

REPORT

Workshop on **Recovering Pasts: Interrogating the Present**

11 May 2013

Centre for Women's Studies, AMU successfully organized a one day workshop in collaboration with the Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) on "Recovering Pasts: Interrogating the Present" on May 11, 2013.

Prof. Nighat Ahmad, Director of the Centre welcomed the delegates and gave a brief introduction to the workshop. She said that the workshop was an attempt to build an archive by documenting experiences of women alumni, AMU to capture the process of social change and record the challenges faced through personal narratives. So there was a session on oral narratives of women alumni of AMU to explore the potential of AMU as an academic institution.

The workshop also intended to improve and upgrade the academic concerns of the Centre through interactions/ discussions with the experts in the field. Therefore a session was also devoted to discuss research curriculum and pedagogy at the Centre with the invited scholars and the faculty attending the session.

On this occasion, Prof. Zakia A. Siddiqui, Founder Director of the Centre for Women's Studies said that it was during the tenure of Mr. Mohd. Hamid Ansari as Vice Chancellor that the Centre was established and the then Chairman of University Grants Commission, Prof. Hari Gautam played a very positive role in the establishment of this Centre.

Ms. Indu Agnihotri, Secretary, Indian Association for Women's Studies said that Indian women are still facing many problems and equality and gender justice is a major issue today. She said that AMU occupied a special place among the institutions propagating education among masses. She said that such academic discussions would enhance the social orientations.

AMU Vice Chancellor Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Zameer Uddin Shah while delivering his presidential address expressed his concern about the availability of hostel facilities for girl students of the university. He informed that the university will construct a new Hall of residence to accommodate 1500 girls and the I. G. Hall will be handed over to Women's College for accommodating undergraduate girls.

Regarding problems related to library facilities for girls he said that the university would provide a grant of five lakh for purchase of books for the Women's College library. He asked the girls of Women's College to identify books available in the Maulana Azad Library which would be delivered to them next day. He warned that any financial irregularity in the University or any act that lowers the dignity of women will not be tolerated.

Mrs Salma Ansari, wife of Vice President of India Mr Hamid Ansari was the chief guest at the workshop. Mrs Ansari said, "Gender equality could only be attained if women of the country cutting across the political, religious and linguistic barriers join hands and it will pave the way for their political, economic and social empowerment." She also added that the political dispensations are hardly sensitive to the aspirations of women. She wishfully recalled her student days at Aligarh Muslim University and said that Aligarh has always welcomed new ideas and provided equal opportunities to girl students.

The inaugural session ended with Prof. N. A. K. Durrani, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences proposing a vote of thanks.

ALUMNI PRESENTATION

The first session of the workshop was dedicated to the women alumni of the A.M.U with an intention to document their experiences and archiving it. Following were the alumni who presented their experiences of being in A.M.U.:

- Mrs. Aziza Hanafi
- Professor Bilquees Musavi
- Professor Saira Habib
- Professor Sajida Nabi
- Mrs. Naseem Iqtidar Ali
- Professor Jameela Ahmad
- Prof. Hameeda Ahmad

These alumni mainly studied in the Girls College at Aligarh during 1940's to 1960's. Many of them later on served as faculty in the college and became symbols of encouragement for the next generation. They recalled that during those days there was a section in the Muslim community who vehemently opposed female modern education but for the pro changers, this campus was a symbol of new learning and a tool of social restructuring the Muslim community with modern values. In this tussle of contributing forces the efforts for female education grew in this campus and women from Muslim elite families found a destination where their dreams could be realized and they could get an opportunity to enter into the process of modern learning.

They remembered that the campus of the Girls' College was not much affected by the forces of communalism. Many of the female teachers were of different religions and they celebrated festivals like Holi, Basant, Christams etc. with equal enthusiasm . There was a great respect towards the multiplicity of cultures. They also eulogized that despite the presence of conservatism there was a progressive and liberal trend in the university campus. At higher levels where co-education persisted, there were arrangements for segregation of both genders in classrooms but it was not strictly imposed upon the girl students and it was received with liberality in the campus. Alumni expressed their deep gratitude towards the teachers who always encouraged the cause of female education. They motivated their distant friends and relatives to send their daughters to Girls' College for acquiring modern education. Female teachers in the Girls' College actively worked for the promotion of female education among the women from the deprived section of the society. They also ran vocational

training programmes for their emancipation. Many of them took inspiration and became instrumental to promote the women's issues and mobilize people, particularly women at their native places for this cause. They opened up schools and training centres for the girls at their native places.

As is mentioned above many of them after acquiring university education were appointed as teachers in the college and university. They recalled that it catered to the need of the Girls' College. At the same time they did not face any discrimination on the basis of gender in their appointment at university level. They usually found their male colleagues supportive towards them. However, there was a realization that male students sensed uneasiness while being taught by female teachers.

In this presentation it was revealed that Aligarh movement has redefined the community identity while at the same time reconstituting the ideals of womanhood for Muslim women in India. In this effort the contribution of new educated Alig women is unforgettable. It revealed that these women were socially conscious and raised their voices against forces that were inimical to modern education of females.

PRESENTATION BY RESEARCH SCHOLARS

The next session was devoted to research scholars where three of our research scholars shared their findings and surveys followed up by a discussion on it.

Following were the researches discussed:

Priya Salomi Lartius: Her topic of research is 'Women in Agricultural Work in Uttar Pradesh'. She started off with the existence of biases against agricultural women in our society. Women farmers in Uttar Pradesh suffer from problems such as invisibility and under accountability of their work, landlessness, displacement due to the intervention of technology, failure of governmental policies and programmes, and lacuna in state laws. She highlighted that various tenancy laws, inheritance laws and wage laws are discriminatory and ineffective. She suggested development of agricultural technologies for women, generation of new employment opportunities, unionization of agricultural workers, and provision of government loans, subsidies, equipments etc.

Saman Eram Maroof Ahmad: Her topic of research is 'Women in the Unorganized Sector: Study of Women Embroiders in Aligarh'. Her research is based on the primary survey of 200 embroiders in Aligarh, engaged in *patti ka kam*. They are predominantly low caste Muslim home based workers who suffer marginalization and whose employment opportunities are adversely affected by *pardah* restrictions. She further classified *patti workers* in Skilled and Unskilled category, leading to the differentials in wages. The greater share of women in the earnings of the family does have some positive reflections in decision making. Few women feel empowered and are aware about their exploitation. However, this consciousness of some women was not reflected in any attempts at organizing or improving their conditions. They clearly lack the initiative, and in fact showed reluctance to take up the matter fearing hostility of the intermediaries.

Sana Khan: Her topic of research is 'State and Women in Pakistan'. She critically analyzed various provisions of Family Laws Ordinance 1961; specific laws affecting women's rights under the Constitution of Pakistan, 1973; Hudood Ordinance 1980 etc. Based on a rigid interpretation of the *Sharia* Laws, the Hudood Ordinance makes no distinction as to whether a sexual act has been committed willfully or forcibly and makes no distinction between consensual sex and rape. The Hudood Ordinance has often been invoked to intimidate and subjugate women. Her study further focused on various leading women's organizations of Pakistan. She wishes to undertake a field trip to Pakistan and utilize the trip to enrich her work.

Some valuable inputs were given by the scholars of the field which would further help the researchers in enhancing the paradigm of their researches and making it more holistic and contributive to the existing field of knowledge.

FACULTY PRESENTATION

This was followed by faculty presentation by Dr Juhi Gupta. In her presentation she focussed on "Achievements, Challenges & Future Possibilities of Women's Studies at the Centre for Women's Studies AMU". She highlighted the history of inception of CWS. A brief introduction was given about the Teaching Programmes; Availability of Infrastructure and Library; Seminars, Refreshers Courses, Workshops and other Sensitization/ Awareness programmes conducted so far and social welfare commitments like Remedial Teaching, Medical Camps in the city etc.

At present centre is engaged in a full time three years Under Graduate program (Six semesters from the coming session), Post Graduate program (Four Semesters), M.Phil and Ph.D courses. Centre also has its own library which is equipped with more than 3000 books, reports and subscription of several renowned journals and periodicals.

Misconception and lack of awareness of people about Women's Studies was identified by Dr Gupta as a main challenge for the discipline. Non availability of the text books, broad syllabi, limited career options and insensitive students were seen among the other issues faced. Lack of permanent staff at the Centre, both teaching and non-teaching, was said to be a hindrance in materialising future projects of the Centre.

Dr Juhi added that there is no provision for legal advocacy in the city for women as such. Therefore, the Centre intends to work with local women's groups and Law department at AMU in near future on cases in *Mahila Thanas* to help the women in distress. However, all this can only be materialised once centre overcomes the problems of infrastructure and permanent staff.

She also emphasized that the Centre looks forward to act as a link between academicians, activists, government functionaries, NGOs and media persons so as to mainstream women's and gender issues in the society. Building a systematic data base on the status of women working in local establishments such as Lock industry and Patti work through surveys is very well desired by the Centre.

ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR SHIREEN MOOSVI

The former director of the Centre, Professor Shireen Moosvi, first thanked the present director, Professor Nighat Ahmed for inviting her to the workshop. She said that Women's Studies is an academic discipline where theory and application has to go hand in hand. One cannot become an activist without knowing about the theoretical nuances of the discipline. She said that she was given the responsibility of the Centre for Women's Studies in 2004 as Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences.

She stated that the Centre started off its activities with a two weeks workshop each year starting from 2004 to 2007. These workshops were well attended and generated tremendous response among the students. The academic expedition of the Centre started with a part time P. G. Diploma in Women's Studies in 2005 followed by an UG programme. PG programme started in 2011. Apart from having pure academic courses at Undergraduate and Post Graduate level, Centre regularly organizes Health Camps, Workshops, Conferences, and Awareness Programmes etc.

She put on record the cooperation of colleagues from different departments which made possible initiation and continuation of the academic programmes at the Centre. She also drew attention towards the interdisciplinary nature of Women's Studies which got reflected in the diversity of carefully chosen research topics. At last she bestowed her best wishes for the future as evolution means going higher and higher.

The workshop ended with Professor Nighat Ahmad thanking the participants for their active involvement. She expressed the hope that workshops like this will help in having a fruitful exchange of ideas and such ongoing dialogues will help in building linkages between academics and activism.

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List of Sessions & Speakers of the Workshop

Inaugural Session

I Session : Presentation by Alumni

Speakers

1. Mrs. Aziza Hanafi
2. Professor Bilquees Musavi
3. Professor Saira Habib
4. Professor Sajida Nabi
5. Mrs. Naseem Iqtidar Ali
6. Professor Jameela Ahmad
7. Professor Hameeda Ahmad

Lunch Break

II Session : Presentation by Research Scholars

1. Ms Priya Salomi Lartius
2. Mrs. Saman E. Maroof Ahmad
3. Ms Sana Khan

III Session : Faculty Presentation

1. Dr Juhi Gupta
2. Professor Shireen Moosvi
Former Director, Centre for Women's Studies, AMU

Number of total participants who attended the workshop : **89**