

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



QUILL'S WILL

Special Seminar Edition
January 2016

Protean Frames : International Conference on
Contemporary Discourses of Gender



An Initiative of MA English with Communication Studies



Dr. Sushma V Murthy



Prof. Gaana J

The Department of English takes immense pride in hosting **“Protean Frames: International Conference on Discourses of Gender”** on **12 & 13 January 2016** in collaboration with **Liverpool Hope University, U.K.** We have the special privilege of inviting **Dr. Gauri Viswanathan, Professor in Humanities, Columbia University** to our deliberations as Keynote Speaker. As a department in the present continuous, constantly innovating its curriculum to meet emerging discourses in English Studies, we were one of the first to introduce a full-fledged curriculum in Gender Studies in 2009. This conference is an outcome of the deliberations on gender with our Honours in English and M.A in English with Communication Studies students. We hope this is one of the many promising beginnings for meaningful deliberations on discourses of gender.

Since the Nirbhaya incident in India, questions of gender have gained volume and momentum. There is an urgent need to address questions of masculinity in gender discourses which have predominantly remained unilateral in their approach to women’s questions. Gender Studies has to address a plethora of gender identities and performativities in the light of human rights.

On behalf of the Department of English, Christ University, we welcome you to this eclectic conference that brings together resources, texts and contexts from across the globe in a Protean effort to trans/form existing frames of being, imagining, identity and action.

Dr. Sushma V. Murthy
Prof. Ganna. J
(Conveners)



Dr. Abhaya N B

Gender equations surround us very often in a very subtle manner. We spend our lives negotiating the impulses that shape the gender equations we live by and also understanding our responses to the constructed gender equations. In this process of negotiation Gender becomes an academic discourse, social activism, political ideology and occupies other forces that monitor culture. Therefore it is important for an academic space to think, debate on gender dispassionately. Because academic space does not offer opportunities for academicians to deliberate upon issues sitting in ivory towers; but these spaces also prompt the next generation to shape their

thinking, thus determining the future course of any culture.

In this context **“Protean Frames: International Conference on Discourses of Gender”** on **12 & 13 January 2016** in collaboration with **Liverpool Hope University, U.K.** organized by the Dept of English, Christ University is an occasion to revisit approaches to gender in different contexts. The academicians, thinkers, activists, students participating in the conference will offer their interpretations, perspectives that would shape our individual and collective conscience about gender.

Dr. Abhaya N B
Head of the Department of English

Whatever the “real” differences between the sexes may be, we are not likely to know them until the sexes are treated differently, that is alike.

— Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*

Website Launch

Ragesree Roy



Lighting of the inaugural lamp



Ms. Anita Nair speaking at the website launch

The occasion was graced by the presence of the renowned author Ms. Anita Nair, Chief Guest of the event. The auspicious lighting of the lamps was swiftly followed by Ms Nair's intriguing speech. She expounded on the mobility of the allegiance between gender and writing. She directed the audience to contemplate on how the domain of language has incorporated the intricate vicissitudes of gender throughout the ages. Elucidating on the fluidity of gender, her speech motivated the audience to delve beyond the ritualized veracity of the male/female binary. Reading from *Cut Like Wound* and *Idris*, she delineated the idiosyncrasies that a masculine/feminine entity performs.

Prof. John Joseph Kennedy, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences, addressed the aca-

demic community, urging them to indulge in dynamic gender discussions. He emphasized upon the relevance of the conference that resonates with contemporary implications of the various domains of gender.

Mr. Anand Varadaraj, Secretary, *Suchitra Film Society*, Bengaluru was the Guest of Honour. His speech accentuated the need for greater involvement of women in the realm of the visual world, chiefly the world of Cinema. The ubiquitous dominance of the male gaze and how it determines a woman's role (both in the reel and real lives) was discussed.

A significant performance on *Reading Ahalya* by an English Studies performance troupe 'Tell Tale' (Manognya and Team) opened up multiple dimensions of gender identity and orchestrated a beautiful finale for the launch.

Student Presentation

Shivangi Bhardwaj and Yohaán P Sharma

On 6th January 2016, a presentation was made by the students of 1st MA English on 'Gender and its representation in superhero comic books'. Beginning with the tracing of female characters in the comics, the presentation focused on hyper-sexualised depiction of female characters and the hyper-masculine representation of male characters.

The depiction of same sex relationships in comics broadened the horizons of the gender understanding of the comic book universe. Questions from the audience looked into the importance of comics as a genre. The discussion that followed established how these comics are moulding the minds of young readers and hence, it is extremely important to look into this aspect of popular culture.

Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original.

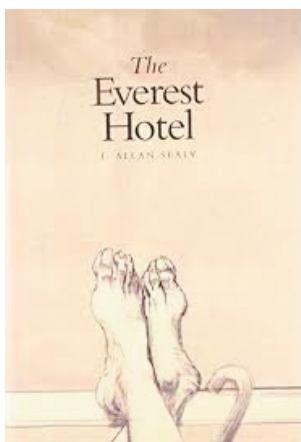
— Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*

Gender Roles: By Choice or Force?

Tarun Surya

Book : The Everest Hotel (I.A. Sealy)

Publisher : IndiaInk



Set in the picturesque yet decaying hill town of Drummondganj, Sealy details the story of its inhabitants, who come across as discards of sorts from everyday society. The novel follows the experiences of a young nun named Ritu who

comes to the town as a new recruit to join a group of nuns taking care of a decrepit hotel along with its equally decrepit owner, the lecherous nonagenarian writer Immanuel Jed.

Despite the well-documented cliché of repressed emotions among the community of those who have dedicated themselves to God, the novel treats Ritu's story with a surprising lightness that affords it a sense of legitimacy.

As a direct contrast to the respect that Brij affords Ritu, Jed stands as a bastion of chauvinism and patriarchy as he constantly makes life difficult for Ritu while also making passes at her at every given opportunity, expecting a positive response as if it was his right to do so. Inge's unrepressed sexuality, while heightening the xenophobia she faces from the locals, also forms a perfect foil to Ritu's restrained emotions, drawing both Brij and Ritu into an uneasy ménage-a-trois unconsciously. A clash of religions, though almost non-existent in the novel, does surface towards the end when Ritu decides to adopt an orphaned child but is not allowed to do so due to her status as a single woman.

Though the focus of the novel remains on Ritu for the most part, the other inhabitants of the town too contribute to the narrative in their own way, playing and disrupting gender roles regularly.

How Gender Can Be As Flexible As We Make It

Meghana Ravichandran

Movie : No Bikini

Director : Claudia Morgado Escanilla

Growing up is never easy. There are hundreds of thousands of rules, each with their sub clauses, especially when it comes to acting out our ascribed gender roles. But what can one say to an androgynous person, who treads the unknown line between the masculine and feminine, playing the gender they find most comfortable at the moment? And especially what would you say to such a person who is just a 7 year old child? Robin, is such a child, who states that she had a 'sex change' during a 6 week swim camp in which she assumed the persona of a he, as it was easier to be so. A scene showing Robin

jumping into the pool from a high diving platform is an allusion to being comfortable and at ease at the way things are at the moment.

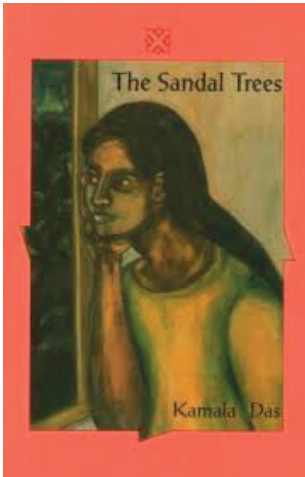
The utter disgust of her mother at her daughter being half naked in front of so many people is contrasted to Robin's convictive statement that she had 'never, not once, felt naked'.

The short film depicts the flexibility of the self, if only we'd allow ourselves to break the bindings that hold us down from expressing who we truly want to be as opposed to who we truly are. The usage of the swimming pool itself as a space of release is very metaphoric to the fluidity of gender.

I do not wish them [women] to have power over men; but over themselves.
— Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

A Movement away from Euphemisms

Rony George



S*andal trees* - a novelette written by Kamala Das, explores the same sex love between Sheela and Kalyanikkutty. Considering the sociopolitical context in which it was published, *Sandal trees* is undoubtedly a bold attempt. Queer

relationships within a heterosexual mainstream form the pivotal aspect of *Sandal trees*. "Sexual union is a political act," says George Orwell in his novel *1984*. This politics of the bodies is almost always oppressive for the women. Das's writing questions this oppression, giving her characters the agency to speak

and to act according to their own choices. Uninhibited original accounts of unveiled experiences and innermost passion demarcates Das's works from her contemporaries. In *Sandal trees*, explicit narrations of lesbian love raise questions about the independence and space of a woman in a patriarchal society. Though Das portrays lesbian relationships in a very bold manner, she does not allow her protagonist to break the rules and shake off the shackles. Though Sheela feels attracted towards Kalyanikkutty, she is not courageous enough to express it. Despite being a doctor by profession and hence financially independent, she is not empowered or enabled enough to decide for herself. Das's works paved the way for many women writers to write their life stories as well as fictional pieces along the same lines. She ushered in a fresh and bold lease of life into the genre of feminist writing.

Lakshmis, Koyals and Payals

Allwin K Joy

The rooster crowed. Grandpa switched on his radio to listen to the same old male voice regurgitating what transpired last day. I don't know what he gets from it, but definitely that coarse voice does wake me up for the morning business. It's time for the long walk into wilderness just to empty the bowels. It's funny that we just built a toilet outside our home after repeated requests made by the lovely actress Vidya Balan through that same old rickety radio. Ma says I'm not old enough to use the family *com-mode*. I got thrashed when I asked how come the rule doesn't apply to my little brother. She says, "Lakshmi! Shut up! He's going to be the breadwinner one day! Yeah right. All he does is churning up the bread that I win each day, breaking my back lifting bricks, in his perpetually busy belly and releasing all of it into that

ceramic luxury that I am denied every day. Aah! A thorn! I hate this walk... Oh no! The sun is going to be up in no time and so will be those perverts. Oh! Vidyaji. You should really rephrase that advertisement! You said "No toilet No bride!" Now try something like "No toilet No girl child! " Oh no no no... I take that back! That would sound like a yes to female foeticide, wouldn't it? I would rather suffer these thorns than see the already dwindling number of ribboned ponytails go extinct altogether! Sigh... The rooster crowed again, declaring another busy day for the Lakshmis, Sukanyas, Titlis, Koyals and Payals. Another day under the embrace of the hot sun, breathing sand and cement!

Disguise: Stories We Tell

Prashant Parvataneni

We are the stories we tell. Storytellers and poets of the lore in India have been singing and telling tales of endless transformations. Some stories are seen, some heard, and some remain hidden. If we listen closely, we find all around us, stories of bodies and beings refusing to be chained to a fixed form, an immutable identity... stories of disguises driven by desires. Drawn from the texts of A K Ramanujan, Devdutt Pattanaik, Rabindranath Tagore and Pradip Bhattacharya, we bring to you mythological tales of Ahalya, Chitrangada, Mohini and folk tales of a serpent lover and gossiping lamp flames. These stories ultimately underscore the idea that like gender, sex, and identities, stories too are never singular. The real question is not which story is true, but which one is better.

In Giving We Receive

Kevin Frank Fernandes

Adjunct Faculty, Dept of Professional Studies

In Giving We Receive
 Every evening,
 After slaving away all day
 At an unforgiving stove,
 They
 Gathered together,
 Their knotted cotton headkerchieves
 And dresses
 Smelling of sweat, and spices, and home, and comfort,
 A sisterhood,
 A circular sisterhood;
 With their baskets of scraps,
 From old dresses, shirts, tablecloths,
 Patches of memory,
 Stitched
 Together
 With a thread of woe:
 A drunk, wife-beating husband,
 A crabby mother-in-law,
 Unpaid rent,
 The uncertainty of having to take up another job,
 Feed another's child,
 Keep another's home.
 They sing a song of sighs.
 The sighs spin a string.
 The string holds the memory patches together.
 On
 Winter mornings,
 Their families wake up,
 Wrapped up in
 Sighs and memories,
 Never knowing what kept them warm.
 It is in giving that we receive.



Picture Courtesy- Fatema Diwan

A role assigned-

To care to hold

To love to protect

The role-play of marriage? Or a mirage of their own?

- Ragesree Roy



Picture Courtesy- Oindrilla Das

*The glow of the spirit
And the might of the heart
Radiates from the power within
The power that makes every
woman a goddess*

-Ragesree Roy

*Patriarchy, reformed or unreformed, is patriarchy still : its worst abuses purged or
foresworn, it might actually be more stable and secure than before.*

— Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*

Keynote Speaker



Gauri Viswanathan, *Class of 1933 Professor in the Humanities at Columbia University.*

She is the author of *Masks of Conquest : Literary Study and British Rule in India* and *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* (which won the Harry Levin Prize awarded by the American Comparative Literature Association). She is the editor of *Power, Politics, and Culture: Interviews with Edward W. Said*. She has received Guggenheim, NEH, and Mellon fellowships, and was a fellow at various international research institutes. She is a network partner in the international research project "Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism, and the Arts," funded by the Leverhulme Trust in the U.K.



Picture Courtesy- Oindrilla Das

*I am the storm and the fire,
The power and the instinct
The eye of the vision
The hands of the might
In folds of ten-
To love and to burn
To heal and to scar
I am the mother
I am the destroyer
I am **Shakti**...*

I in all women and all women in me

-Ragesree Roy

Speakers from Liverpool Hope University



PROF. CYNTHIA HAMILTON



DR. LINDA MCLOUGHLIN



DR. JACQUI MILLER



DR. MANEL HERAT

MA English with Communication Studies

Co - curricular Activities

Chautauqua

Research and Journal Forum

Coffee Hour

Talking Cinema

Athena

Acropolis

Quill's Will is the MA in English with Communication Studies magazine - A platform for the students of Christ University to showcase their creative expressions and critical opinions.

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