

## **The Narrated Life**



**Taran Nishat Khan: Socialist Wives – Stories of Women and Movements from 1950's Bombay**  
**[Gender Studies, Social History/History/Oral History]**  
**(2004)**

*Taran Nishat Khan studied Mass Communications at the Jamia Millia Islamia University and also has a Masters in Development Studies from the School of African and Oriental Studies. She has directed and co-produced a number of audiovisuals and street plays. | taran.khan@gmail.com*

In 1950, three young men belonging to the Communist Party moved together into a flat in Bombay. Their baggage included privileged family backgrounds, a liberal arts education, literary dreams of making it big and membership of the Progressive Writers Movement. The men Ali Sardar Jafri, S.M. Mehdi and Kaifi Azmi later became prominent participants in the Urdu literary renaissance as well as in the social and cultural movements in post-Partition Bombay. Taran Nishat Khan's documentary-narrative, however, does not trace the well-known movements of these three men, but focuses on the less famous wives who came with them. Sultana, Zehra and Shaukat became friends and keen participants in the various initiatives (IPTA, for example) their husbands' political and literary affiliations opened to them. Located primarily in the domestic arena, Taran's narrative explores the women's shared time in their flat: an experiment in community living and a time of bonding and exploration but also the discovery of a city together. The mundane but potent barriers located in the realm of the domestic is constantly reformulated by questioning the role of the left-associated movements prevalent in those years in Bombay as well as the transformations in lived experiences the women underwent: their forays into theatre, writing and broadcasting.

Thus, the journeys made by these three women, from the protected and privileged childhood of well-born Muslim women to the urban paradigm of Bombay, the new city, with a heady mixture of idealism, poetry and alcohol, is the focus of this project. Their involvement in movements like the Indian Peoples Theatre Association coloured their experience of urban space. Living together, the three women engaged with this new domain. Their reinvention of self has to constantly balance between their received values, morality, aesthetics and their present contexts. Taran Nishat Khan, the granddaughter of one of these women, retraces the paths of the three women to question the gender roles of socialist wives and to see if and how left-associated movements were open to feminist interventions. In interviews, the women speak of their cramped living space and contingent network of sociality, their adventure of commuting using public transport and their dilemmas of being outsiders in a big city.



**Rinchin: Tracing the History of Girls' Education in a Small Rural Town through the Eyes of its First Woman Teacher**  
**[Gender Studies, Social History, Oral history/Autobiography]**  
**(2006)**

*Rinchin currently lives in Bhopal and works in and around the state of Madhya Pradesh with local people's groups and organisations. She completed her graduation in Philosophy and then her MA in Social Work. Since then, she has been working primarily with women on issues of health, violence, gender and sexuality through community-based informal adult learning and training programmes. | rinchin@gmail.com*

Rinchin's project involves a biographic narrative of Soni James or Soni Bua, the ninety-year old retired principal of the mission school in Haat Pipalliya town. This school was one of the first to be especially dedicated to girls and Dalit children. Rinchin attempts to record local history through the narrative of Mrs. James. Soni James' life as a second generation Bhil Christian, brought up by foreign missionaries, who later became a schoolteacher is a startling story of a matriarch of a large family of over 52 people. Soni James has lived in the town for 70 years and her life reflects the changes across a century. In her reminiscences, she connects to many contemporary issues like religious conversions, attacks on Christian organisations, caste and gender issues. Every aspect of Soni Bua's life juxtaposes itself against these contemporary events and her biography touches on many aspects of the town's and the nation's history. Her story is the story of a second generation Christian convert, whose tribal parents converted during the famine of the 18th century. Soni Bua's own narrative abounds with stories of her growing up in missionary traditions, her training to be a teacher, the country's Independence, her comments on the present systems of education. They touch on many layers of memories, recollections and ideas. Most importantly, her narrative underlines a basic tenet: the past is not always easy to get out, it is almost always coloured by the present, and the present always overwhelms.



## Anuja Ghosalkar: Papa Ajoba : My Grandfather, the Film Make Up Artist

[Cinema History, Oral History/Autobiography]  
(2007)

*Anuja Ghosalkar is a media professional and has worked as a film festival coordinator and co-curator for India's first International Women's Film Festival, Mumbai. She has also worked on a number of documentaries and ad films on themes of human rights and HIV affected people.*

*anu.ghosalkar@gmail.com*



Papa Ajoba is Ram Madhavrao Tipnis who worked as a make-up artist in the Hindi film industry from 1941. He is also the maternal grandfather of Anuja (she called him Papa Ajoba, father-grandfather) who went to live with him when she was nine and who grew up hearing wonderful stories about his life. Anuja realised much later that those stories were also history, the history of an age, of a film industry and felt a great desire to document Papa Ajoba's life, not only for the sake of history but also for herself. I must document these anecdotes, for the sake of posterity, for my sake because I must know in depth where I come from and where I might go. I owe this to the man who brought me up to love cinema, theatre and most importantly who told me stories, not knowing that stories often become history, she says. Today, she lectures on films but she is also depressed by seeing the callousness with which film memorabilia has been destroyed. She is filled with despair because that way we can never trace our rich film heritage if there are no records, no oral histories of people who lived and experienced those times.

Anuja's project is actually grand in scope. She will start with her grandfather's life as a make-up artist from 1941 to 2000 but it will only be a starting point for a much larger project she has in mind to chronicle the life and times of her great grandfather who ran a theatre company called the Maharashtra Natak Mandali and then onto her grandfather's life in theatre and films and at AIR. For the Sarai project, Anuja focusses on the sixties when Papa Ajoba worked with prominent actors like Shashi Kapoor, Asha Parekh, Sadhna and Saira Banu. During his early years, he worked with V. Shantaram at Raj Kamal Studio and later spent time at Flimistan. A large part of Papa Ajoba's life was spent with F.C. Mehra's Eagle Films where he worked until 2000 in their award winning television series *Office Office*. Anuja is interested in documenting Papa Ajoba's interactions with stars, his legendary cricket matches with Dilip Kumar, and his long years at the heart of Bollywood. She also wishes to interview Papa Ajoba's colleagues, the famous stars of yesteryears and make a brief montage of films Papa Ajoba acted in, like the Dhamendra starrer *Aankhen*. She hopes eventually her grandfather's life and work might add to the film lore and history and prove of some value to future researchers. If nothing else, she will be happy that she chronicled the life and times of a man who experienced the transition from theatre to films and finally to television; it's her thank you, Papa Ajoba for his stories.

### **Papa Ajoba's recipe for colours:**

Around 1942-43, when Papa Ajoba joined Raj Kamal, they used to make their own make-up. Described below are the materials and the process by which they created colours and powders.

*(Papa Ajoba speaks)*

**Coloured Foundation:** We used to mix coloured powder that was used for painting houses with petroleum jelly in a doctor's mixing plate with a knife that was flexible. Then we took zinc powder and mixed it with the coloured powder. After making the colour, we would boil it, then strain it with cloth, then fill it in containers; so we had: whites, blues, blacks. These were the lining or the base colours.

Max Factor came to India around 1939 or 1940. Before that there was only one German Company called Leichner. We used to get sticks of colour from them but it was really hard. So we used to take a little from the stick on our hands and then pat on that make-up.

Max Factor was expensive and our lining colours were better. Max Factor had tubes that were numbered. 21 to 31 for the Indian skin - the ladies used numbers 27, 28, 29 and for the gents we used 30, 31.

Right at the start, around 1904, in theatre they used powders and water, and we called it water painting. They used this water paint on their hands and face. Therefore the theatrical white make-up in early theatre and also early cinema. For example, in all of Phalke's films, the faces look almost white. This was also because in early days the lights, both in theatre and cinema, were not so powerful and the bright white faces caught the light better.

At a point in time, grease used to be mixed with coloured powders or paint. But big theatre stars like Bal Gandharva used loni i.e. homemade butter to mix the colours instead of grease.

**Coloured Powders:** The coloured powders were made of French chalk which is white in colour. You had to grind the French chalk and make sure that there were no solid particles and the powder had to be soft. Then to that powder, we would add whatever colour we wanted.

*Anuja Ghosalkar*

**Naresh Fernandes: Jazz Goes to Bollywood**  
**[Music History, Social History, Cinema History]**  
**(2004)**

*Naresh Fernandes is a journalist and the editor of Time Out Mumbai. He is co-editor of the Penguin guide Bombay Meri Jaan: Writings on Mumbai and has done research and written numerous articles on Indian and world music. naresh.fernandes@gmail.com*

Naresh Fernandes takes a look at the lives and work of some Goan musicians, their styles and repertoires and tries to see their work in the larger context of the Indian music industry. Naresh extensively interviews a large number of working musicians and records their daily successes and anxieties regarding their work.

**My Name is also Anthony Gonsalves**

In addition to the music directors, much of Bollywood's sparkle was the result of the efforts of men whose names appeared in small type as assistant music directors - or arrangers, as they'd be known in swing bands. Most Bollywood music composers had been trained in traditional Indian musical styles and didn't know how to orchestrate the tunes they created for the western instruments that formed the bulk of their ensembles. That was the work of the assistant directors, many of whom came from the state of Goa, which was a Portuguese colony until 1961 and had a long history of Western classical and marching band music. Many Bollywood arrangers - Sebastian D Souza, Chic Chocolate and Anthony Gonsalves, among them - learnt Western music in church choirs in Goa, before heading to make their living in Bombay. But before they reached the Bollywood studios, many of them served time in the jazz and dance orchestras that were popular in the hotels and nightclubs of British India. But it wasn't only the arrangers that made Bollywood swing: many of the players in the film orchestras - especially in the wind and string sessions - also had extensive jazz band experience; it was their natural instinct to hit blue notes.

*Naresh Fernandes*



**Iram Ghufuran and Taha Mehmood: Call Centre Workers in Delhi  
[Technology/Internet, Oral History, Performance, Labour]  
(2004)**

*Iram Ghufuran is a film-maker and media practitioner working at the Sarai Media Lab. She is a member of the editorial collective of Sarai.txt. Her interests include new media and popular culture. Taha Mehmood worked as a researcher with the Information & Society Project at the Sarai Programme and is currently pursuing an M Sc in City Design and Social Science at London School of Economics. His areas of interest include history of surveillance technologies and the politics of information, film and popular culture, and work practices of new economy labour.*

*mehmood.taha@gmail.com | iram.ghufuran@gmail.com*

Call centres or Business Process Outsourcing Units are the new points of our urban landscapes. Iram and Taha's project looks at the distinctive work and leisure practices of these call centres through the lived experiences of the executives working there. Fahim, Gaurav, Shagufta and Ken are archetypal call centre workers – young, articulate, wanting to go places. Their workplaces are sites of contradictions, of escape and fantasy, of imagination and anxiety, of aspirations and failures in metropolitan India. Calling through disembodied voices, connecting to people worldwide, these young people are the remote agents where performance is a key concern and the ability to dispose off a call in minimum time decides the next salary perk. Working at odd hours, they negotiate the city at early mornings and at night. The ambivalent spaces of the sleeping city, its excitement and dangers, its neon-lit streets and shuttered shops blur into schizophrenic images that often replicate the nature and space of their work.

Taha and Iram look at the lives of these people and also try to investigate the hierarchy of the workspace in a call centre, a workspace that is monitored constantly by the watchful gaze of the supervisor. However, even under this watchfulness, the very body of the executive becomes superfluous in the fact that the caller is always faceless. This superfluity of the body subjects it to rituals of dressing, of maintaining a certain image. The executive, though a faceless voice, always leaves the stamp of his/her personality in appropriating the office space through photographs left on the desk, pin-up memorabilia or even empty Coke cans stuck to a computer. The research tries to see why call centres are employing more and more middle-aged people, where the male/female ratio is often favourable to the latter. The gender play in a close-knit hectic work schedule is often played out through headphones. This study in the lives and works of people in the BPO industry brings these nocturnal sojourners of the city to our attention and gives them human faces. They share their experiences as they weave their way through the labyrinth of the workplace and the city.

**Faraaz Mehmood: Changing Banking Practices in Udaipur  
[Industry, Labour, Economy, Oral History]  
(2005)**

*Faraaz Mehmood is a banking professional who lives and works in the city of Udaipur.  
faraazmehmood@yahoo.com*

The economic reforms started in 1999 led to many changes in the structure and functioning of the banks including both the public and the private sector banks. The old notion of cumulative profits garnered from around the branches countrywide had been brutally wiped out. A profit-making branch in Colaba, Mumbai would not lend any shoulder to an obscure rural outfit in Sagwara. Each branch had to sustain on its own and would have to present a monthly *raison d'être*. Faraaz Mehmood's branch has a staff of 12 officers on rolls and 36 outsourced employees in home loans, sales, back office, clearing, personal loans and pantry. The enormous numbers of outsourced employees contribute to the thickening of the bottom line. They are paid between Rs. 1,800 to Rs. 5,000 for a 12-hour schedule. The amount of labour they generate is routed towards the personal records of the branch head and operations head who respectively draw salaries between Rs. 60,000 and Rs. 35,000. At the end of the year, the two of them also celebrate the fruits of the collective labour of the impoverished staff by taking home yearly bonus in packets containing Rs. two lakhs and one lakh each.

An industry survey of expenditure of banks on salaries stated that the state banks pay its employees 18.52% of their earnings, the old private sector banks pay 13.78% whereas the new private sector banks like Faraaz's pay a measly 5.87%, while the foreign banks pay 11.14% as salaries to their employees. The statistics are interpreting the facts adequately. The recent trend in private sector banking has been that of a facilitator of consumption rather than of production. The flow of finance, according to a recent survey, has been towards fuelling the urban housing sector economy rather than agriculture. In 2002-03, Rs.12,308 crores was provided as credit to the housing sector in comparison to the Rs. 10,848 crores towards agriculture. The last decade has shown that the poor can borrow, save and repay loans unlike the middle class housing loans defaulters.

Much soiled cash has been counted since the dawn of liberalisation as to completely efface the basic banking norms and morality. This statement is the outcome of Faraaz's experiences as a practitioner and a rather bewildered observer of banking practices. Banking is widely believed to be a profession with respect and faith where we deposit money for gradual and assured gains. Faraaz's very first day at the cash counter swiftly wiped away these long-held notions and embraced the new ethical code dinned in his head by the branch head. While dealing

with the ever extending queue taking cash from them and handing out payments, he had to keep up the tempo of cross-selling. While handing wads of currency notes, he had to keep up the prattle about the benefits one might collect by applying for home loans, moonlight insurance and the various fixed deposit schemes floated by his concern.

---

**Kuldeep Kaur: The Labour Room as a Space for Unheard Voices  
[Gender Studies and Sexuality, Oral History. Social History]  
(2005)**

*Kuldeep, who works as a freelance journalist and in a clinic as a labour-room nurse, lives in Chandigarh.*

*k.kuldeep97@rediffmail.com*

Kuldeep undertakes this study in an effort to understand the various attitudes and psychological pressures on new mothers. The labour room becomes a space for interactions and communication with diverse kinds of women from urban business families to the rich farming families of Punjab and Haryana, as well as the agricultural migrant labour from UP and Bihar. Kaur explores the constant pressures, physical and mental, acting on a woman when she is admitted in the labour room. She feels that, due to shortage of time and the magnitude of the event, words uttered in and around the labour room are beyond the everyday clichéd expressions of daily life. The words uttered are the real micro picture of society's attitude towards women and children.

Kaur's study helps us to understand that labour rooms are also spaces where women come to know about their bodies, their reproductive health, contraception and often their conversations show up the poor general awareness of these issues. On the never talked about issues of sex, Kaur finds most of her respondents are exploited and this exploitation is so invisible that even the women themselves are not aware of it. These conversations that form a substantial body of the project, the women's fears and anxieties help Kaur understand the many substantial pressures under which women live. Talking to the patients hearing them speak then shapes the researcher's efforts to articulate the unheard voices that she comes across in labour rooms. This articulation is with the expectation that civil society will open its ears to these voices going through intense pain from the labour rooms. Kaur also feels that the social, religious, cultural and familial pressures that the patient's face are perhaps more powerful and more intense than bodily exigencies.

One of the most moving sections in Kaur's research is when she lets her subjects articulate their fears of bearing a daughter and being ostracised by family and friends. The powerlessness of the women over their own bodies and their own lives, often bring starkly home to us how

little things have changed as far as these fundamental issues are concerned. One after another, women express their fears about issues many take for granted. The value of Kaur's study probably rests on this: we begin to see and realise the enormity of gender questions that we take for granted.



**Ranu Ghosh: The Story of a Laid-off Worker's Resistance to Eviction in Kolkata**  
**[Labour, Displacement, Environment, Oral History, Conflict]**  
**(2007)**

*Ranu Ghosh is an independent film-maker based in Kolkata. She has directed a number of documentaries on women and development that have been screened both in India and abroad. Her documentary film *Curtain Call* was awarded the BFJ award. | [ghosh.ranu@gmail.com](mailto:ghosh.ranu@gmail.com)*

In West Bengal, nearly five hundred factories or more are now closed or have been declared sick. Over 6,00,000 workers have lost their jobs or have been displaced or evicted. In recent times, the government has replaced production-based industries with service sectors catering to big capital and foreign investments. In this revival, agricultural land is acquired to set up large-scale industries while within the city operational factories are sold off to provide high value real estate development. In this changing industrial mode, the effects on the city's landscape and its socio-economic transformation raises important questions about the issue of development. The huge numbers of unemployed and displaced workers face an uncertain future, destabilise the labour force and adversely affect the city's social structure. Ranu Ghosh has been following the transformation of a productive industrial unit, Jay Engineering Works into the South City Project described as eastern India's largest mixed use real estate development. Jay Engineering, also called Usha Factory, started manufacturing electrical consumer goods in the 1950s with a labour force of migrants from Bihar, U.P. and East Bengal refugees who flooded into the city after the Partition. In 2003, the factory closed down and was made defunct; the land was handed over to the real estate consortium of five major real estate magnates. The factory was demolished, the large natural water bodies were illegally filled up and the construction of the South City Project began in 2004. This building project comprises of three 35-storey and one 28-storey residential towers, a shopping mall, a school, a multiplex, club etc. The management of Jay Engineering forced the workers into retirement with little or no compensation, except for one man. Shambhu Prasad Singh has refused the meagre handouts and has taken his case to court. Against all odds, and withstanding the sustained pressure of the builders, he continues to live in his original quarters, surrounded and dwarfed by the huge construction machinery on all sides.

Since 2004, Ranu Ghosh has been documenting in video and still photographs the stages of development at the construction site of the South City project. She met Shambhu and began following his everyday life, his improvised strategies of survival in the face of circumstances and his zeal to fight for his rights. Soon, Shambhu changed from a character in Ranu's film to a collaborator. Unable to enter the construction site to record Shambhu in his beleaguered quarters, Ranu tutored him to use a handycam, often over the phone. In this way, Shambhu has managed to record excellent footage of his living within the site pending the final disposal of his case. Ranu's work is thus to document the strategies of survival of the displaced labourers and track the continuing debates on various legal issues related to the mega project called South City.



### **Sugata Nandi: The Politics of Personal Reminiscence in Calcutta, 1947–67**

**[Social History, Oral History, Migration/ Displacement]  
(2007)**

*Sugata Nandi teaches history at Krishnanagar Government College, West Bengal. He has worked as a research assistant with the University Grants Commission.  
meetnandi@hotmail.com*

The urban history of Calcutta between 1947 and 1967 has attracted very little attention from historians and social scientists. These two decades after the independence are particularly significant in the growth and decline of the city. Developments like overpopulation, stagnation of industrial growth, unemployment, food shortage, industrial and general strikes, brutal police action and a steady radicalisation of political consciousness that found expression in the Naxal Movement and the formation of the first non-Congress ministry in 1967 are extremely significant in the city's history. The influx of East Bengal refugees into the city, the strike by tram company employees union in 1953, the general strikes of 1957-58, the food movement of 1959 and the communal riot of 1964 are some of the events that are assessed through the personal recollections of people that Sugata interviews.

This project endeavours to look at these two decades drawing on the memory of those who grew up in Calcutta of the 1950s and 60s as a way of looking back at landmark incidents that stand out either as important points of change or as moments of celebration of the global importance of Calcutta. For these people, these two decades constitute a time when Calcutta of the present was born. They look back at this as a time of momentous changes when the city shed its colonial past and developed a new political and cultural identity for itself. The project is a gathering of interviews for constructing a collage of remembered experi-

ences. Sugata gives great importance to the personal reminisces because they engage with the past of the city and yet still await being enshrined in officially and academically produced histories. The aim of this project is not to gather data on Calcutta; rather memories are seen as imprecise ways of recounting incidents without a fixed form. The individual experiences will form the texts that will then be examined to discover the politics that inform and influence the performance of remembering and reconstructing landmarks of urban events. In this way, Sugata will try to connect personal recollections, often rejected by historians as counterfactual and imprecise at best, with the realm of their underlying politics that shapes the formation of personal knowledge about a phase of history that had unfolded in front of them and that had in turn been influenced by them.



**Hansa Thapliyal and Vipin: Sahibabad Sounds**  
**[Oral History/Autobiography, Creative Writing]**  
**(2002)**

*Hansa Thapliyal studied direction at the film institute in Pune. She works with storytelling in writing and in films. Vipin Bhati studied sound engineering at the film institute in Pune. He has worked in documentary films, mainstream fiction and new media projects. The Sahibabad project is an ongoing one. | hansatin@yahoo.co.in | vipinbhati@yahoo.com*

This project involved the collecting of, on tape, stories about the growing up of a bunch of boys and girls in a suburb of Delhi like Sahibabad that is geographically situated in UP even as jobs and aspirations link it with Delhi. The young people belong to different castes: Gujjars, Jaats, Brahmins; some are service class, others belong to rural elite families. On the one side is the city, on the other the villages from where some of their parents migrated. Their stories reflect the experience of growing up in this context, conscious of the village/city difference, not completely belonging to either. The stories they tell about themselves are comic (no other mode is entertained by them), the strokes are broad, characters are often personas, and everything under the sun are lampooned and made into group entertainment.

Hansa and Vipin have collected conversations and stories on some 45 hours of tape. These are stories of cricket matches played under the hot Sahibabad sun or competing with teams from Delhi; stories about schools, of hated teachers and smart subversive kids, the endless question of English language and its use; as well as stories about relatives from villages who formed a foil to the creation of middle-classness that was happening in the suburb. All these contexts stay within their consciousness despite all the advances into the city that shape them and

their way of looking at the world. There are also stories of relationships of fathers and sons, of violence and disappointment and conversations that can be heard as voices. Hansa constantly wonders about boundaries as she went about collecting these stories; it was one thing to tell a story: to a friend, in idiomatic, evocative ways and another to tell and transmit them to a public at large, with the formal nature and one sidedness of recordings. During the project, Hansa was constantly jousting with the business of not treating these young people completely as subjects and pinning them down as flesh and blood humans. Soon she got the feeling that some robust form of fiction was required to represent all the stories that she had heard. Her final presentation was soundscape but supplemented with a good amount of writing that charted this shift into fiction.

---

**Pankaj Rishi Kumar: Punches – Ponytails – Ringtones: Women Boxers in India**  
**[Gender Studies and Sexuality, Oral History/Autobiography]**  
**(2005)**

*Pankaj Rishi Kumar is a documentary filmmaker. A graduate from FTII with a specialisation in Film Editing, he started making his own films in 1997. His films - Kumar Talkies (1998), Pather Chujaeri (2001), Mat (2003), 3 Men and a Bulb (2005) - have been screened at festivals all over the world. His current film on women's boxing is a work in progress. kumartalkies@yahoo.com*



The body is a landscape infinite with suggestion, curiosity and incarnate possibilities. It is also a metaphor pulsating with signifiers about birth, death and all other things between. The ways in which we care for it, nourish it, adorn it and display it, represent important statements about our culture. The space it occupies, the curves it defines, the manner of its regulation, the methods of its restraint, its fertility and sexuality: these features make the body a potent instrument for understanding a culture. How we produce and consume the body confirms something we already suspect about culture: that control needs to be exteriorised. Representation is as important as action. Implicit control is barely control at all: it needs concrete expression. There are few more effective and enduringly legitimate means of expression of this control than sport. Boxing has traditionally been a male sport. It is also a sport that involves a display of physical strength, violence and masculinity traits that one often associates with men rather than women. When women start playing this sport, they are not only mastering the techniques of the

game but also crossing the gender boundary and transgressing into a male sport. The implications are varied and complex.

Why do women take up boxing? What drives women to a sport that challenges the socially sanctioned feminine boundaries? These are the questions that trigger Pankaj's curiosity. Invitations vary from empowerment, self-defence, hobby, 'I had nothing better to do' and sometimes a violent father forcing a daughter to learn the sport so that she will not be as helpless as her battered mother. A serious look into the archives of women boxing reveals that very little has been written on this sport in India. There are two generic excuses for the lapse. First, women's boxing is a young sport in India. (The first National Championship was held in Chennai in 2001). Secondly, there has been no blatant commercialisation (like cricket) of the sport and hence there is very sparse media coverage. This is in spite of the fact that the World Amateur Women Boxing Champion, MC Marykom, is from India. In the absence of any intelligent discourse on women boxing in the country, there is a danger of using the discourse emerging from the West as the theoretical framework for studies in this area. The lived reality, sociological and cultural, for a woman boxer in India is different from the West where the sport has already gained a degree of recognition both by the sponsors and the sports community. In his study, Pankaj enumerates the various facets of women's boxing as he discovers them in the past year while traversing through the lives of few women boxers whose sport Pankaj has been documenting.



### **John Patrick Ojwando: An Exploration of the Experiences of African Students in India**

**[Autobiography, Social History]**

**(2006)**

*John Patrick Ojwando, a Kenyan national, received his MS in Communications from Bangalore University and is completing his doctoral dissertation from the Department of Studies in Communication and Journalism, University of Mysore. | ojpatrick@yahoo.com*

In India and elsewhere, the foreign student's life hinges on uncertainties and overwhelming expectations. This life presents fascinating and bewildering prospects. Surviving separation from loved ones, battling culture shock, and keeping afloat the larger goals of building a career are some of the facets of their lives. The South Asian subcontinent has been host to a number of students in pursuit of their academic careers who have come from Africa, Far East and Middle East and now from Europe. Most of them seem taken in by the country's rich cultural traditions, diverse customs and tradition of hospitality. Things have gone

well in the past but there is a growing disenchantment among the foreign students now. Though not entirely out in the open, a sizeable number of these students are increasingly frustrated with living in a society they believe are insensitive to their concerns and the result is there for all to see. Many students from Africa no longer care to come to India, others feel an entrenched distrust between them and their hosts who remain strangers throughout their stay in the country. John Patrick studies this phenomenon and asks if this is a result of a growing insensitivity or absence of suitable support systems. He asks if this is an outpouring of a malaise that has been prevalent in society or a deep-seated bias towards foreigners. The study draws upon the experiences of African students in India, documenting their lifestyles and take a look at their achievements and aspirations. John is a doctoral student in Media Communications and has lived in India for many years. He is in a unique position to look into these questions and come up with responses that will certainly open up many aspects of Indian society's relationship with those who come to live here.



**Priya Babu: The Aravani (Transgender) Community in Tamilnadu  
[Gender Studies and Sexuality, Performance]  
(2007)**

*Priya Babu is the founder member of Sudar Foundation, a non profit organization working for the rights of the Aravanis in Tamil Nadu. She has also worked as a journalist and researcher. | priyababu\_sudar@yahoo.co.in*

Aravanis have existed in Tamilnadu for centuries. Though born biologically a male, an Aravani has close psychological affinity with a girl/woman. Through social ostracism, she is forced to leave her families and join the Aravani community. This community has a rich cultural tradition with a wide range of rituals and practices. Much is known about it in oral history but very little of Aravani lives have been documented systematically.

The Aravanis take their name from Aravanan, son of Arjun, who is considered a husband by them and a ritual marriage takes place with the god every Chitra Purnima at the Koothandavar temple at Koovagam village in Tamil Nadu. These temples, dedicated to Aravanan, are to be found throughout the state, pointing to an acceptance of the community by mainstream society in ancient times. This link has slowly eroded over time and the Aravanis are marginalised to a great extent now. Tracing these close cultural linkages can yield rich dividends, an important aspect of this project. For this end, Priya Babu has already explored seven out of the forty nine temples for Aravanan, mostly in north Tamil Nadu, with support from the National Folklore Support Centre and now

researches those in the southern part of the state. Through this project, she hopes to document the culture, customs, rituals and beliefs of the Aravanis and their links to mainstream society. The marginalised Aravani community has diverse cultural practices, long unbroken traditions and unique social roles during festivals and fairs in the state. Priya Babu explores all that as well as the representations of the community in the ancient scriptures, inscriptions and paintings in Tamil Nadu's temples and historical sites. Through interviews of the Aravani community members, Priya Babu also explores their involvement in mainstream society and whether they feel integrated with it or not. The rich subculture of the Aravanis adds to the complexity of the cultural diversity of the state and that needs to be documented sooner rather than later.



**Rajesh Kumar Komath: An Ethnography of Teyyam Performance**  
**[Theatre/Performance, Oral History/Autobiography, Social History.**  
**Theory]**  
**(2006)**

*Rajesh Kumar Komath is an artist and researcher. Rajesh completed his Post Graduation in Development Economics at the Dr. John Matthai Centre, University of Calicut and travelled a long way to capital of Kerala - Thiruvananthapuram - to do his MPhil and PhD at the Centre for Development Studies, affiliated to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His research is on 'Social Development of Teyyam Performing Community and change.'*

*rajeshkumar@cds.ac.in*

Rajesh Kumar is a member of the Teyyam performing community. Teyyam is an ancient dance of North Malabar performed by men of hereditary low caste communities to propitiate the gods and Kavus (sacred groves) of the region. The Teyyam performer enjoyed social respect during the performance even as members of higher castes paid obeisance to the performer. As soon as the performance was over the performer reverted back to his untouchability.

Teyyam is, in a sense, the manifestation of the depressed consciousness of a whole community subjugated and marginalised. Two major social groups who perform the Teyyam are the Malayan and the Vannan castes. Their performance of Teyyam has represented a way of breaking hegemonic discourse of cultural aesthetics.

As an insider, Rajesh Kumar combines individual experience with social, cultural and economic aspects of his community to analyse how long term social transformation reflects on the lives of Teyyam performers who have been affected by a number of social and economic changes. The dynamics of community organisation of land control,

Communist ideology, migration of Christian plantation workers and commercialisation of agriculture has resulted in sweeping changes in the traditional societies of Malabar. The purpose of this study is to understand the predicament of marginal communities in the larger stratified society and the aesthetic practices of cultural production in the context of Teyyam.

The main objective of this study is to find how a Teyyam performance can be seen as a subaltern cultural production and how the aesthetics of this performance has impacted on the socio-political discourse of North Malabar region. The study also traces the local histories of shrines where performances take place, practices of different Teyyams and their myths, legends and songs. The study, involving extensive field-work of performative dimensions, becomes an action oriented ethnographic research. Rajesh Kumar's experience as a Teyyam artist, that gives so much energy to his research, has been fraught with dilemmas and anxieties. Initially, he had been doubtful about exposing his caste identity to his peers at college and undermining his social acceptability but as he became more and more involved in the performance of Teyyam he began to be drawn to its rich artistic and ritualistic heritage. This study is, in a way, his own tribute to an art form that has not only shaped his own but an entire community's consciousness.



**Syed Khalid Jamal: Work Culture in Fast Food Chains  
(Labour, Oral History/Autobiography)  
(2005)**

*Syed Khalid Jamal did his Masters in Mass Communication  
from Jamia Millia Islamia University, Delhi.  
zzkhalid@gmail.com*

Syed Khalid Jamal's project was a study of the work culture in Fast Food chains like Barista, McDonald's and Domino's where he interviews a number of the employees. From the beginning Khalid decided to adopt participatory observation as his research methodology because he found that the employees feel nervous and apprehensive of talking about their jobs. Sometimes they treated the researcher as a spy from a competitor outlet. Their hectic schedule also prevented them from having a candid conversation. Khalid then decided to become a part of them. He took a job as a crewmember in Pizza Hut, Noida. As a part of the recruitment process, he underwent a written test that was followed by an interview. He was to be on probation for six months. Syed worked at this job for eleven days and then took a job in Barista. His research is based on his findings and observations as he worked with other employees. The four departments that an employee has to pass through are the kitchen, service, cash and delivery. There are no fixed time or duration

for each department and the shift manager decides how long each employee will remain and where. Syed's interactions with the workers brought out many interesting facets of the industry. The mixed lot of workers, ranging from high school students to young postgraduates, demonstrate various motivations for their work. Some work for extra money while others want a career in the industry. There are part time and full time workers who earn salaries below their expectations and are dissatisfied with what they do. Yet they don't leave because they are unable to find any other suitable employment. Despite all this, the average turnover ratio for employees in individual fast food chains is 40% to 50%.

---



---



---

### **Syed Bismillah Geelani: The Kashmiri Encounter in Delhi: Politics of Fear**

**[Law: Human Rights, Oral History/Autobiography, Conflict, Migration/ Displacement] .**

**(2005)**

*Syed Bismillah Geelani is a Kashmiri student studying in Delhi University. He has been in Delhi since 1996. It was in December 2001 when his brother was arrested and framed in the Parliament attack case, and he suddenly found his identity changed from Kashmiri student to a brother of a terrorist. Bismillah writes stories and also political features in Urdu and English.*

*s\_bismillah@yahoo.com*

On December 2001, Syed Bismillah Geelani was arrested by the Special Cell of the Delhi Police on suspicion of being involved in the Parliament attack case. Syed Bismillah's brother, Syed Ahmed Rehman Geelani was arrested earlier as one of the main accused in the case. The next two years was unmitigated trauma and mental anxiety for the Geelani family. When SAR Geelani was given the death penalty, they lost all hope of getting justice but the judgement was overturned in the Supreme Court and SAR Geelani was acquitted without any charges. Shadowed by his experiences as a brother of a terrorist, Syed Bismillah decided to do an in-depth study of the Kashmiri encounter, especially when he went through media reports in the first few days after his brother's arrest. Every respectable newspaper forgot professional ethics and published all kinds of scurrilous and damaging accusations and allegations about SAR Geelani and his guilt. The electronic media was even more sensational. A documentary called *December 13* aired by Zee TV networks claimed it as truth and conducted a virtual media trial of Geelani.

In the months and years that followed SAR Geelani's incarceration and trial, his brother constantly encountered an atmosphere of fear.

Everywhere he went, he was a Kashmiri and a natural suspect who plotted against the state. After the release of his brother, Syed Bismillah began thinking about the trauma his family went through and the root causes of this syndrome of fear that had in many ways shaped his family's life in Delhi. A Sarai fellowship enabled him to undertake this study to see how the Kashmiri encounter in Delhi worked and how the politics of fear shaped the lives of Kashmiris living in the city. He began talking to a large number of Kashmiris living in Delhi and tried to understand whether there was a similarity of pattern in the trauma he had faced and what they encountered in their everyday lives.

While interviewing both Kashmiri Hindus and Kashmiri Muslims, it was apparent to Syed Bismillah that the two communities lived in constant fear, though of a different kind. Both had left the valley and lived the migrant's life in Delhi but their similarities ended there. The Kashmiri Hindus lived in fear of the terrorist. This was a fear they shared with a majority of people living in Delhi. This fear also led to the ghettoising of different communities where Kashmiri Hindus lived only with each other and felt a fragile kind of safety. Similarly did the Kashmiri Muslims. But the real fear of Kashmiri Muslims living in Delhi is not a part of the public discourse, and that included the fear of being picked up by police any time of night or day, fear of false encounters, fear of not getting a house on rent, and the fear for those they have left behind in Kashmir. The experience that Syed Bismillah had of waiting outside the Tihar Jail for his weekly meetings with his brother gave him an insight into this fear that consumed the world of hundreds of Kashmiris with relatives inside the jail. But this shared sense of insecurity did not bring him any closer to them; rather this fear stood as a wall. There is not a single space in the city where Kashmiri Muslims can meet socially in the city even though every single person Syed Bismillah interviews expresses a desire for such a space.

