ISSN 2432-437X

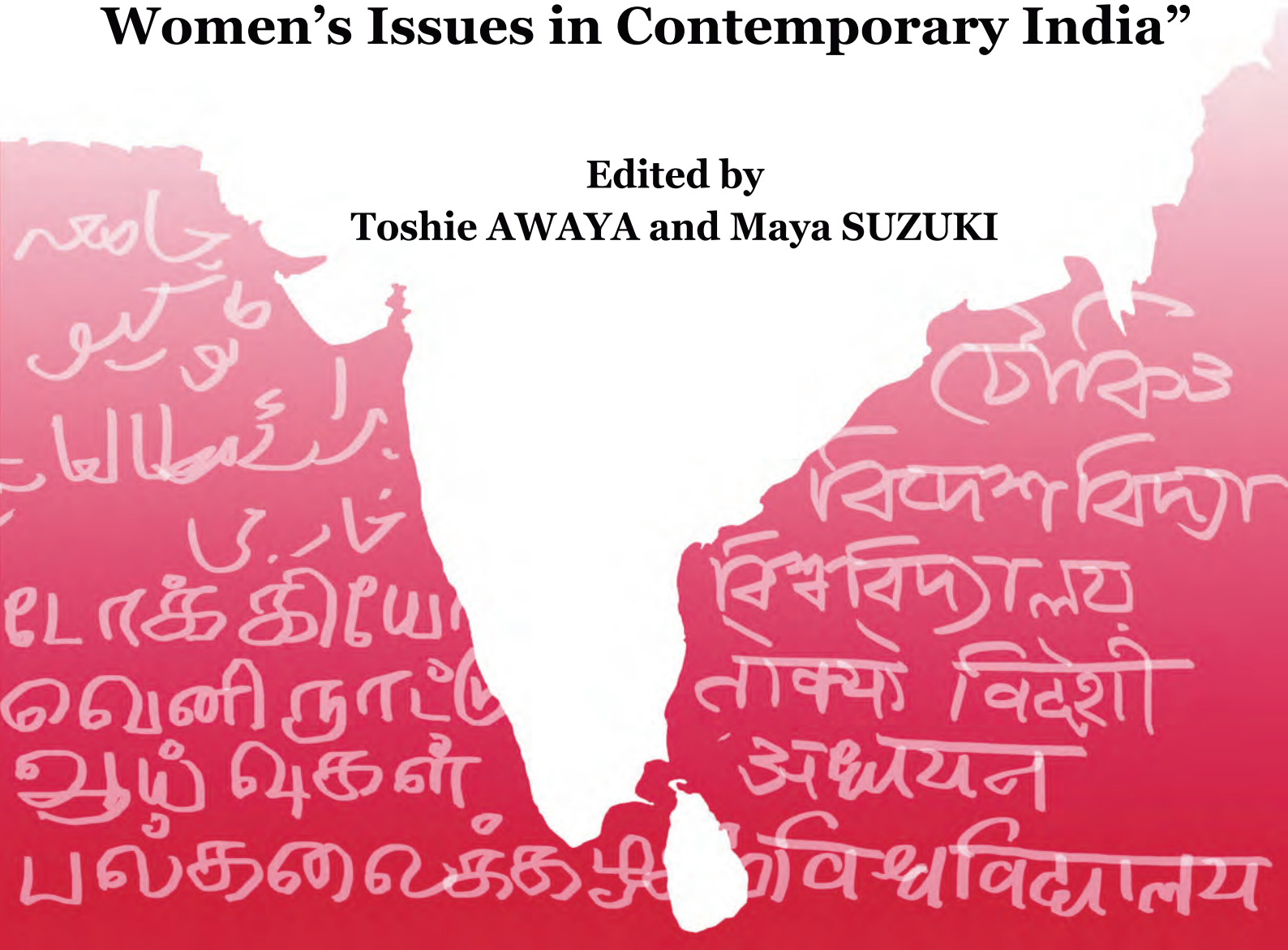
人間文化研究機構　ネットワーク型基幹研究プロジェクト
地域研究推進事業　南アジア地域研究

FINDAS
The Center for South Asian Studies,
Tokyo University of Foreign Studies
東京外国語大学　南アジア研究センター

東京外国語大学南アジア研究リサーチペーパー　9
特別号

Nandita Das Special Lecture
“Personal Life is Political:
Women’s Issues in Contemporary India”

Edited by
Toshie AWAYA and Maya SUZUKI



東京外国語大学拠点・南アジア研究センター

Center for South Asian Studies, Tokyo University of Foreign Studies (FINDAS)

研究テーマ「南アジアにおける文学・社会運動・ジェンダー」
Literature, Social Movements, and Gender Issues in South Asia

本拠点は、現代南アジアの構造変動に関する理解を、重層化・多元化・輻輳化する社会運動の歴史・政治・社会学的分析と文学分析、およびジェンダー視角を軸として深めることを目的とする。さらに、対象研究領域に関して、すでに東京外国語大学が所蔵する文献・史資料群を充実させることを系統的、意識的に追及し、国内における文献拠点となることをめざす。

本拠点の第 1 期（2010～2014 年度）の研究活動を通じて、経済自由化・グローバル化にともなう現代インドにおける構造変動が、個人、家族、コミュニティ・レベルの人々の意識、ジェンダー関係に劇的な変容をもたらしたこと、アイデンティティの複合性と可変性がさらに加速化していること、ならびに、インドを特徴づけている活性化された民主政治が、それまで社会的周縁に位置づけられてきた諸集団の積極的な異議申し立てなしには理解できないという事実が明らかになった。第 2 期（2015～2019 年度）では、社会運動の諸相をとくに、人的紐帯の変化、および、それらを支える情動や感性の側面に焦点をあてること、対象地域をさらに、南アジア地域に拡大するとともに、中国・東南アジア・イスラーム地域などの他地域との比較研究を意識的に組織化し、理論化を主導することに重点的に取り組む。

東京外国語大学は、ウルドゥー語・ヒンディー語・ベンガル語を中心に南アジアの諸言語の教育、および南アジア地域研究に関して明治期以来の長い歴史を有し、世界的に活躍する高度職業人ならびに日本における南アジア研究の中核を担う研究者を輩出してきた実績がある。また、国内有数の南アジア諸語文献・南アジア関連の文献・史料の所蔵を誇る。さらには、海外の南アジア研究者との学術交流にも長い伝統がある。こうした特長を最大限に生かしつつ、本拠点はさらに国内外の南アジア研究者のネットワークのハブとして共同研究を組織するとともに、若手研究者の育成を重点的に行い、南アジア地域研究のレベルを明示的に高めることをめざす。

研究ユニット 1「輻輳する社会運動における実践と理論」
研究ユニット 2「社会変動と文学」

東京外国語大学南アジア研究リサーチペーパー９：特別号

Nandita Das Special Lecture

“Personal Life is Political:

Women’s Issues in Contemporary India”

Edited by

Toshie AWAYA and Maya SUZUKI

Photos

Nandita Das

Nandita Das with her son, Vihaan

Discussion

Audience

主催：人間文化研究機構　南アジア地域研究　東京外国語大学拠点　南アジア研究センター（FINDAS）

2019年度　FINDAS国際ワークショップ

インド人監督ナンディタ・ダース氏が語る

「現代インド女性をめぐる問題：女優として、活動家として」

Nandita Das

インドを代表する映画
俳優・監督
代表作にManto（2018）
ほか

日時：　2019年7月9日（火）　18時～20時

17時45分開場

場所：　東京外国語大学　講義棟100番教室

使用言語：英語（通訳なし）

※申込不要（定員60名）

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人間文化研究機構
基幹研究プロジェクト

前書き

ここに収録するのは、2019 年 7 月 9 日に東京外国語大学で行われた、俳優・監督ナンディタ・ダースさんの FINDAS 講演記録です。ダースさんは彼女の監督第 2 作目にあたる映画『マントー』の東京外国語大学での上映に合わせて来日しました。『マント―』の上映は、大阪でも行われ、いずれの上映も、ダースさんの挨拶と観客との質疑応答が並行して行われ、大盛況のうちに終わりました。

ダースさんご自身が講演の最初の部分で望まれたように、講演はインフォーマルな雰囲気の中で進み、ダースさんのお話は、実に自由闊達なものでした。その雰囲気を残すため、最小限の修正以外、あえて英語に手を加えることはしませんでした。当日の雰囲気を感じ取っていただければ幸いです。読み原稿を用意することもなく、参加者に直接、話しかけるようなスタンスで、しかも、ある意味、きわめて「重い」テーマを淀みなく語られたこの講演は、ダースさんが、自らの経験を時間をかけて自省的に血肉にしていらっしゃってきたことを如実に示していると思います。

母親・父親の固定的な役割への批判的考察、ストリート演劇に関わる中での体験（自らが「特権的」な地位にあるということへの気づきは、殊に印象的でした）、レズビアン関係を扱い、インドで映画館焼き討ち事件まで引き起こした映画『ファイヤー』をめぐるさまざまな体験（性的マイノリティとしての自らの体験を、姉妹の体験として偽りダースさんに語ったヘアードレッサーのエピソードなど）、「女流」監督というラベルを張られることへの反発から、それを受け入れるまでの自らの変化、さらに質疑応答のなかで触れられた映画製作におけるメッセージの位置づけをめぐる考察など、講演を聞いた人、この記録を読む人に、自らの生活を振り返り、熟慮する契機を提供してくれるでしょう。社会と自分自身を変革すること、そして、その過程における「対話」の重要性を強調するダースさんの訴えに対して、この刊行が間接的にでも応答できればと期待します。

当初、講演の記録は FINDAS 内部の資料としてのみ残す予定でいたものの、講演の内容が、インドではもちろんのこと、ジェンダー問題をめぐって普遍的に直面する根本的な問題をあまりに鮮やかに浮彫りにしており、これは公開し、広く共有するべきだと直感的に認識しました。そして、急遽、このような形での公開をダースさんにお願いしてみたところ、快諾してくださり、この刊行に至ることができました。講演の公開に同意してくださったナンディタ・ダースさんに改めて感謝いたします。最後に、ダースさんの来日に関して実務やスケジュールの管理その他で協力してくださった、東京外国語大学ヒンディー語専攻卒業で、現在、インド映画の字幕作成などでご活躍中の藤井美佳さんに心から感謝いたします。

2020 年 2 月

粟屋　利江

Kensaku Mamiya

Thank you for being a part of the international workshop on 'Women's Issues in Contemporary India: As an Actor and Social Activist.' I am Kensaku Mamiya from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies.

Toshie Awaya

It's a great honor for us to have Ms. Nandita Das today as a speaker for FINDAS seminar. I am Toshie Awaya teaching South Asian studies and gender issues at this university, TUFS for short. I am also the head of FINDAS. FINDAS is the name of the project based on the Center for South Asian Studies at this university. FINDAS has been organizing various seminars and international workshops and other events for last around 10 years, and we are focusing on gender, social movements, and literature.

Theme-wise, there is no doubt that today's seminar is quite appropriate for this FINDAS seminar considering Ms. Nandita Das' career as the artist as well as the social activist – if I may call you a social activist. Not only that, her film "Manto," which we had the privilege to see on the screen at the TUFS is very much relevant to FINDAS as a theme, in the sense that "Manto" can be located at the interface between literature and social issues. I hope all the participants here will be able to utilize this seminar to the utmost to learn about the gender issues in India from Ms. Das' perspectives as an artist who has been engaged with contemporary issues. Her career will be explained – introduced by Mamiya-san afterwards. I hope we can exchange meaningful opinions today. Thank you.

Kensaku Mamiya

Thank you very much Professor Awaya.

Before her lecture, first of all, I would like to introduce today's speaker, Director Nandita Das, briefly. She started working in the film industry as an actor in 1996. The film was "Fire." You must see the film. After the "Fire," English film "1947 Earth," "Hazaar Chaurasi Ki Maa" in Hindi, "Bawandar" in Hindi in 2000, "Kamli" in Telugu, 2006, "Ramchand Pakistani" 2008 in Urdu, to name but a few. She has appeared as an

actor for over 40 films in different languages in total. As a director, the film "Manto" which you have seen on last Sunday or Saturday. She directed "Firaaq" in 2008. She helped continue to raise the issues such as same-sex love, gang rape, baby harvesting, naxalism, and freedom of expression, etcetera, through these films. She has been selected twice as a jury member in the Cannes Film Festival and "Manto" was among the 18 films shortlisted from over 2000 entries in the 'Un Certain Regard' category in the last year's festival. And in that festival last year, she joined the protest against the gender gap in cinema and society with 81 female personalities all over the world including Cate Blanchett. She has been acting passionately in the "Dark is Beautiful" movement since 2009 till now. Now, I would like to ask Ms. Nandita Das to come here and start your lecture.

Nandita Das

Good evening everyone. *Konnichiwa*. I don't know if I'm saying it. Is that afternoon? What is the evening for…?

Japanese Male

Konbanwa.

Nandita Das

Konbanwa. Yes. *Konbanwa*. Thank you very much for coming. I'm going to try and speak very slowly. I know language becomes a little bit of a challenge, and I have not prepared a lecture. I'm not going to give you a Wikipedia page on women in India because there are a lot of statistics you can get from just googling about it. I'm going to share more of my journey, what I have learned, where I have suffered, what are my failings. I'm going to share very honestly my experiences because I believe that when we become more open and we share our own stories with each other, that's when we learn, that's when we think, and that's when we feel. So, when I'm sharing with you, I'm also telling myself. I'm also hearing it as you are hearing it. So, it's not planned. It might go from here to there and come back and it's not chronologically – I will try to give you an overview in the beginning, but largely I will go back and forth in time. If

you feel you haven't understood something and you want to intervene, please do not hesitate. Just raise your hand and you can ask me again. One of our friends here can also translate. Please let's keep it absolutely casual and informal, so please do not hesitate.

I'll tell you a little bit about myself. I grew up in Delhi. My mother is a writer, and my father is a painter. I was very fortunate that as a child, I had a role reversal. What I mean by role reversal is like in India and I know Japan is also primarily a traditional patriarchal society, where men have a certain role and women have a certain role. So, usually women are supposed to be the homemakers. They take care of their husbands, their children. Home is supposed to be their biggest skill, their house, this is where they belong, and fathers, the men, they go out. They are the breadwinners. They go out and work and earn so that the family can be supported, and usually, children grow up with the mothers being at home and fathers providing for the home, but I'm very fortunate that I had a complete role reversal. The opposite was happening. My father had his studio at home. He would paint in the house. He would cook and clean. As a child, I used to think that fathers stay at home, they cook, clean, and for fun, they paint. And my mother used to go to work. She worked in a place called National Book Trust that publishes different Indian language books in different – like a Malayalam book in Hindi, a Hindi literature book in Gujarati. So, she would do a 9 to 5 job. She was not the best cook and I never resented that. By resent, I mean that I never felt bad about it. When I think about it I feel yes why should all women know how to cook. I'm not a great cook at all and I don't feel bad about that either. My mother would work and my father would stay home. The good thing was that when I was growing up, I didn't think that women have to stay at home and men have to go to work. For me, it was natural. Whatever you are used to, that becomes your "normal", and in a society, we very quickly define what is normal and we define it by what we think largely people are thinking, but we don't know what each one is thinking, what each one is feeling, what each one is experiencing, but we say, "Oh, this is normal and this is not." But for me, this was normal. It was normal for women to work and it was normal for fathers to be

at home and that's what I feel good about because I never became stereotypical in terms of the roles that men and women have to play.

I have a younger brother. He is six years younger than me. My parents separated when I was seven, so I was almost like a mini mother when I was young. Now, we are more like friends because when you grow up, the age gap doesn't feel too much but as children, it does feel, and he also grew up with both parents working and that's why he was never treated differently from me. I never felt I was treated like a daughter, like a girl. Everything was equal. Both my parents, they are not social workers, but they had a very strong social conscience. My mother comes from a Gandhian family, and her parents were both in the national freedom struggle, so they would tell me stories about it. My grandmother was more educated than my grandfather. They also had a love marriage. They met in the jail, in the prison, along with Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Gandhi. That's the kind of background I came with.

We often think money is a big privilege. Oh, they are so fortunate. They are the privileged, and there are these poor people, the underprivileged. We don't realize that the biggest privilege is the privilege of making a choice, the privilege of thoughts, the privilege of freedom, the privilege of being open. And that's why I feel very grateful to my parents that that's the privilege they gave me. What is the word in Japanese for 'privilege?' Can somebody say?

Japanese Male
Tokken.

Nandita Das
Tokken?

Toshie Awaya
Tokken.

Nandita Das

Tokken. I asked to ensure that everyone understand the word I am using. That was a big advantage for me. The fact I could ask anything. I could question anything. I didn't feel shy or hesitant about anything, oh I'm girl, I'm a daughter, maybe I should not do this. That was never that. I studied in a school, which was also very open, and then I wanted to do my Bachelor's degree, my graduation, in geography. Everybody else asked me why geography, but my parents never asked me. They just said, "Why do you want to do geography?" and I told them because I like the subject, I had a very good teacher. I know the importance of having good teachers. They can encourage the love of the subject or they can kill it forever. So, it's a big responsibility, and I had a great teacher for geography, so I took up geography, and by the end of 3 years, I did not want to do geography anymore. Because my university was not very good. The school was good, but it was the Delhi University. They did not really teach it that well. I didn't know what to do, but during that time, I paid most attention to street theater. I don't know if you have that form. You just go out on the streets and you perform. There was a very good group called the "Jana Natya Manch," which means really "people's theater," and the first play I did was on a dowry death case. I don't know if you know about dowry. Dowry is what a woman has to pay, she has to bring a lot of things when she gets married to the man. She's almost being bought. Bought? She's being sold. You give the girl and you have to give money, which is strange, because you're already giving the girl, which is a big thing anyway, and on top of that, you have to give a lot of things to keep the groom's family happy, and if girl's family is not able to give enough things or if the man's family gets greedy or if the man himself gets greedy, they start abusing the woman. They start beating her up, they threaten her, and sometimes they actually kill her. It seems really crazy. For me, during my growing up years, this was unimaginable. I didn't know anyone who had taken dowry, given dowry because of my parents being progressive. All their friends were progressive, so we grew up in a little bit of a bubble of writers, artists, photographers, musicians, dancers, journalists. All of these people, they didn't take dowry, they didn't give dowry. They didn't even have arranged marriages. Mostly they all had love marriages. Some worked out, some didn't, but it didn't matter.

My first play I did with the street theater was on dowry death, and I played the victim, the girl in the middle of the fire, because lot of the times, they would kill them by the gas stove. The in-laws would keep it open, and the girl would light it and they would say, “Oh, she made a mistake. It was an accident. She killed herself” or it was “We didn’t do anything. We didn’t have anything to do” because there is no evidence, and so many such cases happen even now. It’s really tragic that in the world today there are so many forms of abuse that exist.

For me, dowry deaths were stories in a newspaper which now come on the 7th or 8th or the 9th page, like a small story. The news says, in Delhi, there was a dowry death. Sometimes, professors like really educated people, they are doing. In fact, mostly it is the educated and rich people because they are the ones who can afford – who want dowry, who understand all this. Poor people don’t even have money to give dowry. When I did this play in a small slum, in a poorer neighborhood, and after every play, we would take a bed sheet and people would throw money in it, like little coins, 10 paise, at that time. I’m talking about 25 years ago or maybe 30 years ago, and they will give little money, and here, they started giving the notes, like 1 rupee, 2 rupees, 5 rupees, and some people were crying. They would touch me and they would say, “Oh, it’s so sorry. You had to suffer so much,” and I would look around say, “It’s just a play.” I’m just acting. I mean I’m here. That fire was just orange ribbons. You can see it. Why are they crying? Why are they taking it so seriously? I was 17 years old. Very idealistic. I used to think this play is going to change the world. There would be no more dowry deaths here because we were performing and people were liking the play, they were talking. It is then I realized that these cases were happening to them. For them, this was not a news item in a newspaper. It was their life, and I think at that time, I slowly started realizing that maybe I was living with too many privileges. I was living in a bit of a bubble. I didn’t know such people who actually suffer these things. I felt deeply about it, but it was not a lived experience. It was not something I knew deeply inside my heart. It was not my body that had suffered that, and slowly, I started realizing that what I really want to do was to work with people. So, I decided to do my

postgraduation, my Master's degree in social work. I did it in Delhi University. A degree doesn't make you a better or worse social worker, but what it does is that, it exposes you to different issues. Today, you are learning something new about India, tomorrow you will be learning something about history, about different subjects. When we learn about human suffering and human struggle, and we all are sensitive, the more we learn, the more curious we are about it, the more we want to know. The more we experience, the more we feel, the more we start wanting to do something about it. So, I always tell young people that the one thing we all should do is to be open to experiences, open to suffering, open to feeling and seeing and experiencing what others do it on an everyday basis. That doesn't make me go and sleep on the street, but we work enough with people so that we never forget how privileged we are. We never forget how many things we take for granted, and doing my Master's in social work, that's what it did to me. It exposed me to mentally challenged children, what are their issues, what is autism, what do their parents go through. It exposed me to gender issues and the struggles that women have. It exposed me to caste issues. It exposed me to various forms of social abuse, and I was feeling very overwhelmed. I was feeling very – like Oh my God, what can I do. I'm too small. I can't do anything. The problems are too big, and I think we often feel that way. We often feel the problems are too many. I'm not going to make a difference anyway, so why should I bother. It's better I just do what I have to do because I'm not going to really bring any big change. But imagine if there was a great concert, and we all loved it, but we felt lazy to clap and appreciate it. If I'm not going to clap because I think the others are going to clap anyway, and everybody decides not to, there will be complete silence after that great piano concert or a great violin concert. Everybody counts and that's what I started thinking that I have to do my job, which is what that student who made the film who wrote every drop counts, and from there on, my journey of engaging with social issues started.

My first job was to work in a slum with young girls and women and to talk about what are their rights. I was young at that time. I was 20 years old. I felt I was educated in social work. I came from a privileged background. I used to tell them you must be strong. You should not take beating from your husband. Why should you suffer it? You

can teach your children to be strong. They are looking at you as a role model. You are the older persons. You are the adults. We used to work with these young girls, young women, which was very satisfying. Coming from privileged house, going to this poor neighborhood, talking to all these women, seeing the transformation or what I thought at that time was transformation because they were all saying, yes, we should do this. Let's organize this. We had very good conversations. After 2 years, one day I went to the slum, and I saw this woman. She was completely beaten up, like her skin was black and blue, and she had scratches everywhere. I was shocked because she was becoming the leader of that community that I was working with, so I went to her and I said, "What happened? Why are you looking like this? Who beat you up?" She said, "Don't worry. My husband beat me up. He was drunk. He beat me up, but I'm not going to keep quiet. I'm going to fight." And that day, I was very, very troubled because I realized that all the work we did was with the women. We are making them stronger. We are making them question their situation. We are making them fight back, but we are not working with the men, and they are still there, and the women have risen in a way, and what alternative can I give this woman. What is she going to do now? She has three children. I cannot tell her you come to my house with your three children maybe for 1 day, 2 days, 1 week, but what is the choice. I was maybe too young, too idealistic but stupid, not really realistic about all of this. I didn't know how to handle. So I looked at her and I started crying and I said, "No, you know, I told you to be strong but not at the cost of your life. Not at the cost of your well-being, of your health, of – you know, this is not good." And she said, "No, no, don't worry. Why are you crying? I want to fight back." I asked her, "You're going to fight back and do what? Where are you going to go?" She said, "I don't know," because she had never worked. She didn't have any skills. She used to take care of three children and everything, but you see we don't value housework. I remember once doing a survey with women in a Muslim neighborhood, and everywhere we would go and say, "What do you do?" and the women would say, "Nothing" and I used to say "Nothing?" "No, we don't do anything," and I said, "Oh, who cooks?" "I do." "Who washes the clothes?" "I do." And I was writing down everything that they do, and we made a list of 25 things, packing the lunchbox, giving this to the son, cleaning the house, 25 things, and then at the end, I said, "So, what do

you do?" and they immediately understood and they said, "Well, but you know, we don't get any money for it." So, we have created a world where money is the value for things, so we don't value what women really do. This woman also, she did not value her work. She said, "I don't know what I will do with three children." And I said, "Well, I'm sorry. I think I made a mistake. I made you ask too many questions too soon. We first need to work with the men." And I started including men in the conversations. It was not easy because they felt, "Oh this girl, she comes from a rich neighborhood." We were not rich. We were very middle class, but for them, we were rich. They said, "Oh, she comes, she's educated, she's done her MA, she thinks she knows everything," and they would start fighting with me, and the women of the slum would start defending me. They would say, "No. She's right, and we should do what she says." So, we started a dialogue, but I did not feel I was emotionally equipped to handle it. So I left that job and I started working with children and teachers to understand why teachers were not excited to teach in government schools, in rural areas, in village schools. Because they had 45 children, they used to be sent to do other work. They were not interested in teaching, and the children were not interested in studying. I started working on education, and again, I started seeing a difference between the male teachers and the female teachers. The female teachers had much more work because they had to take care of their children, their husband, their family, their home, and then come to school. As a result, they were even less interested actually as teachers because they were already tired when they came to school. They had to get up at 4:30 or 5:00, finish everything, come to school at 7:30, deal with all these 45 children who are making noise, and then go back home and again do all that.

Then, slowly I started realizing that the story of women is different from what I have grown up with, from what I think. Then in 1996, I got an offer to do this film "Fire." It was directed by a woman named Deepa Mehta. She is Indian born, but from Canada. She told me this is a film about two women, and asked me to read the script. I said, "Okay, I will read the script." Even though my family was very liberal, we never talked about homosexuality. It was something I understood intellectually. Like I said, "Yes, everybody should have the right to love who they want to. Everybody should be able to

make the choice they want to," but I didn't understand what it really meant because we never talked about it. My parents had friends who were gays or lesbians, and they would come to our house, because it was very inclusive, but we never spoke about it. So, I did not know the struggles. I did not know how insensitive the society was. I did not know what kind of hypocrisy that we all lived in. It was only after "Fire" when we travelled to many different parts of the world to show the film, and I'm talking 23 years ago when in India we did not talk about these things at all. It was all under the carpet. Even I realized Indian journalists didn't know how to ask a question. They would say, "So, what do you feel about that kind of a relationship?" "How was it to do that kind of a scene?" They didn't even use the word. So, it was very strange for me, and the first screening was in Kerala, and Kerala is in the south, a state where you get the best of literature, but you also get the worst. You get the best of films, the most artistic films. It has the biggest pornography industry also. It has many contradictions. It had a matrilineal society, meaning the mother's side was actually quite important in the property division and things like that, but it's also very sexist society. I don't know how your experience of Kerala has been, but I have been there quite a few times, and I was shocked because I didn't know, it's a beautiful state with lovely beaches and trees and very nice food. They use a lot of coconut, so I thought, "Oh, we are going to have our Indian premier at the Kerala Film Festival." It's a very good festival. I still like it a lot. We were seeing "Fire" for the first time in India, and I had seen it many times at other festivals, this was a very big hall with 3000 seats. It was packed. Usually, for films that deal with women, there are more women. Here, it was like 70% men and maybe 30% women, and when I asked some people why are there so few women, they said, "Oh, women don't like to see films." I said, "Really? Who told you that?" Please ask the women. I'm sure they will tell you that they like to see films. And then when we were watching the film, it got the opposite reaction to every screening that I had gone to. There is a scene where – the film is really about two women who are married to two brothers, and both their marriages are not very good, and then they slowly start feeling a sense of love, care, affection, attraction to each other, and these two sister-in-laws become very close and when the mother-in-law notices their closeness, she cannot speak but she spits on the older daughter-in-law. This is a very disturbing scene, and at every screening that we

went to before that, people would do – like you could feel a collective sigh, but in Kerala, when she spits on the daughter-in-law, men started clapping, and I was shocked, and this is in 1996, and I was like “What?” Deepa Mehta, Shabana Azmi, the woman who played the older sister-in-law with me, we were completely shocked. So, that was the exposure of “Fire” that I had in Kerala, and it was very disturbing. When the film got released, it got released after two years, without a single cut. In India, there is a lot of censorship. There is a censor board, which pretends to be very liberal, but is often not so liberal and is very arbitrary. What do I mean by arbitrary? Like there is no logic. Sometimes they will give a cut to something, sometimes they will not give a cut because six or seven people are deciding for the whole country or 1.2 billion people. It’s crazy. It’s so subjective for a few people to decide what is right for the whole country and what is not. But to our pleasant surprise, they did not give a single cut in “Fire,” so we were very happy. It got released. On the 30th day, the Right-Wing Hindu party rose against the film because they said there are no homosexuals in India, and this is against our Indian culture. When they say Indian culture they meant Hindu culture, and it’s not about religion. I come from a Hindu family, and we have always been taught to be very open. I don’t practice any religion, but primarily that’s what every religion I hope teaches, Buddhism is probably a more evolved religion than the ones that exist. So we were really surprised, and they started really attacking people going into theaters, literally beating them up, tearing the posters, breaking the glass in the theater, and all of us, Deepa Mehta, Shabana Azmi, and I – we had police outside our homes for one month to just protect us. My parents were very outspoken and liberal people. They got really scared for me because I was staying by myself, and they said, “You know, you are more vulnerable because anybody can come and attack you. You live alone. You’re not protected by anything.” So, there was a lot of fear.

But anyway, that started a very important conversation. That started a conversation, not only about homosexuality but also questioning the arranged marriage system. People started talking about freedom of expression, why should anybody tell us what we should watch, whether it’s a good film or bad, even if I dislike a film, I will defend the right for everyone to watch it. And I think that’s why this is a landmark film. Any place I went,

people wanted to talk about “Fire.” Sometimes, I would sit next to – like I am on a flight, and this stranger next to me would say, “Oh, why did you do that film? Aren’t you ashamed of it?” And I would say, “Not at all. I’m very happy and proud about it.” And I would start a conversation. So whether it was in big groups or small, I took every opportunity to listen, not just say what I had to say, but also to listen to different point of views, and I felt there were few people who were completely against it. Very few actually. And there were also a few people who openly talked about their support, but there was a large number of people who were confused. They understood it intellectually, but did not understand it emotionally or were not aware enough about it, had many fears, had many questions, or there were some who understood it emotionally but did not have the vocabulary or ability to intellectualize it.

For instance, I once went for a haircut in a salon, and the girl who was cutting my hair, said, “You know, my sister is like you in “Fire.”” Because she didn’t know how to express it, and I said, “Oh, that’s good. So did she see “Fire”?” She said, “Yes, she saw it and she loved it,” and I said, “Oh, I’m so happy,” and then she started telling me all about her sister, how difficult it is and how her parents have not accepted, they threw her out of the house, but they take her money. They threw her out but when she earns, she has to give it to her parents, and I said, “Well, that’s strange. You can’t throw your child out for loving another person, another person of the same sex, and you don’t mind taking the money.” After listening to her full story, I asked her, “Is this your story?” and she suddenly looked at me and said, “How did you know?” There was so much fear that people didn’t even want to share their story openly. She wanted to tell me her own story by saying, this is her sister’s story. There were many, many stories – I heard many conversations. I became like a champion for the LGBTQ rights at that time by default. I did not start with that intention, but because it’s a human rights issue, because I started realizing what an insensitive society we were living in, how people are happier killing and justifying violence, but they feel uncomfortable when two people love, and they want to protest against it. Also, it did not make it easy because we had a law that criminalized homosexuality. The 377, an Act, which is more than 150 years old introduced by the British Government – in fact, in Britain, it was banned long ago, but

in India, we kept it for very long, and I feel in some way, “Fire” provided the space to have a conversation. Lot of people used “Fire” to start a conversation with their parents, with their friends in their communities and it started to create an understanding about it. In India it is only early this year that finally homosexuality has been decriminalized, finally 377 is out and the Supreme Court gave that verdict. So, it’s been a very long battle.

It’s very rare that you can measure the impact of a film because a film doesn’t create a revolution, a film creates conversations, it creates thinking, it creates self-reflection, it creates challenges to our prejudices, it sparks new ideas, and all this happens very subconsciously. We don’t even know that we are changing by reading a book or watching a film or when somebody tells you a story. We only know if we are constantly aware of ourselves, and I feel like, “Hmm, today, I am the same person that I was 20 years ago, but I’m still not the same person that I was 20 years ago.” My response to some things is different. Maybe something that made me very angry 20 years ago, I still feel passionately about those things, but it doesn’t make me angry. I still can process it differently. Maybe if somebody said something that is completely different from my thoughts, I would not like to engage when I was 17 year or 20 or 25 or even 30, I would get so agitated that I would think how can somebody think like this. How can they be so insensitive and dehumanized, and I was very judgmental and opinionated. But today, I’m more interested in engaging, I’m more patient in listening, not always but mostly I try to be more patient in listening because when I listen, I understand where they come from.

Basically, with “Fire,” I felt there was actually a tangible impact. You can actually see the change it brought to the conversations about homosexuality and the issues related to same-sex love, and like I said, even today people say that you are straight, why you defend it so much, why you go for these marches, and why you sign these petitions. Every issue is our issue and one of the biggest problems with the women’s movement is that only the victims have been fighting the battle. We are fighting the battle. We are talking among ourselves and that’s why I’m very happy that there are also so many men

here today. I don't know as if students maybe you were forced to come. I don't know, but there are some old men as well with the white hair, which I'm liking a lot that I'm assuming you have not been forced to come, and that you don't feel threatened. If men feel that, "Oh, our power is going and it's not a conscious thing." The more educated we get, the subtler these inequalities become. If somebody comes and says, "Oh, you know, you are a woman, you cannot do this." I can argue it. I can fight it. But when somebody is not telling me in those words, but I can feel it from the way they talk to me, I can feel it in their tone, I can feel it in their choice of words, I can feel it in what they expect me to do, that is more difficult to counter. It is more difficult to fight that, and I feel that is what I struggle with even as a woman director.

Since, when I did "Firaaq" 10 years ago, it's one of the changes that has happened in me. 10 years ago when people would call me for these women director panels, I didn't like it at all. I used to say, "I'm a director. I happen to be a woman. Why should I only talk about what it is like to be a woman director?" A woman director is a thing when I'm directing actors, I'm working with my crew, I'm only the director. But my gender is not participating in every decision, so why should I be labeled as a woman director. But today, I'm happy to be labeled as a woman director and that change has come because we are now asking that in every field there should be more women participating. Why should there not be? Why should we not have more women directors? If I want more women directors, first I have to assume that title and accept that title myself, and I have to first acknowledge that, yes, I am a woman director. My being a woman must have some impact on my gaze, in the way I look at things. It may not be conscious, but subconsciously, sometimes when you see a film and you say, "Oh, definitely a man has made it." You know especially when you see those violent action films or sometimes the way sexuality is dealt with, you feel this must have been made by a man.

Similarly, when I did "Manto" and I was coming out after my screening in Cannes, the World Premier, one lady came to me and she said, "This film could have only been made by a woman," and I said, "Hmm, why do you think that?" And she said, "there are two things, one it talks about violent times, but there is no violence really in the film,

and two, “Manto” talked a lot about sexuality. Some of his stories are more sexual than you have shown. You would have not distracted us with showing too much skin. Instead, you kept with the intent, and I think that’s where the female gaze comes in.” Of course, these are generalizations. Just because we are women, it doesn’t mean we cannot make a war film, and it has been made. A war film has been made by women. We do not want to stereotype, but there is a female gaze, and if we want diversity, if we want to see different kind of films, different kinds of art, we want different kinds of ideas, we have to have different perspectives, and for different perspectives, the female perspective is huge. We are not even the minority. Even a minority must have a say, but we are holding up half the sky as they say, that we are literally half the population. In India, the sex ratio is really dropping. There are 945 women to a 1,000 men because more and more people are wanting male children, so they are either killing like getting aborted if it’s a female child or sometimes even killing an infant after they are born as a daughter.

I am a big champion of multiple identities, which means that all of us have different identities, we are not any one thing. I am a woman, I am an Indian, I am born in a Hindu family, I am a non-vegetarian, I am an actor, I am a director. I have many identities. Depending on where I am, my identity changes. If I am in the midst of many Japanese, my identity is of an Indian. If I am in the midst of many men, my identity is of a woman, if I am in the midst of vegetarians, my identity is of a non-vegetarian. So, identity is very fluid, and it is all of this, but over the years, I realize that my identity of a woman somehow has become the most important identity, not because I want to make it my primary identity, but because I am constantly being reminded that I am a woman. I am almost never allowed to forget that whether it is in a good way, whether it is in a bad way, whether it is about how I look, whether it is about where I work, how I should behave, somewhere the awareness that I am a woman is more than any of my other identities and maybe that’s why I continue to engage with this issue in my work whether I write a column, whether I come and speak, whether I make my films. Even if I make a film about a male protagonist, the females in that film are very important, and it’s a male protagonist who cares about women, who has contradictions.

For me, it doesn't mean that only when you make a film which is women-centric, which has a woman protagonist, then it's about a woman. It's about how you represent women. I think this is where I am going to stop. I have given you a broad overview of my concerns through little bit stories from my life, and I hope that we can have a frank conversation, and I would be also very interested to know if you see some parallels in your society and what do you think are the struggles because you all obviously are educated, are privileged like myself, and how do you see it if we could find ways together because the change is not going to come from somebody else. The change in this inequality is going to come from us and each one of us, so I would be most delighted to have this conversation. Thank you.

Mamiya Kensaku

Thank you very much, Ms. Nandita Das. Should we break for some time?

Nandita Das

No. I'm good. If you are okay – if you all want a five-minute break to go to the bathroom – I am good. Anybody can ask question. You can just raise your hand. Right here.

Female Participant

Thank you so much for sharing your story. I was really intrigued. I am an alumnus of this university, and I believe I liked the way you said you are a champion of multiple identities because our role is increasingly being polarized by identity politics.

Nandita Das

Yes. Absolutely.

Female Participant

A question I have for you as you are a veteran of the Indian film industry as an actor, as a director, I'm really intrigued and quite puzzled about the issue of being "brown" in your industry. And although "brown" issue itself doesn't exist in Japan because we are

yellow but the issue of representation in film and TV is an issue in our country too whether we should cast LGBTQ actors in roles or not. These are issues that's relevant. Two, I would like to hear a bit on representation and casting.

Nandita Das

Sure. Thank you. As you know that in India, we make close to 2,000 films every year, and most of them are mainstream like Bollywood. We have other big industries in the south, Tollywood and Kollywood, they call all kinds of woods. A mainstream film by definition is trying to please more people. When you try to please more people, you have to average out things. You can't do things, which have too many nuances. You tend to stereotype things, so in India the skin color is a huge prejudice, and the darker skin color is not appreciated like right from our childhood, even though my parents never put that complex in me, so I didn't even realize till I joined this campaign where it was worth even a standalone issue because I have been working on women's issues for so many years and you are dealing with stories of such great abuse and inequality and discrimination that I felt dark skin is an issue, but I don't know whether it should be a standalone issue, but when I joined the campaign, I realized that it's not about the skin color. It's about what it does to your self-esteem, what it does to your confidence, what it does to your sense of self. A lot of young girls completely lose their confidence, even by the time they are 10 or 11 if they are dark. They do not participate in the school plays. They do not because they feel they will not get the best roles. They do not participate in many of the dance, music. Somebody says "don't go out in the sun, you'll become too dark." Our matrimonial ads have "fair and lovely" everywhere. There is a big demand for light skin. Our films, our television, our ads, our hoardings, if you see in India, everywhere you will see light-skinned women. It almost looks like they are not Indian because 90% of Indian skin is like this and you don't see them anywhere. A friend of mine said all these beauty magazines are to tell you that you're ugly because they show you the perfect body, perfect hair, and a person who is thin – they standardize beauty for you, and you have to try and fit in. This is a huge problem of representation. Even in our country, the LGBTQ representation is quite poor. After "Fire", maybe now in the recent 3-4 years, there have been three films, which are good. At least maybe things are

changing. Some people say now that homosexuality is decriminalized, what change will it bring? It's just a law, but I think it impacts. It at least brings it to the conversation that this is not a crime. It is not something bad that you have to hide. I think things will change but like everywhere in the world, something that is not mainstream, something that is not heteronormative will always take time, and it's no different in India, and Bollywood makes it harder for things to change. There is very little space for independent cinema because of distribution and marketing, so it's a real struggle.

Female Participant

Thank you.

Female Participant

Thank you so much for your beautiful talk. I was really inspired by your efforts and all things you have done for fighting for women. My question is about the conversation. You mentioned that you started conversing with men after realizing that only working with women is not enough to solve the problems. I'm from Hong Kong, and recently, as everybody knows, there is a huge political struggle, and it's difficult to start a conversation in reality. I would like to ask how did you start an effective conversation with men and how was the struggle?

Nandita Das

It's an ongoing thing. As we know that the word "empower" can never be used in the past tense. I can't say I'm empowered. I can only say I'm in the process of empowering. Similarly, even with men, it's not that easy. It's very slow process, but I think men are struggling too. Men are also struggling because they are exposed to these conversations about women, about equality. I have an eight-year-old child, and I see when I go to school, mostly it's the mothers who come to pick up the children. There are a few fathers, and all the mothers are really appreciating the men who are coming. Even for what should be natural and normal, we say, "Wow, he's so amazing. You're coming to pick up your own son?" Like it's your own child. What is the big deal? But we give them so much importance, so how do you balance between not putting them on a

pedestal because they are doing what they should be doing anyway and at the same time encouraging them that it's good what you're doing. Don't feel awkward like "I'm the only man in the room who has come to this workshop with children, in all others are women." so it is difficult, and we are all a product of our experiences. This is what men have seen their parents do. I also realized despite my work on gender issues, how conditioned I was. I married a very patriarchal man actually, surprisingly, but he wanted to change. He said, "Yes, my parents were like this. My father was like this. Very patriarchal. I don't want to be that person." I said, "Oh, wow, I had an opportunity to change one person. That's my job. I'm really going to change one person." But as we know, it's not that easy. So, I failed in my attempt and we separated 2 years ago, but the point is that it is such a slow process. When I started realizing that as a mother, I was doing exactly those things that I told my other friends, female friends who were mothers, not to do. When I was not a mother, I used to tell them, "Why? Where is your own identity? You are only worried about your child and what she is going to eat or he is going to eat. You are not caring about your own dreams and desires." I was thinking, "My god, I'm doing exactly that." So I wrote a play called "Between the Lines". I was telling Mika-san. Where are you Mika-san? To subtitle it in English. I'm going to send you the link. It's a story about an educated lawyer couple, and they are both very good at their profession and how they start slowly peeling the layers of inequality when they take up a case where they have to fight each other, and how they both are conditioned by it. The conversation with men is both easy and difficult. It's easy if you do a one-on-one conversation because men are more vulnerable then. If you do it in a group, they start to posture. They start to not show what they are truly feeling, and there are troubles. You can't do a one-on-one conversation with every man because it's not possible, but what has been very helpful is to start a conversation between men and women and to let them have a conversation with each other. I think a lot of things come out, and women then take it up upon themselves and they start responding and sometimes men say unintentionally, but really clueless things that women then react to and then men have a chance to also defend their stand, and I think the more we talk, the closer we will get. Yes, please.

Female Participant

Hi. I may have a question related to cinema and women in the industry, and according to Wikipedia, if you don't like Wikipedia, I'm not quite sure…

Nandita Das

No. It's okay. I see Wikipedia all the time.

Female Participant

It's okay. According to Wikipedia, you chose Irfan Khan. But because of some issues, you had to change. Is that right?

Nandita Das

No. It's not. See, Wikipedia can be wrong. No, in between, I did think of Irfan Khan for a while, but I feel Irfan Khan's presence is very strong. It's stronger than Manto's presence, so I wanted an actor who will become Manto and I went back to Nawaz. Okay. Please continue.

Female Participant

My second question is do you have any film institute for women in India with some actresses or choreographers like you and Aparna Sen or Farah Khan. Some of them have a very big name. Can go to the industry very easily to change their role as a director.

Nandita Das

Yeah, there are many.

Female Participant

Can you expect more new female directors coming from film schools in India?

Nandita Das

Yes. Sure. The biggest, the most famous film school is called FTII, Film and Television Institute of India, which is in Pune. It has a good course, and there are directors who have come out of them. Now, in fact in the younger generation because the society is changing, more women are joining direction. The names you said, Aparna Sen or Farah Khan, they are slightly older. In that generation, there were few directors. Even in my generation, comparatively few, but now when you see younger women, there are many more. The other school is SRFTI, Satyajit Ray Film & Television Institute, which is in Kolkata in Bengal, just outside Kolkata, and there are many other small direction courses, one in Ahmedabad, called National Institute of Design. They also have a film course. Like that, there are many. There is in Bombay a college called Sophia College, which is only for girls, and there is a mass communication course and a film studies course, but as we know, like with the arts, you don't have to study arts. There are some great filmmakers. I don't know if Kurosawa and Ozu studied cinema, so I'm not saying – it's good to study. I don't have that advantage because I never learned film making formally. I never even assisted anybody, so for me I was learning on the job, so it is good to learn whether with another director or in a film school. There are a lot of young women now who are coming together and changing, but you know why should only those who are suffering always be the ones changing also. Women also have to make their films, so just as men are busy making their films, women are also busy making their films, but you can also change the society not just by telling others, but by living that. When you have more role models, it also inspires and encourages younger women to say that, "Oh, this person is a filmmaker, I can do it too."

So, there is a filmmaker called Zoya Akhtar. She just made a film called "Gully Boy," which became very popular, and it has a male protagonist of a rap singer. It's a story of a rap singer. But there are many other women directors. There is a woman called Shonali Bose. She has also made films. If you just search online for women directors in India, many names will come up. Aparna Sen's daughter, Konkona Sen, she also made a nice film called "Death in the Gunj," and she's also an actor-director. There are a few actor-directors; not so many, but things are changing. I was asking somebody here a few

days ago that are there enough women – not enough because it'll always be a small percentage – but are there more women directors coming from here, and I don't hear that many names. The only name that I have heard is Naomi Kawase, maybe, because of Cannes, but I don't hear at least internationally. Maybe there are many more here. My other concern was that in India there are also male directors who have done strong stories about women issues. I don't have to be a man to do a story about a man or I don't have to be a woman to do a story about women. These are human stories, and anybody who is less represented, it is in a way the responsibility of the artist to represent them more, so we have a lot of male film directors right from Satyajit Ray to Mrinal Sen to Shyam Benegal and many others to Adoor Gopalakrishnan in Kerala, who have done very strong films about women's issues. That is what we want art to represent all of us and to be diverse. I hope this answers your question. Yes, please.

Nandita Das

Yeah. Please feel free to ask in Japanese. Exactly. I was going to say. Do not hesitate.

Female Participant

Hi. Thank you. Nice to see you again. It was lovely hearing your story.

Nandita Das

Thank you.

Female Participant

My question will be like recently we hear a lot about the Indian female actors not being paid well. There has been a lot of fight going on about that. I would like to know the challenges as a female director in the industry, not just for you, maybe other colleague's experiences, and also like in those challenges, do you face challenges in communicating with your actors as you are female and they are male?

Nandita Das

Sorry. What did you start with? What is your first question?

Female Participant

The female actors being paid less. So, how about the directors?

Nandita Das

It's true that female actors are paid less in India, but this is not just an Indian phenomenon. In Hollywood with some of the most powerful actresses, whether it's Angelina Jolie or whether it is Salma Hayek and all these big actresses get paid lesser than their male counterparts. They are fighting those battles there, and slowly, people are getting aware of it. There is Geena Davis, the Hollywood actress – and you should google this, it's quite interesting. She started something called the Geena Davis Institute. I'm trying to bring it to India, but we don't have any funders. What they do is they just do a lot of research on women's representation in films, how many dialogues do women get, how many women there are in the films, what do they talk about, how many women are behind the camera, what is their role, and they have just put those facts and figures to the Hollywood industry to show how little are women represented both on screen and off screen. And, that is changing the narrative. Even the film like "Wonder Woman" has started coming, and the woman who got the Oscar last year for her film, "Three Billboards," I don't know if you remember that she said that if even the male actors and male directors start making it part of their contract that we will employ that many women, then things will change. The "Inclusion Rider" she calls it.

Like that, in India, women do get paid less. We are not organized. There is really no body that takes up this issue. Sometimes it comes up and then it dies, like the #MeToo movement. I know in Japan, I only read about one story of a journalist. In India, there were quite a few stories. Some were right, though unfortunately some were not right. It became a bit trivial. People started misusing it also a little bit, so it kind of became not as strong as it should have been, but at least it has begun. The conversations have begun. For directors, the biggest prejudice is that when you go to funders, they think you are going to be too emotional, that you will not be able to follow through. The other challenge that women face is that they become mothers, and we forget that a woman has

such a big role to play in life if she becomes a mother. It's not even a question for a man. If a man is a father, you never ask, "How do you balance your work and life?" It's not even something that they are asked. When I started directing, that's the first question I was asked. Not just me but any woman when she gets married, they say, "Oh, are you going to continue acting?" When you have a child, they are asked, "Are you going to continue directing or acting?" So, a lot of women leave their work, like Shonali Bose and some of these directors, they did not work as much when they became mothers. The system is not created in a way that it supports this idea. Today, Mika-san and I were talking about how we see few children here, and we were talking about the lack of support for women. If there are less nurseries, less crèches, it's telling you to make a choice. You either work or have c child, not that every woman has to be a mother, not that every woman has to be married, but if you are a mother, the system must support it. The system must encourage you to work and to be a mother, but it doesn't. There are many challenges that women face, but slowly the younger women are changing the narrative. The younger women also do not want to get married too soon. They do not want to have children, and of course, because they also want to express themselves, they want to make films and that's going to be also the reaction to it and so be it. Yes, please.

Male Participant

Good to see you back again. Very nice to see you and hear your speech. I am from India originally and I have been living here in Japan for the past 3 years now. I am acclimated with the social issues here as well as in India. It's good to see you talk about feminism and gender equality because I'm also a supporter of both. I just want to ask you, but before that I also want to tell you that feminism is also kind of getting a grip these days in Japan as well.

Nandita Das

Getting what?

Male Participant

Getting a grip. I mean a lot of people are talking about it, and the good side I want to talk about is one of the famous brands called Uniqlo appointed a female CEO recently, which is a very good sign. Since you have been an activist and a film director for so long now and I'm sure you want to see a change happening in the society, so from the point of view of gender equality as well as feminism, if you want to talk about the positive side that you can see within India, lately or maybe in the last 10 years.

Nandita Das

I would say India is a land of contradictions. There are many paradoxes that exist. More and more women are getting educated. They are also working. They are voicing their opinions. They are actually a part of many conversations. India is a country where we also have female goddesses, female prime minister and ministers, female CEOs. It's not unusual. Even in America, the biggest democracy, a first-world country, when Hillary Clinton was fighting for presidential candidate, it was a big deal that a woman president would have happened, which didn't happen. We have strange contradiction in India. Women in top ranking positions, and they are accepted. Yet, we are also abusive toward women and violence is also there at every stage of women, so that's the kind of contradiction. It's almost like we take two steps backwards and two steps forwards, and both exist simultaneously.

Often, I say that we live in different centuries simultaneously. You will find the most modern and the most articulate women, and you will also find the most repressed and quiet, like submissive women. In that sense, I don't know, it's just my impression, but I feel like maybe I don't know if it's culturally or traditionally or patriarchal. In that sense Japan is more homogenous comparatively and that's why maybe you're able to see the change, like you say that there is one CEO and it's a big deal. For us there have been many women CEOs, but we cannot only celebrate that because we also have the kind of abuse that maybe you don't have, to kill a female child after she is born is unheard of. I mean there are cases where they put peas in their nose and drown them in the water. Which society does that? Which society kills for dowry?

There are all those cases and I feel geographical boundaries are manmade, yes, mostly. In some things, we say human-made, but this is manmade, and we as a world have to come closer, so the liberals of India must join hands with liberals of Japan or wherever, and we are the "we" and the ones who are not are the "they." It's not so much India versus Japan situation. Yes, there are cultural differences, there are cultural similarities, but the more we come together and learn from each other, I think we can connect. Like I was saying that here I feel the conversations haven't fully come out. I'm sure there are conversations that are happening among women or even in media, but it feels like there is something that is like a pressure cooker and maybe the lid still hasn't fully come out. In India, it keeps coming out, but we get trolled also. The kind of abuse that women get on social media is horrible, and I have faced it myself. It's very sexist. It's very abusive, and it's not just in India. In the US and everywhere if you just google also, the trolls for women, they did a study and they found out that often it is more sexist. It's not just saying we disagree with you, but it can be very, very demeaning and very violent.

So, yes, I do – when I say negative things about India, I'm not thinking of it as if you ask me about myself, I will say some good things and some bad things. That is the true picture. Similarly, I don't want to just sound like a nationalistic by saying only good things because if you love your country, you will see the bad things also because you want to change them, and you say the good things because we want to keep them, and we want to learn from the good examples elsewhere. Thank you. Yes, please.

Female Participant

Thank you for your lecture. I am a student here at TUFS, and actually, I want to be a filmmaker in future, and I am also studying gender issues and also I'm interning over here. I have a question. What kind of messages do you put when you make a film? Like in feature films like "Manto" and then also there are lots of adaptations on these works. How did you put your message in the film and then also do you have any advice for the next generation of filmmakers or activists?

Nandita Das

Okay. Thank you. Sometimes, we think of a message as something that's very preachy, something that somebody is going to sit on top and tell the others. Nobody wants to be told. I don't want to be told what I should do, but I still want to change, I want to grow, I want to hear new stories. I feel like if you believe what you believe in, it will also find its way to come into the story. Also the choice you make, like a lot of people say that you are a feminist, you talk about women, why are both your films about other prejudices, other discriminations. Why does this "Manto" have a male protagonist? Why did you not take a woman story? I feel also women think about many things. We are also impacted by violence. Being a woman doesn't mean that we only think about ourselves – we think about everything that affects also men. The messaging has to be very subtle. The messaging has to be in your intention. When you are telling a story, it should be an engaging story. That is very important.

For me, as a young filmmaker, I would say that there are two parts in a film, the content and the form. For me, at least the content drives the form. How I want to tell the story is decided by what I want to tell, and once I know what I want to tell I can decide the form. So in "Manto" it's not one thing. It's many things. I want to tell that it's important to talk about truth. It's important to show reality as is, even if the reality is not very good or pleasant or difficult. It is important to show it, and here was a man who wanted to show it. I also want to say that we need to be courageous to do that because otherwise we are self-censoring ourselves. We are becoming selfish. We are not engaging enough. We are scared. There is a sense of fear. If I do this, what will people say? What will they think? Will they judge me? So, "Manto" also inspires us to be free-spirited.

The third thing I feel is to see that things are difficult. When you speak the truth, when you are courageous, it is a difficult path. It's not going to be easy. It's easy to be more general, like everybody else, more "normal," but that's not going to change the world and your life is not going to be so interesting. It's not going to be so meaningful. For your own self, we're not changing. This film, not much is going to change anyway. People will forget after sometime. Many greater films have come and gone, but the

point is – is it giving some meaning to my life, is it making me think about things, is it changing me as a human being, am I getting opportunities to meet different people, to hear them. I feel that if I believe in what I really want to do then I can use art, I can make use of this very powerful medium, to start those conversations. There are some great films, which have beautiful form, beautiful photography, beautiful visual effects. I'm sure there are Japanese films like that, like there are Hollywood films and Indian films where the form almost overtakes content and that's a choice. It's like art for art's sake. There's nothing wrong. There are some great paintings, great poetry, which are purely for art and that also is not actually just for art because even our aesthetics, we are changing. What we see, what we choose to see, we are also changing, but I personally feel we can use our art to make a tiny difference in those conversations because filmmaking is an expensive medium. It's not like I can write a poetry and it's okay if you don't read it or I can make a painting and it's okay if you don't see it. But for a film, so many people come together, so much money is put in, all that effort, if it can't do one tiny drop of good, then I think it's a bit of a waste. As a young filmmaker, I would say first experience, give the time to experience different things, and when you are truly passionate about saying this is the story I want to tell because your own interest has to last at least 1 or 2 years. For me, it was 6-7 years of work because I had to research and it was a new subject, but even for 1 or 2 years, you must every morning when you wake up, you must feel, yes, this is the story I want to tell. Once you have that passion, you will find your message and you will find the form to tell, and you can come and intern with me if you want. Any questions in Japanese, please do not hesitate. I am saying that again.

I think we are done. I just want to thank everyone and I hope we will continue with these conversations among us because sometimes we end up having conversations with our own self in the head and sometimes with our close friends, but we might surprise each other when sometimes we think we know the answer, so we don't ask each other because we say, oh, I know what she's going to say, I know what he's going to say, but maybe there are surprises. So, I would request you all to start those conversations not knowing where it's going and maybe you will be surprised and that's how it's a rippling

effect. Very small changes happen, and I think that is the best way to change the world – I want to end it actually with a Japanese story I just remembered. I don't know, maybe you know it. You know the hundredth-monkey phenomena? Is there a book called the hundredth-monkey? I don't know what it's in Japanese, but I think you know about it. Yeah? I don't know if I'm saying it right, so please correct me if I'm wrong, but I read it many years ago as a translation.

There were these islands near Japan or maybe in Japan where the researchers were observing monkeys, and they saw that these monkeys were eating sweet potatoes, and they were peeling the skin because the skin has a lot of mud. Sweet potato grows inside the earth, so they would peel it, throw it out, peel it, throw it out, and then they would eat the inside, and then there was a she-monkey. I'm not being a feminist. It was in the book. There was a she-monkey. She took that sweet potato, went to the stream, washed it in the water, and ate it with the skin. The little child, her child, saw it and ate it. He or she went to the stream, washed it, and ate it like that. The research just found out that in a far off island, many miles away, these monkeys definitely didn't travel there through the seas, but far away, they saw that the monkeys were doing exactly that and they called it the hundredth-monkey phenomena. That all of us can be that hundredth monkey who one day will go and wash that sweet potato in the stream and will slowly start that movement without us even knowing, so there is a collective consciousness that shifts. Today, of course, we are far more interconnected through the internet, through media. We are not so secluded as those monkeys, but just as right wing politics is increasing, just as violence is increasing, hatred is increasing, there is also room for good things to increase, for sisterhood, for men and women to be more friends, for more equality, for love, for same sex, freedom. All of this is possible if all of us feel "I'm not very important in this world, but I'm not so insignificant either." It is that balance if we can create and become the hundredth monkey, then maybe each of us can make a difference. Thank you.

Mamiya Kensaku

Thank you very much. Lastly, I would like to ask Professor Awaya to say a few words.

Toshiya Awaya

Before I thank Ms. Das first, I would like to thank Mamiya-sensei, Hagita-sensei, they are my colleagues and members of FINDAS, and Suzuki-san, the research associate of FINDAS and Fuji-san, she graduated from this university and she is very, very active and famous as a translator for Hindi films. All of them made the screening of “Manto” and this wonderful session possible. I would like to thank them all.

Lastly, of course, I would like to thank Ms. Nandita Das for a powerful, inspiring and provocative talk. I think almost every piece of her comments, for instance, on motherhood and the balancing between nationalism and criticism towards our own cultures are quite relevant to the contemporary Japanese society. Thank you for the sharp and valuable insight. I would like to thank all the participants for being here today.

東京外国語大学南アジア研究リサーチペーパーシリーズは、人間文化研究機構ネットワーク型基幹研究プロジェクト南アジア地域研究推進事業の出版物です。

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東京外国語大学南アジア研究リサーチペーパー９：特別号

Nandita Das Special Lecture
“Personal Life is Political: Women’s Issues in Contemporary India”

Edited by Toshie AWAYA and Maya SUZUKI

2020 年 3 月 16 日発行　非売品
発行　東京外国語大学拠点　南アジア研究センター
〒183-8534　東京都府中市朝日町 3-11-1
東京外国語大学 研究講義棟 700 号室 南アジア研究センター
TEL: 042-330-5222
http://www.tufs.ac.jp/ts/society/findas/

印刷　株式会社　美巧社　東京支社
〒170-0003 東京都豊島区駒込 1-35-4　グローリア駒込 2F
TEL: 03-6912-2255

ISSN　2432-437X