side of women then what is it that makes her weak and retreat from competition? Melinda Gates says, *"A woman with a voice is, by definition, a strong woman. But the search to find that voice can be remarkably difficult."*

Is it a social world order that has been and is heavily set against women? Are these social setups the breeding ground for deeply ingrained mindsets that look at women through a lens that only glorifies her as a care-giver / home-maker? As an individual, her primary responsibility is towards the betterment of

her family alone, which many times comes at the cost of her own physical, mental and emotional well-being.

What is the price that the world pays for this skewed balance? A skewed balance where fifty percent of the population has to work two hundred percent their normal capacity to receive less than hundred percent of the credit that is due to them. The hurdles placed in the way of women are sometimes so insurmountable that many of them pull back even before the race begins. Isn't this a significant loss to the world human capital? A majority of every generation of women sacrifice their future and independence to facilitate a brighter future for their progeny. Does this sound fair and justified? Doesn't it seem like a vicious circle that needs to be broken?

The hurdles placed in the way of women are sometimes so insurmountable that many of them pull back even before the race begins. Isn't this a significant loss to the world human capital?

Indra Nooyi, former CEO and Chairperson of PepsiCo, in one of her interviews acknowledged that “Women cannot have it all”. She underlined the difficulties that women encounter while trying to maintain a semblance of work-life balance. When these are the words of a woman ranked among the most powerful women in the world by publications like Forbes, what chance does millions of other women stand who lead ordinary lives and have ordinary jobs?

In spite of these hurdles, we have seen numerous women, like Nooyi, who have stood tall and forged ahead in their careers and social life. In most cases it would have been a result of their sheer grit and determination with a ‘speck of support’ (SOS). Many more women-centric success stories can be written if there exists a ‘SOS’. Even Nooyi speaks of a supportive family that helped transcend hurdles.

What shape and form should this ‘SOS’ take? It may vary from situation to situation. It may be in the form of accommodating policies, inclusive practices, supportive infrastructure, dismantling stereotypes, shattering glass ceilings and the like. Educational institutes, the corporate sector and media have started taking cognizance of the need for change and are taking steps to address and bridge the gender gap that exists. But for the above-mentioned reforms to manifest itself at the workplace there needs to be a pronounced change in the way people think (mindset), speak (narrative) and behave (action) within their basic social systems i.e. family. Until and unless mindsets, narratives and actions don’t change, constructive changes on this front will just be a distant dream.

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**Many more
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***Dr. Betty Sibil** has been a member of SIBC since 2017. She is Professor at Pillai Institute of Management Studies and Research and her areas of interest are training and development and human resource management.*

Are We True Feminists?

Yvette Lee

Feminism in its truest sense is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality of the sexes. In the early 20th century when women were fighting for basic human rights, the strong one-sided hostility feminism had was understandable. They had to fight against men for their equal rights when it came to voting, politics, reproduction or just the freedom to express themselves and therefore had to resort to extreme instances of public disobedience. However, today modern feminism has veered from gender equality into a cult of angry women who seek to belittle and dehumanise men, demonizes ALL men and treating them as presumptive rapists, abusers and job snatchers while encouraging women to see themselves as victims.

Gloria Jean Watkins, better known by her pen name Bell Hooks has very articulately defined feminism in her book 'Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center'. She explains, "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression." This definition encapsulates the real meaning of feminism because it so clearly states that the feminism is not about being anti-men. It makes it clear that the problem is sexism and that females can be just as sexist as men.

As a feminist I do acknowledge and don't want to undermine and underplay the severe oppression girls and women still suffer in many parts of our country and the world. In India girls are still pulled out of school at puberty, we still lack equal representation in the workspace and even in politics, we are still seen as sex objects, we are still eve teased and even among the educated and so called 'modern' families, women don't have rights over their bodies, their sexuality and reproduction, not to mention property rights. But is the solution to this inequality only a tunnel-visioned, self-centred and naïve rampage against men?



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I still might not be able to provide you with a solution to gender equality but I for sure know feminism does not mean women are superior to men. Feminism calls for equality – to see men and women as deserving candidates for equal opportunities and rights. Feminism once concerned with increasing the freedoms of women and all people in society, should not move towards demanding the reduction of freedoms for the opposite sex.

We should not turn feminism into as narrow and petty movement as it is turning out to be. Feminism was and should always be about equality for all, true freedom, more choice and the change in perpetuating hierarchies and not about creating new hierarchies.

Gloria Steinem puts this idea well. *“A feminist is anyone who recognises the equality and full humanity of women and men.”*

Let's be true feminists if at all we believe in it!

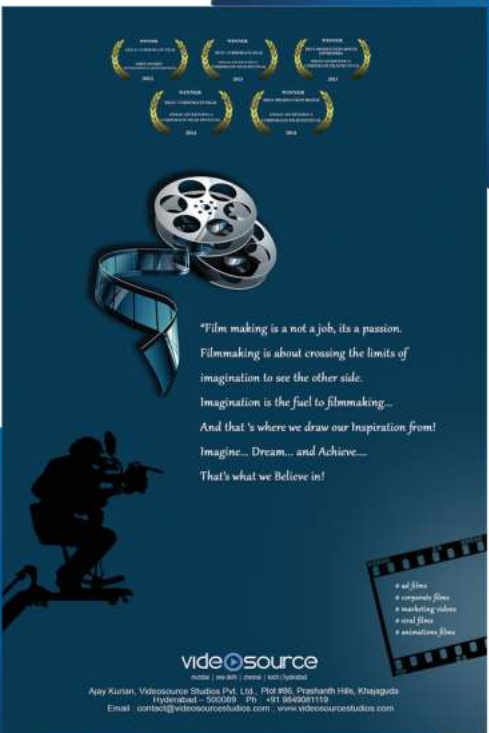


Yvette Lee is a Counsellor and Social Worker. She is past president of SIBC (2018-22) and currently Programme Action Co-ordinator. She will soon assume the role of NASI communication officer for 2022-24.

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