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# Sandesh

The Message : A Newsletter from IndUS of Fox Valley

## From Editors' Desk

Dear Readers,

We dedicate this issue to woman of India, whose status within Indian society varies like the multiple colors of a rainbow. On one end of the spectrum, she is a Prime minister, an astronaut, an Air force pilot, a CEO, a doctor, an engineer or a teacher. At the other end she is nothing but a bonded soul, deprived of any voice. In between those extremes she meets everybody's needs at home and carries the burden of family honor on her shoulders. These diverse shades, of course, can not be captured in four articles; however, we hope that these essays will generate enough interest so you will want to learn more about the Indian woman and the problems she faces.

Sandesh

An IndUS of Fox Valley

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## India and the 'Other' Sex

Brij Mohan

Man's design is not to repeat himself in time: it is to take control of the instant and mould the future. It is male activity that in creating values has made of existence a value: this activity has prevailed over the confused forces of life; it has subdued Nature and Woman.  
- Simon de Beauvoir (*The Second Sex*, 1949)

Jawaharlal Nehru was right. The way a society treats its women is perhaps the best measure to judge the level of its civility. Since time immemorial, woman in India has been a paradoxical reality. As an abstraction, she has been revered and worshiped; as a reality, however, she has always been a lesser person—at best an *ardhangini*; at worst, a prostitute, a maiden, and albeit unrecognized, a new *Dalit*. The ambivalence is suggestive of a pervasive repressive duality.

The *otherness* of woman, anthropologically, is an outcome of male supremacy. Women are the carriers, nurturers of a benign culture as well as victims of archaic feudalism which has both glamorized and exploited them as a subject (of aesthetic indolence) and an object (of lust and sexual gratification). To contextualize their status, one should understand "*the Other*" in an existential voyage for survival. Aside from basic procreation and familial obligations, their gendered-roles have been constrained by the hierarchies of caste and class. The symbolic abstractions of beauty, dance and sexual indolence on the one hand and the history of subjugation portray two distinct pictures, one pneumatic, the other real and live<sup>1</sup>.

The girls for the pleasure of the kings, landlords, *nawabs*, and priests, were from the lower classes and castes depicted without human dignity. It's not uncommon in many feudal states where the *bhumiar* (in Bihar) or *rajput* landlords (UP,

Rajasthan and Nepal) enjoyed the privilege of spending the first night with low-caste bride. These obscene patterns and practices, however, are in a great flux. Notwithstanding the deterrence of the ascending *Dalit* power, the new rich continue to enjoy the pleasures of flesh and blood<sup>2</sup>. The fantasies and figures of stones from antiquity are etched into a psyche which leads to rapaciousness in the seductive glow of a Bollywoodized civil culture<sup>3</sup>.

Having recently seen *Water* and *Maya* in quick succession, I began to suspect some residual elements of a predatory culture. Those of us who have migrated to the West and those who live in a different *India* on the subcontinent have perhaps an exalted, loftier view of life which does not exist in reality. In an alienated milieu, we are nostalgic about every thing that we miss. It's both human and cathartic. However, we ought to recognize the schizophrenic duality that obscures our perception and judgment. In the name of dogmas, superstitions and religion, we have conveniently transplanted a decadent culture without a critical thought. The point is: What we hold virtuous and loftier may be inherently flawed as a nurturing and empowering background.

We are all children and parents of a paternalistic dominance culture. While this can be explained and even justified by our *karma* and *dharma* philosophy, we cannot unravel the genesis of evil in a scientific manner. From the primitive to the post-

industrial stage, man has been a dominant force. Myths and legends have deified the charisma and corruption of men in power. It was Rama who was *Maryada Purushottam*<sup>4</sup>. This diminishes Sita, in my mind, as a bait to kill *Ravana*. It's Krishna and the Pandavas who are the heroes of the *Mahabharata*, not Dropdadi whose dignity is at stake and finally lost to the villains! What you see in *Water* is prefaced by an authentic epitaph from *Manusmiriti*.

Certain facets of post-industrial society are both complex and puzzling. Material strides have not reduced the magnitude of rape, murder and exploitation of the poor and the low-caste females. The ubiquitous sexual harassment—euphemistically called eve teasing—is a national disgrace. As women enter the labor force due to economic necessities, education and modernization, the battle of sexes assumes a new dimension. The prostitution model of feminist power on the one hand and neo-Darwinism of the affluent society on the other have created a nexus which makes evil both invisible and invincible.

Our spiritual heritage and the pieties of nonviolence sound academic at best and hypocritical at worst when the custodians of Indian culture shop for a bride or a groom with unabashed vulgar considerations. The preponderance of dowry deaths and bride burning in the middle class is an intriguing subject for critical analysis. Much of violence against Indian women is on account of racism, sexism and greed that plague both society and womanhood. The Hindu scholars contend that we have no racism in India because “we are one race”. Racism is a social construct; so is *varna* and *caste* which have bedeviled the Indian humanity. Bollywoodization of culture has not helped; a new surge for crass consumerism, hedonism and narcissism has corrupted the whole new generation. I will argue that we practice racism, sexism and even (domestic) terrorism in our own families.

It is a universal tragedy that temples and mosques hijacked morality and ethics ever since organized religion attained institutional legitimacy. While women were burnt alive on the stake in the West

as witches, the self-righteous Hindus and Muslims tortured, burnt and beheaded their wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers as *sattis*, adulteresses, whores, and sexual slaves. The infanticide of females and sonogram-guided abortions of the unborn girls stupendously speak of these unspeakable horrors. Much more alarming is the atrocious behavior of India's phalocrats who commit rape and murder of helpless females with impunity to suppress and punish those who revolt. Indira Gandhi's government systematically tortured and “broke” the striking workers' wives. The nexus of corrupt police, ‘criminal’ politicians and local thugs make a mockery of India's status as a democracy. No wonder, our collective male pride is assuaged only by phallic nukes.

Liberation remains an incomplete project despite a sea of social change in modern India. Indian women are ahead of their counterparts in other cultures in education, professional careers, literature, health and politics. The positive discrimination allowed by government has been helpful in many a good project. The genius of Indian woman endures despite age old norms and barriers. New social legislation against dowry, family violence and other socially oppressive behaviors has proved a deterrent but sexist brutality continues unabated in most of South Asia. The poor women bear the brunt of injury in a sadist culture under the shadows of rapacious market place values and degenerated attitudes toward the down trodden.

For the first time, more American women (51%) are living without a husband than with one. “For about 10,000 years, the only career path for these women was to ‘marry well’... [today's] women have become an integral of the modern working world,” concludes Helen Fisher, an anthropology professor at Rutgers<sup>5</sup>. If widowed, she had no place in civil society. Divorce was out of the question. Hence the rising gender gap between married and single is an indicator of progress. However, it is more education, liberty and class than gender. In ancient times, love and self-determination perhaps gave females more freedom. However, with the rise of

property and patriarchy, arranged marriages—which degenerated into child marriages—destroyed that freedom. Like property and slaves, woman was owned by a man or men. We seem to be returning to the hunting-and-gathering stages when women chose when and whom to mate with. India's modernization is beginning to show the triumph of romance over superstitions. But certain traditions die hard. Thanks to Aishwarya Rai for a massive public service: Her horny dance performance on screen relieves millions of people in India and abroad through sublimated cultural orgasm. When stony fantasies become virtual reality, one may think of a sexual *Nirvana*. However, illusions are dangerously seductive and addictive. This renders deconstruction of decadence as a hopelessly inane project.

I have always believed that a good divorce is better than a bad marriage. Patterns and mores regarding divorce and re-marriage vary from community to community. While Muslim women continue to remain “married” despite decadent orthodoxy, their divorce (*talaq*) is solely a male privilege. By default, the Hindu women are less prone to the vicissitudes of this male privilege though divorce is no more a social taboo.

The Indian woman has always been an unrecognized hero in the culturally scripted general drama of strife and survival. From early childhood to old age she has weathered domestic storms with uncanny courage, resilience and fortitude in the name her *dharma*. While her sacrifices and contributions to familial-social stability still remain unacknowledged, her role as the carrier and nurturer of heritage cannot be over emphasized.

Diaspora India will view woman's role and status with empathy and optimism which may contradict the reality at home. The progress of Indian women is thwarted by a host of factors that still sustain a nearly archaic chauvinistic system. What India needs is an overall social and economic uplift without caste, communal and gender prejudices. At micro level, attitudinal changes will go a long way. For example, if every daughter-in-law is accepted as one's own daughter, the problem of bride-burning

will simply not arise. I cite this duality because the daughter-mother-in-law dyad is the most problematic area in South Asian cultures. It's an irony that oppressed ones unusually tend to be worst oppressors. This cycle of violence, brutality and dissonance cannot be broken unless the young generation assumes a sense of responsibility to themselves and their better-halves. Dowry, destitution, dogmas of dehumanization speak of a shameless culture. Shame, Marx said famously, is a revolutionary sentiment! □

1. The portrayal of indolent maidens in India's religious art does not represent the common people although symbolic cultural coherence is

there. Their "small heads, long legs and slenderly swelling shapes" are not human; they are unreal, "fantasy images of girls for one's pleasure," as Jan Myrdal concludes: "They are pneumatic... objects of pleasure. These temples are monuments of triumphant feudalism. The female beauty exhibited here is the beauty desired by those who had commissioned the building. Indolently pouting maidens. Real-life girls look different, even in India." (See 'Is Woman Human?' in *India Waits* by Jan Myrdal, Lake View Press, Chicago, 1986, pp. 266-276.

2. See Suketu Mehta's *Maximum City: Bombay Lost and Found*. New York: Vantage, 2005. Part II, 'Pleasure.'

3. Cf. Philistinism "commonplace among scions of third world dynasties". See Pankaj Mishra, *Temptations of the West*, Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 2006: 285.

4. The noblest of men; an ultimate paragon of manly virtues.

5. Helen Fisher, 'History loves an unmarried woman,' *The Los Angeles Times*, January 21, 2007.

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## Indian Women in the Public Sphere

*Ananya Chakravarti*

Margaret Cousins, the Irish suffragist and co-founder, with Annie Besant, of the Indian Woman's Association, once wrote that "[i]n the extremes of honor and serfdom accorded to womanhood Asia is one." Her aphorism strikes at heart of the essential contradiction that was the matrix and genesis of the women's movement in India. The movement, which has its roots in the nationalist project of the nineteenth century, was conceived in many ways in negative terms. Far from being a positive quest for female liberation, the women's movement began as a way to challenge British colonial discourse within the framework of an emerging nationalist project. The resultant ideology ensnared women between the increasing pressure to engage in public life, which brought with it a measure of freedom, and the traditional stigma against women in the public sphere.

British colonial discourse had centered on a highly gendered justification of colonial rule: firstly, that the Raj was a civilizing influence for a base culture marked by such features as *sati* and child marriage and secondly, that the effeminate men of India (and particularly of Bengal) were incapable of ruling themselves. Indeed, one of the justifications of the 1891 Indian Consent Act, which prohibited the consummation of marriage with a girl under the age of

twelve, was that consummation before the designated age was the mark of effeminate men. The cause of this inadequate masculinity was not the sole province of men or of male culture in India; Indian motherhood was as much to blame. As Katherine Mayo wrote in 1917 in *Mother India* about the benighted Indian mother:

Force motherhood upon her at the earliest moment. Rear her weakling son in intensive vicious practices that drain his small vitality day by day. Give him no outlet in sports. Give him habits that make him, by the time he is thirty years of age, a decrepit and querulous old wreck—and will you ask what has sapped the energy of his manhood.

In fighting this colonial image of the decadent and effeminate Oriental man, early nationalists conceived a program of social reform, the site and subject of which was the Indian woman, specifically of the middle class. While upholding the superiority of Indian values as embodied by the patriarchal ideal of a submissive and self-sacrificing *grihasthini*, these early reformers stigmatized the practices most hated by the British, such as *sati*, and began a serious push towards female education. Through education, women would be able to adapt to the demands of the

colonial liberal ideology and would become better suited to carry out their familial duties, especially those of motherhood. An educated mother was also better suited to educate a new generation of Indian men—the idea, as Cousins put it, of woman as "race nourisher". The essential structure of patriarchy, however, was untouched; it was still understood that "respectable" women, unlike the common women of the street, did not descend to the public sphere.

In the early 1900s, the nationalist movement began to encourage female participation in the public sphere more actively. Gandhi's movement was particularly effective in this regard. Building on notions of the essential quality of self-sacrifice and spiritual virtue ingrained in Indian women, Gandhi believed that women were essentially suited to his movement based as it was on the core principles of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. "If non-violence is the core of our being, the future is with women." His belief in the inherent suitability of women to his political program created a space for women in the public sphere. The spinning of *khadi*, a womanly task and a central symbol of the nationalist movement, provided a new avenue for female political participation. As guardians of Indian virtue, women could picket liquor stores.

In all these activities, however, women's prescribed roles were not radically undermined.

Despite this basic conservatism, the emergence of women in the public sphere still retained its vague stigma of dishonor. In an illuminating episode during the 1930s civil disobedience in Kanpur, prostitutes were prevented from taking part as they were considered unfit to sit next to "ladies" by the District Congress Committee. The distance between women of the streets and women on the street had to be maintained literally and metaphorically in order for women's participation in the nationalist movement to retain ideological legitimacy.

Women did not remain passively accepting of this essentially conservative model. The younger and more militant generation of nationalists recognized the capacity of women to mount more violent forms of resistance. Subhas Chandra Bose exploited this potentiality in the all-women's wing of the army. Women terrorists such as Mrinalini and Radharani Debi of the Benares bomb case rejected the essentially passive role Gandhi had accorded women in his movement, as embodied by his unwillingness to take women along in the Dandi salt march. If the feminine symbol par excellence of Gandhi's movement was that of *Bharat Mata*, a nurturing and benevolent mother, that of the revolutionary wing was Kali, the darker avatar of feminine power.

Whatever the contradictory impetuses of the women's movement during the pre-independence era, it is undeniable that the nationalist movement allowed women unprecedented access to the public sphere. It is also undeniable that the woman's movement was largely subordinated to the demands of the nationalist movement during this time. Though women such as Cousins and Besant brought increasingly feminist ideologies to the Indian political scene and began to propagate these ideas through organizations such as the Indian Women's Association, the feminist movement even among women took a backseat to the nationalist project. Thus

Sarojini Naidu, for all her immense achievements in pushing back gender barriers, remains largely a figure of the nationalist movement.

With the arrival of Independence and the promises of equality in the Constitution, women now had the opportunity to mount a feminist movement unencumbered by the demands of another political project. A true feminist movement began to emerge in the 1970s, aided by Indira Gandhi's presidency and her support for women's issues. Spurred by outrage against gender-based violence, beginning with the Mathura rape case in 1979, the next decades saw stiff legislation against dowry-related crimes as well as the banning of sex-selective abortions of female fetuses.

Yet despite these gains there are several obstacles hindering the women's movement in India today, the most challenging of these is the communalization of public life. After Partition, the essentially secular feminist movement was unsure of how to assimilate the concerns of Muslim women, which became the province of the Muslim Personal Law Board and of specifically Muslim women's organizations. This has served not only to splinter the feminist movement, but also to marginalize Muslim women in debates surrounding women's issues and to weaken their battles against such practices as the triple *talaq* system. As Muslim Personal Law and non-interference in Muslim religious matters by the government have become symbols of the integrity of the Muslim community, it has become increasingly harder for secular feminists to challenge such practices.

The emergence of women's development-oriented organizations may provide one model to combat this problem. For example, a Bengali Hindu woman directing SEWA (Lucknow) has recently organized the Muslim *chikan* workers. Organizations such as SEWA, which seek to help poor women, cut across caste and communal lines and even reach the marginalized *adivasi* community. Moreover, women are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty

in India, making the service of such organizations especially valuable. These non-governmental organizations also represent a different avenue of change, one dependent on private initiative. Since the Constitution of 1947, the women's movement has traditionally used law as an instrument of change, framing the debate in terms of rights and equality before the law. This strategy has certainly paid dividends—the recent 2005 Women's Reservation Bill, which extends the reservation of one-third of the seats in local government guaranteed by the 74<sup>th</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments to the Parliamentary and State Assemblies, is a significant step forward. However, legal rights must be enforced and some social evils such as poverty cannot simply be legislated away. Organizations such as SEWA, which are not dependent on the government or on legislative changes, provide another avenue for advancing women's interests.

Whatever the challenges ahead, it is undeniable that women have made significant inroads in every aspect of public life, freeing themselves from serfdom without losing honor in the process. Women activists such as Medha Patkar, the founder of the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and Mahasweta Devi, the tireless advocate of tribal rights, have become household names. Kiran Bedi, India's first female police officer is currently serving as the Director General of India's Bureau of Police Research and Development. Justice M. Fathima Beevi became the first woman judge of the Supreme Court in 1989 and in 2004, Punita Arora achieved the rank of Lt. General in the Indian Army. Women politicians such as Mamata Banerjee, Uma Bharati, Mayawati, Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi are some of the country's most powerful. Women such as Simone Tata, Ravina Raj Kohli, Ekta Kapoor, Lalita Gupte, to name but a few, have led India's biggest businesses. India (unlike the US) has had a female head of state. We have proved that individual women can indeed reach the pinnacle of success in any field in India; the challenge lies in helping the vast swathes of women who

seek not the pinnacle of fame, money or power but the quotidian dignity of a free and honorable existence. □

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## Representation of Marginal Identities and Subjectivities in the Works of Women Filmmakers in Indian Cinema

*r. Amit Kumar*

Women's sexuality has been presented in popular Indian cinema through patriarchal perspective – women are either sexualized objects or desexualized caretakers. Meaning productions of morality, nationality, ownership of the body and female-sexuality-as-threat marks women's bodies. Such meaning productions have not only been a result of market forces but also ideological ones. Women filmmakers have intervened in and fractured traditional patriarchal representations of women in Indian cinema.

Representations of women in popular Indian cinema have followed two major patterns for a long time and continue to do so. On the one hand are the desexualized moral images of Indian women - the self-sacrificing mother who also symbolize India's idealism; the ideal obedient and respectful wife who saves family and husband from all evils; and the dutiful daughter and the loyal sister. Popular cinema reproduces social roles that define private familial spaces for women. These roles have historical depth in Indian mythological and religious texts, such as Vedas, Manusmriti, Ramayana, and Mahabharata. Sita, Sati, Savitri are the mythological burdens on Indian womanhood reproduced by popular cinema.

On the other hand are the sexualized, objectified images of women for the visual pleasure of the male gaze. Famous characters deployed for such are the courtesan, vamp, Westernized woman and the latest sexual avatar, "the item girl." After serving their purpose, these characters are killed, punished, or marginalized from respectable social domains. Song and dance sequences in Indian cinema have stood in for sexual

intercourse, and in them, the object of sexual desire have mostly been women's bodies. An example is the solo dance sequences of heroines in Yash Chopra's romantic films.

Women filmmakers such as Kalpana Lajmi, Aparna Sen, Vijaya Mehta, Prema Karanth, Mira Nair, Deepa Mehta, and Gurinder Chadha work mostly outside the mainstream Indian cinema framework. They represent alternatives with a focus on female subjectivity and oppressive Indian traditions. There is a reality of identity experience – of being in marginalized social spaces – which makes these women filmmakers interested in women's issues and issues of identity, migration, class differences, and dominance of public and private spaces.

Influenced by filmmaker Satyajit Ray and her film-critic-father Chidananda Das Gupta, Aparna Sen extends the lineage of their serious approach to filmmaking. In *Parama* (1984), Sen critiques the oppressive confinements of gender in traditional patriarchal familial settings. *Parama*, the main character in the film, assumes the roles of wife, mother, aunt and sister-in-law. Once found emotionally drawn to another man in the absence of her husband, she is abandoned by her family. *Parama* departs from standard moral rules of conduct and behavior, and hence, generates controversy. Sen approaches women characters as flesh-and-blood individuals who can be emotionally and sexually involved outside socially acceptable codes. In *Sati* (1989), Sen slaps the age-old tradition of immolating wives at their husbands' death pyres and bashes social oppressions against women in 18th and 19th century Bengal. In *36 Chowringhee Lane* (1981), Sen captures

the isolation and loneliness of a middle-aged minority woman - a triple marginalized condition. In *Mr. And Mrs. Iyer* (2002), Sen explores a road trip relationship between a married Hindu woman and a single Muslim man. In their need for survival amidst Hindu-Muslim riots, they sense humanity beyond cultural differences. Sen continuously examines the feminine condition and relationships in contemporary India with varied perspectives.

Kalpana Lajmi breaks traditional parameters and explores women's sexuality as free of guilt. In *Ek Pal* (1986), Priyam has a sexual fling in the absence of her husband. Breaking the conventions of Indian society, Priyam conceives, decides to keep the child and willingly reveals the identity of the child's father to her husband. In *Darmiyaan* (1997), Lajmi critiques the marginalization of the third sex, hermaphrodites, who in India are commonly known as eunuchs/hijras. In this film, Lajmi creates irony around the use of female sensuality in popular Hindi cinema's melodramatic genre. In *Daman* (2001), Lajmi questions marital rape, an undiscussed topic in Indian society and Indian films. Lajmi's latest film, *Chingari* (2006), again questions the patriarchal traditions, Hindu religion and tortured state of womanhood in northern Indian society. Lajmi censures the three stereotypical images of goddess, mother, and prostitutes in Indian society.

In their work, Vijaya Mehta and Prema Karanth also criticize traditional social customs that oppress women. Mehta is widely known for her film, *Rao Saheb* (1986), in which she explores Brahmin orthodoxy and widow remarriage as well as the dilemma between inherited



customs and rationality for change. Rao Saheb is a Brahmin advocate, a Western-educated, reform-believing man. He is attracted to Radhika, a widow, but remains fearful of social traditions. In his indecision to marry Radhika, Rao Saheb eventually descends into madness. In *Phaniyamma* (1983), Karanth's main character Phani is married at the age of nine. After her husband dies, Phani leads the life of a bald-headed, dressed-in-white-widow, who relinquishes any pleasures of normal life. Over the course of the film, we see how Phani, once a symbol of male-dominated social torture, eventually stands against the outdated customs and obsolete ways of thinking and helps other women to challenge oppressive conditions.

Mira Nair is one of the best-known woman directors worldwide. Women's issues as well as the issues of identity, migration and living in a cross-cultural world are central to her work in films like *Mississippi Masala* (1991), *The Perez family* (1995), *Monsoon Wedding* (2001) and yet to be released, *The Namesake* (2007). *Salaam Bombay* (1988) received worldwide acclaim for Nair's examination of the lives of marginalized children oppressed by poverty and the adult world. In *Monsoon Wedding*, a Bollywood-film-in-a-Hollywood-style, Nair sketches complicated women characters who make life decisions in non-traditional ways. The film also takes on pedophilia in traditional Indian families and the

crudity of being upper class Indian and Non Resident Indian. The sexual attitudes of women characters in her films stem out of their ages, cultures, experiences and personal choices. Cultural transportation is something Nair understands and deals well with in her films.

Deepa Mehta's film *Sam and Me* (1991) explores race, age, class, and the experience of being an Indian immigrant to Canada. Later, in her trilogy – *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1998), and *Water* (2006) – Deepa Mehta raises controversial issues that disturbed Hindu fundamentalists in India. Posters for *Fire* were ripped and burnt; audiences were threatened out of theatres. *Fire* represents lesbianism as a form of rebellion against religious and patriarchal oppression. *Water*, her final film in the trilogy, that was in 2007 nominated for foreign language film by the Academy Awards, deals with the fate of Hindu widows and prostitution and exposes the politics of Hindu religion in early 20<sup>th</sup> century India. Based on her reputation and the subject matter of *Water*, fundamentalist protesters did not let Mehta shoot *Water* in Varanasi (a holy Hindu town).

The works of these women filmmakers lend power and variety to representations of women. Several male directors, such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen, also played significant roles in changing dimensions of women's

characters in Indian cinema. Shyam Benegal works with women's conditions and subjectivities in *Nishant* (1975), *Mandi* (1983), *Manthan* (1976), *Bhumika* (1977), *Mammo* (1994), *Sardari Begum* (1996), and *Hari Bhari* (2000). The New Indian cinema movement of the 1970s and 1980s stood as an alternative to mainstream politics, representation and aesthetics. Women's issues were at the movement's core, and important women filmmakers flourished and made significant films during this time.

We must also not forget that diasporic filmmakers such as Nair, Mehta and Gurinder Chadha, make films primarily for Western audiences and international film festival market. Chadha's films move further and further into exporting the mainstream Bollywood form for Western audiences. A recent case example is *Bride and Prejudice* (2004). Nonetheless, their films have brought fresh images, perspectives, and stories. They should be praised for what they achieve, but it is also important to consider the market forces influencing and limiting their work. □

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## Most Powerful Business Women Leaders of India

Sandhya Sridhar

A mother? A wife? A sister? It is easy to think of an Indian woman in a traditional family role, but she can be all that and more. More and more women in India are defying the norm and asserting themselves in nontraditional roles previously thought of an exclusive domain of men. One such area is business enterprise. With greater access to education than ever before and armed with governmental assistance, we see more women succeeding in business.

There is an anomaly though. A business

may be nominally listed in a woman's name but run by men in the family. This may be done for tax, or funding purposes. To an Indian mind, that is not unethical. Family is a basic unit in the society. An enterprise is not merely an individual venture. Innumerable women help their family businesses, albeit in a supportive role. I will introduce you to few women who represent the new breed – the most powerful business leaders. Some like Kiran Muzumdar – Shaw are entrepreneurs in real sense of the word,

whereas some others like Anu Aga and Simone Tata acquired their positions because of family connections. Nevertheless, they all proved that talent and hard work ultimately pays, despite their gender difference.

### Indra Nooyi, President & CEO, Pepsi Co.

This Madras born woman did her bachelors from Madras Christian College and



MBA from Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta and then M.B.A. from Yale University, USA. She started with Boston Consulting Group and moved on to Motorola and Asea Brown Boveri. She joined Pepsi Co. in 1994. She turned the company into a bold risk taker and became President of Pepsi Cola in 2001. Wall Street Journal included her name in their top 50 women to watch in 2005. According to Forbes magazine's 2006 poll, Indra Nooyi is the fourth most powerful woman in the world<sup>1</sup>.

### **Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, a master brewer, founder of Biocon.**



Kiran became India's first woman Brew Master after learning her craft at Ballarat University in Melbourne, Australia. After working as a trainee brewer in India,

she became Trainee Manager with Biocon Biochemicals Limited in Ireland.

Collaborating with the same Irish firm, she founded Biocon India with a capital of Rs.10, 000 (approximately \$ 222) in her garage in 1978. The initial operation was to extract an enzyme from papaya, tropical fruit. Her application for loans was denied by banks because biotechnology was then a new word, her company had no assets, and above all, women entrepreneurs were still a rarity.

Over the years, the company grew under her stewardship and is today the biggest biopharmaceutical firm in India. It has evolved from making enzymes to a major pharmaceutical enterprise producing everything from insulin to antibodies, with annual revenues of \$122 million and a total stock-market value of \$1.2 billion. Kiran Muzumdar – Shaw has won many accolades and is considered the richest woman in India<sup>2</sup>. You can see Charlie Rose's interview with her at Google video website<sup>3</sup>.

### **Lalita D. Gupte and Kalpana Morparia, Joint Managing Directors of ICICI Bank**

Lalita D. Gupte<sup>4</sup> and Kalpana Morparia<sup>5</sup>,



Joint Managing Directors of ICICI Bank, India's largest

private sector bank.

They led the transformation of ICICI Bank, a traditional lending institution, into a technology-led, diversified, financial services provider. It became a leader in the domestic market and is now increasing its presence in international markets. Among several awards, it has won "Best Bank in India" from Business India Magazine, "Best Bank in India" by Euromoney, and by Asian Banker Journal. Lalita Gupte is at the helm of ICICI Bank's global foray. The bank now has subsidiaries in the United Kingdom, Canada and Russia. .

Kalpana Morparia is responsible for strategy, risk management, audits and compliance. She is also the official spokesperson of the company. Both Lalita and Kapana made the Forbes list of most powerful women in the world<sup>6</sup>. Their achievements have earned them several recognitions.

### **Anu Aga, Retired Chairperson, Thermax Engineering**



At a time when the industry was facing a downturn, she managed to see the company through a crisis and put it back on the road to recovery. Her major turnaround initiatives included: reconstitution of the board, shedding of non-core activities, rightsizing of operations and increased focus on the customer. In its early days, the company had a remarkable culture of caring and innovation but it lacked in discipline. She created a high performance culture at Thermax<sup>7</sup>. She believes in giving back to the society, in communal harmony and human rights, especially of women and children. After her

retirement she is involved in welfare and education of underprivileged children in slums<sup>8</sup>. Her other interests are vipasana yoga, film and her grandchildren.

### **Simone Tata, a fashion entrepreneur, from Mumbai**

Known as Cosmetic Czarina, Simone Tata has several firsts to her name: the first businesswoman to introduce cosmetics to Indian consumers, the first businesswoman to start the practice of beauty salons in the country and the first to set up a national fashion retail chain of department stores in the country<sup>9</sup>.



French by birth and educated in Switzerland, fond of traveling, she came to India as a tourist where she met her future husband, Naval H. Tata. They married in 1955. In 1962, she joined Lakmé, India's first cosmetic company, rising to become its Chairperson in 1982. In 1989 she was appointed a director in Tata Industries, Asia's largest private sector group, with over ninety-one companies in various sectors<sup>10</sup>.

### **Neelam Dhawan, Managing Director, Microsoft India**

Microsoft India trusted Neelam Dhawan to provide the required direction and leadership an age of revolutionary changes in information



technology by appointing her the Managing Director in 2005. She has been in the IT industry for 22 years in an executive role at Hewlett-Packard India and with experience in other leading IT companies. Neelam Dhawan is very highly respected in the industry and has an excellent track record. She is responsible for growing Microsoft's products and services businesses and driving the company's partnership and strategic alliances<sup>11</sup>.



- 1. [http://www.southasiabiz.com/2006/09/eleven\\_most\\_powerful\\_women\\_in.html](http://www.southasiabiz.com/2006/09/eleven_most_powerful_women_in.html)
- 2. <http://www.iloveindia.com/indian-heroes/kiran-mazumdar-shaw.html>
- 3. <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=5211716581188683421>
- 4. [http://www.tfci.com/iba\\_tfci/banktech06/gupte.htm](http://www.tfci.com/iba_tfci/banktech06/gupte.htm)
- 5. [http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/11/06women\\_Lalita-Gupte-Kalpana-morparia\\_4HSC.html](http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/11/06women_Lalita-Gupte-Kalpana-morparia_4HSC.html)

- 6. [http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/11/06women\\_The-100-Most-Powerful-Women\\_Country.html](http://www.forbes.com/lists/2006/11/06women_The-100-Most-Powerful-Women_Country.html)
- 7. <http://www.iimb.ernet.in/iimb/html/man-review-article-01.jsp>
- 8. [http://www.asha-foundation.org/women/women/anu\\_aga.php](http://www.asha-foundation.org/women/women/anu_aga.php)
- 9. <http://www.indiafa.org/stafftrustee/article.asp>

- 10. [http://www.asha-foundation.org/women/women/simone\\_tata.php](http://www.asha-foundation.org/women/women/simone_tata.php)
- 11. [http://www.southasiabiz.com/2006/09/eleven\\_most\\_powerful\\_women\\_in.html](http://www.southasiabiz.com/2006/09/eleven_most_powerful_women_in.html)

*After immigrating to USA in 1980, Sandhya Sridhar earned her Ph.D. in Business Administration from Ohio State University. She has worked in both corporate and academic settings in India and USA. She teaches business management courses at Silver Lake College.*



### Honors & Recognitions:

**Sajida Shariff** is a recipient of Carol Montie Community Service Award of the Mediation Center of Greater Green Bay. Each year this award is given to an individual who has shown extraordinary commitment and effectiveness in promoting dialogue, understanding, and the peaceful resolution of conflict.

The award was presented to her at the Center's annual Community Celebration in May of 2006. Many IndUS members along with Carol Kelso, the County Executive of Brown County, and Jim Schmitt, the Mayor of Green Bay, were in attendance.

Our heartiest congratulations to Sajida and we regret for the delay in publishing this news.



Congratulations to **Ram Shet**, recipient of the **Center Strengthening Volunteer of the Year** and **Kamal Varma**, recipient of the **Center Outreach Volunteer of the Year** awards for 2006 of the Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center.

Here are excerpts from their citations. "Ram has been a tireless fundraiser for the Center and leader of operations and fundraising for Foods of All Nations. Ram is personally responsible for making the gift approaches and securing Founder level gifts, sustaining Founder gifts, Associate Founders level gifts, and many other corporate and individual gifts".

"In addition to Kamal's Foods of All Nations leadership, she has been the Center's most active education program volunteer. She has shared her insights at talking circles with groups ranging from college students to business people. She has been a thoughtful panel participant in women's history month panels in 2005 and

2006. She has coordinated Indian cultural presentations for the Center's after school partnership with the Appleton Area School District and Lunch and Learn sessions for teachers in the Neenah schools. She is a persistent voice for acceptance and inclusion of all cultures. With her gentle heart, warm smile and firm beliefs in the value of diversity and inclusion, she exemplifies the Center's mission of creating a gathering place where each person and every group is included and valued".



**Badri Varma** is the newly elected President of the Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center. We wish him all the best to contribute further in this capacity to the evergrowing multicultural arena of the Fox cities.



Congratulations to **Nilaksh Kothari**, the president-elect of American Water Works Association. Kothari is general manager of the Manitowoc Public Utilities and represents the Wisconsin Section on the



AWWA Board of Directors. He will assume his duties as president at the AWWA annual conference in San Antonio, Texas, in

June.



We are proud to announce that **Megha Uberoi**, **Shanti Varma-Lenz**, and **Afsah Hussain** were among the winners of this year's Martin Luther King essay competitions. Megha (category Grade 1-3) and Shanti (category Grade 4-6) read their essays to an audience of 700 people during the 16th Annual Martin Luther King Jr.



Megha Uberoi



Shanti Varma-Lenz

Post Crescent Photo by Patrick Ferron

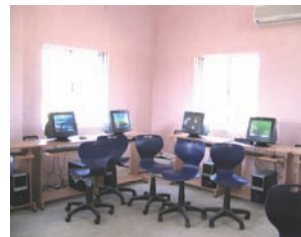
Celebration organized by Toward community: Unity in Diversity on January 14, 2007 at Lawrence University Chapel. Their essays reflect on the question "Is Dr. King's message of equality and harmony among all people and all races still relevant today?" Afsah, a junior at Oshkosh North High School read her essay "If Dr. King Were Here Today ..." at the 11th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration on January 16, 2007 at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. Our heartiest congratulation to all these three budding writers.

### News ...

#### Computer Lab at Killai



What better way to start the new year but with a picture of the Computer Lab at Killai High School, Tamil Nadu India that is now operational.



The lab is the result of a donation of \$9000 from



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Please visit our website at  
[www.indusfoxvalley.org](http://www.indusfoxvalley.org)

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IndUS of Fox Valley and the Fox Valley Community that went toward the construction of the building. A Rotary International Foundation Grant of \$ 17,000 went toward the computers, peripherals and other equipment! A big thank you and kudos to all who made this great venture possible.

**IndUS - 2006**

On a crisp, fall evening, Liberty Hall buzzed with well dressed people, ready to enjoy an evening built around the theme of tourism, "Next Destination: Incredible India" The Annual IndUS banquet was celebrated on October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

A welcoming ambience greeted the guests with a promise of a wonderful evening ahead. The décor was unique, transporting them to a far away land, with charming "rangolis", floral arrangements, little earthen lights with twinkling flames, several replicas of tourist attractions and a running multimedia presentation on sites of allure. While the guests, registered and mingled, trays of hors devours were passed around and a wet bar served them to whet their appetite for more to come.

An exhibit provided the guests an introduction to various tourism sites. The highlight this year was simultaneous power point presentations on nine topics: First Visit to India, Pilgrimages, Historic Sites, Medical Tourism, Ecotourism, Resorts, Adventure Sports, Performing Arts and, Fashions and Fabrics. The presentations were informative, interactive and the rooms were packed to their capacity

A new feature this year was a silent auction of items like a round airfare to India, jewelry, a massage certificate and a certificate for financial services. The sale of these items helped raise funds for IndUS and people enjoyed bidding for them.



The main event in the banquet Hall began with a welcome. It was followed by a lamp-lighting ceremony honoring people involved with increasing tourism and promoting hospitality in various capacities. The banquet featured culinary delights from different parts of India, topping with a sumptuous dessert.

The guests were then treated to an entertainment program built around the theme of tourism. It featured folk dances by visiting artists: an enchanting gypsy folk dance from Nilgiri Hills of southern India, fisher maidens dancing on ocean waves from western state of Maharashtra

and a vigorous, flirtatious one from the northwestern state of Rajasthan. The dances were interspersed by a fashion show put together by members and friends of IndUS, both men and women donned and paraded in beautiful fashions from various parts to the spectators' delight. The evening ended with a dance by members of IndUS to from a popular Bollywood film.



The event was a great success, a sold-out event, as it is every year. The credit goes to all the volunteers and participants. IndUS is truly blessed to have such a wonderful bunch of people.

**Culture Dip**

On December 6th, 2006 IndUS was one of the sponsors in "Culture Dip", an event at Fox Valley Technical College

organized by students of the college. It was open to all the students, faculty, their families, friends and the community. The visitors "dipped" in various world cultures tasting ethnic food, enjoying displays and asking questions. For the finale all present participated in some fun games and many won prizes.

**Lunch & Learn**

On January 24, 2007 IndUS collaborated with Fox Cities Rotary Multicultural Center for its *Lunch & Learn* program at Neenah High School. In a very informal atmosphere several IndUS volunteers met with teachers and administrators at lunch and exchanged ideas and information about India. It was an enriching experience for the teachers as well as the volunteers.

**Volunteer Appreciation Dinner**

Each year IndUS arranges a dinner to show its appreciation for the dedication and hard work done by the volunteers for different events and programs, such as Annual IndUS banquet, SEVA, SAMP, and other educational and cultural programs. This year's Volunteer Appreciation Dinner was held at UW-Fox Valley on February 24, 2007 and was well attended by the volunteers and their families. One of the highlights of the event was a game organized by Sandhya Sridhar, which involved proverbs from different cultures.

Like other years volunteers voted to select a



theme for IndUS-2007. There were three contenders: *Natural Wonders of India*, *Cuisines of India*, and *Dance & Music of India* and the winner was *Dance & Music of India*.

### Fun with Cultures: IndUS Day Camp for Children

If you had stopped at the Appleton Public Library on Saturday, March 3, you would have seen many young eager faces at the IndUS Day Camp: Fun with Cultures. Twenty-eight children aged 6-14, but majority of them under 10, spent the day learning about world cultures in a fun-filled way.

Upon arrival they were given passports and assigned to a red, green or blue team. After a hot chocolate and a warm-up introduction game, they visited Japan, Russia, India and Pakistan. They got their passports stamped as they entered or departed each country. They played games, listened to the stories, created origami, wrote their names in Japanese, sang songs, drew pictures and absorbed lots of information. They were like sponges. They learned so much.

“Experience India” was the theme of an active afternoon ses-

sion. Dressed up in Indian clothes, they danced to popular Hindi film songs, made beautiful Rangolis and played a boisterous game of Kabbadi.

Then it was time to pull it all together for their team projects called “Create a Culture Stew”. They worked to create their own dream culture by including elements of what they had experienced adding a dollop of their own imagination. The parents, when they arrived late afternoon, were entertained with creative “Culture Stew” presentations. They had a new flag of combined colors, a hybrid game, Russian onion domes, a Japanese national game, an Indian dance, an American wave and much more. They showed us all how creative young minds can be. Following some delicious refreshments from Brazil, Japan, Mexico, Russia, India, Pakistan and USA, it was time to go home. The children went home with precious mementoes like their passports, their craft creations, certificates of achievement and above all a mind-set necessary to be a world citizen.

The camp was a great success due to help from Razia Husain, Shino Iwashita, Prateek & Richa Mehrotra, Mayumi Naguchi, Amy Nasr, Katya Pichugina, Mary Beth Pritzel, Radhika Raj, Shakti Shukla, Sameer, Sandhya & B. S. Sridhar, Susan Stachowiak, Mahesh & Ritu Subramony, Ashi Tannan, Christine Vargas, Anu, Badri & Kamal Varma.



**IndUS Of Fox Valley**  
3600 N. Shawnee Avenue  
Appleton WI 54914

**IndUS of Fox Valley**  
Presents  
*A Celebration of Indo American  
Friendship and Goodwill*

**IndUS-2007**  
*Dance & Music of India*

**Saturday, October 27,  
2007**

**5:00 to 9:00 p.m.**

**Reeve Memorial Union  
UW—Oshkosh**

**Exhibition  
Social Hour  
Authentic Indian Cuisine  
Cultural Program**