

ANNUAL REPORT OF MAJLIS 2010-11

Financial Profile

In the reporting period of 2010-11 the main donors of Majlis were Ford Foundation for the Cultural Centre and Jamshedji Tata Trust for the Legal centre. Both these are part of longer grants covering three years each. There had also been some balance from the HIVOS previous grant in the account of Queer Nazariya (the LGBT film festival, an independent project for which Majlis has been a partner) that was utilised in this period. Some additional fund has been generated by investing earlier grant money from HIVOS over the years. A part of that money has been used to cover the deficit in the Legal Centre.

Majlis has also received small one time grants from Global Fund for Women (to work on Gender and Public Space) and Action Aid (for documentation and publication). Two national agencies – Public Service Broadcast Trust has released the balance amount on account of cinema city short films for Doordarshan and National Commission for Women has contributed a small grant towards holding a national consultancy on the Govt. proposal to introduce Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) as a ground for divorce.

Majlis has not purchased or sold any major asset or property in this financial year.

Please see the enclosed audited statement of accounts

Centre for Rights Discourse

Though litigation in the area of matrimonial rights and domestic violence remains the mainstay of the centre in this reporting period the activities have substantially expanded in the sphere of public violence, campaign for law reforms and training programme. The main expansion has taken place in the sphere of Government institutions and judiciary. These alliances have not only created an extra-ordinary outreach for our field experiences and legal strategies that evolved out of the regular practice but also assisted a great deal in the litigation work of Majlis.

Litigation Unit

While litigation continues to be an important arena of intervention, the introduction of the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) has necessitated a structural change in the litigation unit. Since 2007 as the primary litigation under DVA came under the magistrate's court we have started working in that area. To facilitate this in this reporting period we have evolved a new structure for Litigation Unit and divided it into two components – the Family Law Unit and the Criminal Law Unit. Since our work in the Family Court is well established, this unit is fairly large. It is headed by a senior lawyer, Ms. Dolly Mendonca, who conducts trials and files appeals in High Court. Two mid level lawyers and three junior lawyers work in this unit. Cases that need to be litigated in Magistrates Courts and the Sessions Court which include cases under the Domestic Violence Act, under Muslim women's Act and criminal cases of cruelty against women are dealt with by the Criminal Law Unit. This unit is headed by Ms. Nausheen Yousuf and there are three junior lawyers and one support staff under her. More recently, this unit has also been following up cases of rape and sexual assault, and support the victim during litigation as watching advocates. This is an attempt to somehow fill up the lacunae between the State as the prosecutor, the citizens as the accused and the woman as the victim within the Criminal Law system.

The training unit, headed by senior lawyer Ms. Pooja Kute, works on conducting trainings for the judiciary, for social workers and counselors and for coordinating client meetings. Pooja is also part of the sexual harassment committee with various organizations and the Maharashtra State women's Commission.

Pre-Litigation Consultancy

The pre-litigation counseling work involves providing a basic exposure to legal rights, devising and fine tuning legal strategies as per the needs and strengths of a particular client, demystifying the process of litigation and court procedures, pre-litigation and post-litigation mediations and drawing up settlements terms. Not every woman who approaches us lands up in the court. Some are content to know their rights and with this knowledge they are able to negotiate for their rights better and change the power balance within their relationships.

We currently offer legal advice on a regular basis to 10 community based organisations. Majlis lawyers visit the communities periodically. On the appointed day the women of the community gather at the local office and are given legal advice to individual cases. The community workers too are advised on relevant pre-litigation strategies. Negotiation and settlements with the husbands and in-laws are attempted at this level. Only when these efforts fail and it becomes imperative to approach the formal court structure is the woman asked to visit the Majlis office to initiate the legal proceedings.

Trial Court Litigation

Category	Litigant
Divorce Act (Christians) – DA (17)	
Divorce	11
Mutual Consent Divorce	2
Alimony, Maintenance, Compensation	1
Nullity	1
Restitution	1
Hindu Marriage Act (Hindus) HMA (61)	
Divorce	29
Mutual Consent Divorce	19
Nullity	2
Alimony, Streedhan, Maintenance, Compensation, Protection, Injunction, Belongings and Restitution of Conjugal Rights	11
Hindu Adoption & Maintenance Act – Maintenance	1
HMGA - Custody, Injunction, Protection	1
Muslims (8)	
Muslim Marriage Act – Divorce	4
Muslim Women’s Act – Fair and Reasonable Settlement	4
Secular Laws	
125 Cr PC – Maintenance	70
Guardians and Wards Act – Custody	3
Divorce – Special Marriage Act	2
Mutual Consent Divorce - Special Marriage Act	1
Execution Proceedings / Enhancements	54
Misc. Applications	1
Restoration	1
SRA, FCA – Injunctions	13
Appeal – Against not getting residence order	1
Domestic Violence	42
Total	275

As can be ascertained from the above table, women approach the courts for multiple reliefs and contrary to popular perceptions, divorce is not the main relief that women seek through the litigation. The primary concern for women is economic support, shelter and custody of children. Hence alimony, maintenance, injunctions, right to reside in the matrimonial home, protection from domestic violence and custody battles dominate the realm of our litigation. The manner in which the husbands flout the court orders of maintenance is another major concern for women. Women often are forced to enter into a fresh round of litigation and file execution proceedings by way of ER and RD applications to obtain the meager maintenance amounts awarded by the courts. So securing financial support is a long and arduous task.

Profile of a Few Cases

We have selected three unusual cases to provide a sampling of the wide range of issues that come to us in the course of litigation.

Champa

Champa is our youngest client, a bubbly four year old, who loves to recite nursery rhymes and shows off knowledge of English alphabets. She also likes the attention that an all women team of lawyers give her every time she visits our office. We have been following up her case for the past four months. Champa is lucky she has a very alert and caring mother and a very supportive aunt who are determined to get her 'justice' in a court of law.

Champa was in the KG section of a government aided English medium school where her admission was secured after paying around Rs.10,000 donation. Her parents are illiterate migrants from Bihar. But her mother's sister has studied upto XII Std and is employed in an industrial unit. Champa was raped by the watchman in her school. Her mother who was waiting outside the school gate noticed her tear stained face and crumpled uniform and when she enquired, the child replied that she was beaten by her class teacher and the ayah had pinched her. When they reached home, she complained of pain around her thighs. When the mother undressed her she noticed that the whole area had turned reddish and the child was in pain. When the mother probed further Champa replied that the watchman had inserted a worm inside her (keeda dala).

The mother rushed with the child to the local police station and asked the police to register a complaint and send the child for a medical test. Instead, the police informed the school principal who upon arriving on the scene, shouted at the mother and threatened that if she files a complaint, the child would be dismissed from school and she will ensure that the child would not get admission in any other school in the vicinity. The child and the mother were kept at the police station for over five hours without recording the FIR. But the mother was given a small chit which she presumed had the NC no. But the police officer had merely noted his name and his cell phone no. She was asked to come with the child the next day to the school and that the police officer would be present and inspect the scene of the crime.

The next day while the mother and the aunt were made to wait near the gate, the child was taken upstairs to the principal's office and was again shouted at. The child was terrified and could not speak at all. The woman police officer concluded that there was no rape and that the mother had made up the story. The third day, the mother took the child to a private doctor who noticed that the child had been sexually assaulted and referred her to the public hospital. The doctors at the public hospital examined the child and immediately alerted the local police and subsequently a case was registered that day, three days after the crime had occurred and vital evidence was lost. The child had been bathed and the clothes had been washed.

Thereafter, the details of the case were published in the newspapers and the accused was identified and the accused, the teacher and the ayah were arrested. We came on the scene when we read the news report in the press as the school happens to be in the vicinity of our office. We approached the police station and got the details of their residence and contacted them. Since then we have been following up the case. It took awhile to gain the confidence of the family and convince them that we do not have any vested interest in helping them. We started following the case in court and with the police. We helped the mother and aunt with all court proceedings and

coordinated with the hospital and the Investigating Officer. After a few days, the teacher and the ayah were released on bail but the accused is still in custody.

As Champa belongs to the scheduled an officer of the ACP level is made in charge of the case. Champa also received Rs.25,000 as preliminary compensation under the Prevention of Atrocities Act. The ACP has also secured the admission of the child in a new school in the vicinity. We have sent the child for counseling to a rape crises intervention centre. The charge sheet was filed and now the case has been remanded for trial in the Sessions Court. The forensic report has come negative. We will soon be filing our appearances as watching advocates. We have followed some cases of sexual assault in the Sessions Court in the past, but with this case we are planning to start an active victim support programme for cases of sexual assault.

Venkamma

Venkamma is around 35 years, hails from a village in Tamilnadu and has three children. The eldest is a daughter, around 17 years, then a son around 15 years and the youngest, a daughter around 12 years. Her husband's family has a wholesale business in grain distribution in North Mumbai, employs more than 150 workers and owns six storage places. The business was started by her father-in-law but the expansion was done by her two younger brothers-in-law. Her case is that she was married when she was barely 15 but her husband and she never had any physical relationships as he suffers from some mental deficiency. She thinks he is also impotent as he has never made any sexual advances towards her. As a young bride she was distraught when she realised her husband's physical and mental condition and wanted to return to her parent's home in the village. But the in-laws prevented her from doing this as it would cause a social stigma for them. So they negotiated with her for the brother-in-law to play the role of the husband. He was a charming young man and she readily agreed. They lived as husband and wife. After a few months, when his marriage was being arranged, Venkamma asked her mother-in-law what would her future be. The mother in law assured her that the relationship would continue and she would be looked after by the family.

She had three children while her sister in law had two. The birth certificate of her children was obtained in the name of her husband, but the children were raised as the children of the brother-in-law. So Venkamma did not face any serious problems.

As the business expanded and the youngest brother-in-law joined the business, he did not want Venkamma and her children to have any share of the expanded business. So they separated Venkamma and her husband, bought them a separate house and the brother in law stopped his relationship with Venkamma. His own wife was happy at this development as she didn't have to share her husband with Venkamma. The mother-in-law was not very happy but she did not intervene. At present her husband goes to the shop to work and receives a meagre wage of Rs.300 per day from the younger brothers. Venkamma feels that a great injustice has been meted out to her and she wants to claim a share from the joint family property for her children and secure their future as her husband is incapable of defending his rights.

Though a great injustice has been caused to Venkamma there is no legal remedy. If she goes to court, the two brothers may even stop paying the meager Rs.300 wage to her husband. Without this amount she will become a destitute and will not have the strength to carry on with the litigation. Venkamma feels that the family is afraid of social pressure. But she also realises that her claim is very weak and is afraid to push the issue further. We have had a few lengthy consultations with her and suggested some choices such as sending a legal notice to the brother-in-law and expose the family through the press but she is confused and needs time to decide as her situation is indeed delicate.

Umesh and Albela

We are recording this case here to highlight the reality of people's life and the gulf between their life and the realm of official 'law' as defined by statutes and codes. Cases such as these challenge our sense of right and wrong, morality and immorality, and justice and injustice, and everyone - the family, friends, well wishers, state officials and lawyers become accomplices in the crime, in one way or the other.

At the centre of a range of controversies is a young couple - Umesh 24 and Albela, 22 who are parents of a two year old daughter Megha. Umesh lives with his parents while Albela lives with

hers. Both families hail from a village in Gulberga district of Karnataka, but are presently living in a slum of Malwani in Malad, in the Western suburbs of Mumbai.

Late one night we received a call from a local NGO in Malwani, where Umesh works and were posed with a question, 'how does one obtain an urgent back-dated marriage certificate?'. We had no idea, but based on our experiences in court, we suggested an alternative. Since they were Hindus, they could obtain a traditional close up photograph of the couple with the bride wearing a mangal sutra and another where the couple is garlanding each other as Hindu marriages can also be proved by photographs.

The NGO requested a lawyer from Majlis to be presented in the Malwani police station the next morning in case there was a need for some legal interventions. On reaching the police station Pallavi, the lawyer, met the Senior Inspector and a large crowd that had gathered at the entrance including parents and relatives of both Umesh and Albela, the NGO workers and some friends of the couple. Albela's parents were demanding that she should be taken into police custody to prevent her from eloping with Umesh and Umesh's parents were insisting that he should be sent back to their village in Karnataka.

Gradually, the story was unfolded outside the police station. His parents claimed that Umesh had run away from his village a day before his marriage which was arranged by his parents to a girl from the village. The bride's parents had given Umesh's parents Eight Lakhs as dowry, which included a house, land, gold ornaments and other valuables. Umesh was forced to sign a document that he consents to this wedding, despite his opposition to the same. But soon thereafter, he ran away to Mumbai. Thereafter, on a complaint filed by the bride's parents, his parents and relatives were taken into police custody. They were released only after an undertaking was given by them that they would produce Umesh before them and hence their demand of sending him back to the village.

Albela on the other hand, was married at the age of eight to a mentally challenged man of around 50 years. Albela's mother had an understanding with him that she (the mother) would inherit his land on his demise. Albela was not expected to cohabit with him. So she lived with her mother in Mumbai and did odd jobs in the neighbouring middle class colony. The mother was well aware of her relationship with Umesh. When Albela was pregnant with Umesh's child, the mother took her to the village so that the husband could pay for the delivery and also give his name to the child. So the birth certificate has the name of Albela's husband as the father of the child. While Albela could contract sexual relationships with other men, she was not free to marry as then Albela's mother would lose the right to inherit the property of Albela's husband. Hence to prevent Albela's marriage with Umesh, her mother was demanding that Albela should be taken into police custody and Umesh should be sent back to the village to marry the girl from the village.

It took a few hours for the police to unravel the mystery. Finally our lawyer prevailed upon the police officer to file an NC complaint against the parents and to record that Albela and Umesh are married. The police official perused the marriage photographs and was satisfied. There was also a child to lend credibility to their 'marriage'. So the Inspector took the couple to the back entrance of the premises and let them escape in a rickshaw. After some time, police came out and asked the crowd to disperse and informed them that the couple has already left and hence nothing more could be done in the matter. The crowd was annoyed but they too realized that there is nothing further the police could do.

Whose wife, whose child, whose name ... the victim and accused continuously interchanging ... dowry, child marriage, second wife, land deals ... all thrown in for good measure, and this drama takes place right in the midst of urban metropolis of Mumbai. The police are not raking their brains as to which law to apply and against whom. They are happy to diffuse the situation and let the people live their life. It proves that people live by a sort of mutually agreed socio-cultural norm till the time a contradiction or clash of interests arise for them to approach the formal system of police and judiciary.

Lok Adaalats

Majlis is empanelled and our lawyers are regularly invited to be part of the legal panel for Lok Adaalats in Family Courts. This is a mechanism for dispute resolution of cases which are pending in court for a long period. The Lok Adaalats are constituted every three months. Cases pending in court are referred to Lok Adaalats for arriving at out of court settlements through mediation of an

expert panel. The Lok Adaalats are held under the authority of State Legal Aid Authority and the Family Court Bar Association. These are important mechanisms of dispute settlements and proved beneficial to women as they find it difficult to follow the long term litigation process.

Sexual Harassment at Workplace – Complaints Committees

The issue of sexual harassment in workplace, once considered as a taboo, has received wide public acknowledgement and has made the women employees, in general, feel empowered. Majlis' relentless campaign and presence in many committees is one of the factors behind this development. The vigilant presence in the courts and persistent campaigns through pedagogy, media and social mobilisation by Majlis through almost two decades have brought the organisation to the level of credibility that its appearance in a case automatically generates attention and alertness within the judiciary and other state organs.

We continue to be part of the complaint committees in following government bodies, public sector undertakings and Corporate Companies.

- The Maharashtra State Women's Commission
- Central Railway
- Western Railway
- HSBC Bank
- PVR Cinemas
- ICFAI College

Trainings and Workshops

During the year we evolved several training modules to suit the needs of several stake holders in the realm of providing support to victims of domestic violence, both governmental and non-governmental. Conducting these trainings in order to evolve a more conducive system where women's rights can be secured has become an important aspect of Majlis' work. It was a long drawn process before we could break into the rigid bastion of bureaucracy and convince the higher authorities about the merit of such training workshops for their officials.

Following is a list of some of the key segments for whom specialized trainings were conducted.

Training for Judges:

In October, a residential workshop was held on Adjudication of Domestic Violence for the mid-career judges and magistrates at the Bhopal Academy. It was attended by 35 magistrates, Family Court and District Court judges and a few members of the senior judiciary. Though they were receptive, the judges lacked the knowledge about the 'not popularly practiced' provisions of law which they could invoke to help women in various situations and give reasoned and fair orders in defense of women. We discussed the issue of court ethics and sensitivity towards women who file under the Domestic Violence Act in a magistrate's court and are tried along with petty criminals. The issues regarding the difficulties faced by women in executing orders of the court which causes delay and in turn causes harm to women were highlighted to make the judges aware of the difficulties at the receiving end.

A similar workshop was conducted to yet another batch of junior level civil / district judges at the National judicial Academy at Bhopal in March, 2011. 50 judges participated in the training.

In February 2011 we conducted a two day workshop titled, "**Gendering Justice**" for a batch of 50 newly appointed district judges in Maharashtra at the Judicial Academy at Uttan. The issues marked for the orientation programme were – a theoretical understanding of the construction of gender and patriarchy in society which was conducted by Ms. Trupti Panchal, Faculty of TISS and Trustee of Majlis. The other sessions included the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act, Maintenance to women under Section 125 Cr.PC and issues of rape and sexual violence. Justice H. Suresh has been a guiding force in all our consultations held for the judiciary.

Training for Lawyers: In December 2010, we organised a consultation meeting for 30 of our network lawyers from the districts across Maharashtra to discuss property rights of women at the time of divorce. This was part of the campaign for a law on division of property upon divorce in the wake of the government's proposal to introduce a bill to make irretrievable breakdown of marriage a ground for divorce, without making the necessary provisions for protecting the rights of women to shelter and future security.

Training of Police Officials: In December 2010 two workshops were conducted for a batch of 50 senior police officers at the Police Academy in Bombay as part of our efforts at sensitizing the police on issues of sexual assault.

Trainings of Counselors: These workshops were held for the Maharashtra State Women's Commission to train their family counselors and social workers as well as elected women representatives.

Law Colleges and Academic Institutes: As part of our engagements with International Human Rights Day during the months of December and January, we conducted a series of 15 workshops in various Law Colleges in Mumbai and outskirts using the format of debates around certain controversial issues to engage the young students into the contemporary discourses. The issues that were discussed concerned 'use and misuse of Section 498A', 'Muslim Law – Progressive or Regressive', 'Hindu Men – Monogamous or Polygamous' and 'Bar Dancers – Issue of Livelihood or Public Morality'. Each college selected a theme of its choice and since the topics were contemporary, it generated a great deal of interest.

In September 2010 we conducted a one day training programme at Mumbai University. The training programme was conducted for the WDC - Women's Development Cell of the University of Mumbai. Around 50 professors from universities across Mumbai attended the workshop titled, "Feminist Jurisprudence Contemporary Concerns" There is great need for such programme for university teachers as many young students approach them and it is important that they are equipped with the skills and knowledge about the latest developments in law to guide the students.

As a culmination of our work in the realm of Family Law litigation from a feminist perspective over the past two decades, a book on Family Law (in two volumes) authored by Ms. Flavia Agnes and published by Oxford University Press was released this year. This book has been prescribed as a text book by the Academic Council of Bombay University as well as many other Law Universities in the country.

National Conference and Consultancy

While on one hand the Litigation Unit continues to make legal intervention and assist individual women in their fight for justice in the sphere of matrimony and domestic space, our other programme are conceived to bring attention to non-domestic issues that plague the lives of contemporary women. We consider this part of our activity as an extension of earlier slogan 'Personal is Political' to 'Political too is Personal'. Towards this end we have been working on bringing women who suffer due to identity politics, racial hatred, border dispute on the same platform with the women who have been victims of domestic and intra-community violence. This is being done to place women's experiences and issues of women's rights within the central map of nation-state and development rather than relegate them into a marginal folder.

NEGOTIATING SPACES: Gender Concerns in Conflict Zones

The two day national conference was organised to address issues of women's roles in situations of conflict and public violence not only as victims but also as leading members and peace negotiators of their community. It was primarily addressed by women who have been a part of

the political struggles in areas such as Kashmir, North East India, Gujarat, Orissa, Chhatisgarh, Telengana etc. providing incisive insights into their lives trapped in these conflict zones. The testimonies of the women from these contested zones not only provide evidences of state, military and other political oppressions but also foreground the contribution and suffering of women in the arena of ground politics and public violence.

Initiating the conference, Adv. Flavia Agnes highlighted the roles played by women in conflict zones as citizens, female subjects and community representatives in strife torn societies. These pointers then formed the basis of the proceedings and discussions on the testimonies that followed. Delivering the key note address Justice A.K. Ganguly of the Supreme Court highlighted the complex scheme of the constitutional democracy which must protect dignity of the individual even while ensuring the security of the nation. National security cannot be ensured at the cost of violating the dignity of the individual. He stressed that this is the basic dogma of the Constitutional framework of rights.

Prof. Hargopal, the civil liberty activist from Hyderabad who has been a negotiator between Maoist groups and the state machinery stressed the fact that when the state has failed to ensure the dignity of the poor and the marginalised, the initiatives which work for the rights of the marginalised groups cannot be termed as 'unconstitutional' since they have stepped to secure rights where the state has failed in its obligations. Providing a sub-continental flavour to the conference, Adv. Shyamala Gomez from Sri Lanka, described the situation for women who have been in the periphery of the armed conflict and how the cessation of conflict has brought in little change and in some cases rendered their situation even worse. Ms. Parveena Ahangar, the founder of APDP – Association of the parents of disappeared people, in Kashmir, in her poignant presentation brought forth the new spaces that the conflict of the region has opened up for women within a traditional Muslim society as mothers of missing people. In an emotionally charged speech, she challenged the Indian state that she and others like her will not rest until the state returns to them their missing children. A video clip (excerpt from a film made by Kavita Pai and Hansa Thapliyal) screened before her speech, served to highlight the fact that when life itself has become fragile, the women have learnt to weave in normalcy and a sense of humour into their daily activities even while death stares them in the face. Providing a critical framework for the grief and trauma suffered by generations of Kashmiris who have grown up in the shadow of military and insurgency, Anuradha Bhasein of Kashmir Times and Insha Malik a student-activist (now with TISS) provided incisive analysis of the militarization of the region and alienation of the Kashmiri people from the Indian state.

Ms. Trupti Shah from Baroda, Adv Sophia Khan from Ahmedabad and other grass roots activists from Gujarat highlighted the hostility and suspicion which engulfs Muslim women even after nearly a decade of the Gujarat carnage. They presented a graphic picture of the ruptures caused by the carnage and how the vertical split in the civil society has gone too deep making the Muslim women and children continue to face the brunt of the communal segregation that prevails at the course of day-to-day life.

Ms. Kheshili Chishi, advisor to the Naga Mother's Association, shared her experiences of being in the struggle for over two decades. She highlighted the unique position that women hold within traditional Naga communities as leaders of the communities and peace keepers. The intervener Ms. Anurita Hazarika from Assam and as a representative of the North-East Network, whose family has been a part of the struggle for more than three decades endorsed this view. The conference provided a space for activists of this region to speak to each other and raise specific issues that concern each state and also to build broader inter-state alliances in the region. A video clip of the Manipur women's nude protest against the armed forces, to humiliate them for the rape of Manorama, provided the poignant backdrop for this session.

In a self reflective session, activists Dr. K. Lalita, Hyderabad, Ranjana Pardhi, Pune and Adv.

Flavia Agnes interrogated the framework of the earlier feminist movement. The contrasting concerns within the old and the new Telengana struggle, the issue of sexual violations by armed forces and economic deprivation of tribal women in backward areas of central India and Orissa and the intersection of marginality of caste and gender which expose Dalit women to greater risk of sexual violation were the central concerns of this session.

In the concluding session Adv. Vrinda Grover spoke about the tight rope walk which the rights activists have to tread while negotiating with the state and the courts to bring in reforms and to enforce rights. The task is daunting and at times, self defeating, bordering on despair but it must go on, with a deep sense of commitment and faith in the constitutional framework of rights. Ms. Ruth Manorama narrated her struggle to bring in the concerns of Dalit women within the rights framework, and her struggle to place the concerns of Dalit women in the international arena during the Race Conference in Durban in 1994. The national networks that have been built since then, have been able to lend a voice to the oppression of women from down below.

The two day conference attended by around 100 participants comprising of students, academicians and activists was invigorating and inspiring and helped to reaffirm faith in collective struggles in defense of human rights in extremely adverse conditions. We plan to edit these presentations into a publication for wider circulation of these potent articulations.

Consultancies

National Consultancy on Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage: Majlis along with the National Commission for Women (NCW) organised a National Consultation to discuss the Govt. proposal to introduce Irretrievable Breakdown of Marriage (IBM) as a ground for divorce. 150 women's rights activists and scholars from across the country gathered in Mumbai to discuss the introduction of the Bill. Ms. Zohra Chatterjee, Member Secretary; Judge Shalini Phansalkar Joshi, Joint Director, Maharashtra Judicial Academy; Ms. Kirti Singh, Senior Lawyer, Supreme Court, Delhi; Ms. Sheela Ramanathan, a Bangalore based Human Rights Lawyer and several academicians discussed the issue and reached an unanimous resolution to oppose the introduction of the ground of irretrievable breakdown of marriage and resolved to campaign for a law on division of matrimonial property. A report of the deliberations of this meeting was submitted to NCW and we sent our recommendations to the Rajya Sabha select committee. Thereafter, in November, 2010, we were invited to depose before the Standing Committee of the Parliament in the Rajya Sabha Secretariat on Introduction of Irretrievable breakdown of Marriage.

Majlis is now engaged in collecting the perceptions of various rural based NGOs who provide counseling to women victims of domestic violence in the districts of Maharashtra to build a consensus and gain clarity on the components of a law on division of matrimonial property.

Mahila Dhoran (Women's Policy)

Maharashtra government periodically brings out document of its gender policy for governance. Majlis has been part of these consultations on two earlier occasions, in 1994 when the first policy was formulated and in 2001 when the second policy was formulated. This is the third policy that is being formulated.

The salient recommendations proposed by us are:

- protecting women's right to maintenance
- access rights to fathers where there are allegations of sexual abuse
- Amendment to the Divorce Act
- Protection of women under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act
- Rape and sexual Assault
- Sexual Harassment at Workplace
- Maintenance of elderly women
- General provisions to safeguard women's rights.

Policy Level Interventions

During the year, Majlis has initiated campaigns and has made policy level interventions to strengthen women's rights on the following issues:

i. Surname Issue – Concerns for women undergoing Divorce:

When a woman files for divorce or any other incidental relief in the Courts of Maharashtra the court staff makes it mandatory for her to use her husband's name as her middle name and her husband's surname as her surname in the cause title of the Petition. Even women who have retained their maiden surname after marriage and those who do not follow the custom of using their husband's first name as their second name are forced to adopt this practice. If a Petition is filed using a woman's maiden name, the court staff takes an objection and proceeds with the matter only after the woman incorporates these changes in the cause title of the petition. This arbitrary practice causes immense harassment to women litigants. It is not mandatory by law for a woman to change her name or surname after marriage. Similarly, after a long marriage where a woman's identity is built upon her married surname, to expect her to revert back to her maiden surname once again causes loss of identity and great hardship.

In light of the above, we sent a detailed letter to the Registrar General of the Bombay High Court requesting him to bring the aforesaid matter to the notice of the Guardian Judges of the Family Court so that they can issue the requisite directions to the subordinate courts. The matter was thereafter placed before Mr. Justice A. M. Khanwilkar and Justice R. S. Dalvi and currently being contemplated.

ii. Exemption of Women from payment of Jail Bhatta charges in Execution Proceedings

When a woman files for maintenance under the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act (HAMA) the proceedings are treated as civil suits. Upon non-payment of the maintenance amount awarded to her if she initiates proceedings for execution and subsequently if an order of imprisonment is passed in her favour, she is required to pay for the daily allowance for the civil imprisonment as laid down in the Civil Manual. This defeats the very purpose of the remedy as the woman is already burdened due to non payment of maintenance by her husband. Moreover, no jail bhatta charges are levied upon the wife in execution proceeding under S. 125 of the Code of Criminal Procedure or under any matrimonial statutes. Hence the proceedings laid out for execution under Section 18 are discriminatory and violative of Article 14 of the Constitution.

Majlis has been following up this issue with various state authorities as well as the State Legal Aid Board and the Registrar General of the Bombay High Court. Recently Justice A. M. Khanwilkar and Justice R. S. Dalvi have opined that the said provision under HAMA is discriminatory and defeats the purpose of its enactment. It seems the issues would soon be resolved in favour of the women.

iii. Protection to women in technically defective marriages

After two decades of litigating on behalf of women in Maharashtra, our experience has been, that when a destitute Hindu woman approaches a court for a meagre sum of maintenance under S.125 Cr.PC, the common ploy adopted by the husband (under the guidance of his lawyer) is to deny the validity of the marriage by pleading that he has an earlier valid marriage subsisting and hence the woman is not entitled to maintenance. It is an irony that while it is the man who has flouted the law of monogamy as prescribed by the Hindu Marriage Act, it is the woman, who is called upon to pay the price. She is denied the crucial and basic right to maintenance.

It is common knowledge that despite the codification which brought in monogamy, Hindu marriages have continued to be bigamous. The question that we need to ask is NOT whether they 'ought' to be monogamous, but whether we are bound by a constitutional duty and obligation to protect the basic and fundamental rights of a large number of both rural and urban

women, the citizens of India, who wittingly or unwittingly, are entrapped within technically defective marriages.

Therefore, we have launched a campaign for amendment to S. 125. Our campaign has received an overwhelming response from NGOs, women's rights activists, lawyers, academicians, students and the like. We have sent articles to journals such as Economic and Political Weekly to build a public consensus for legislative reform as well as presented delegation to the minister of Law and Justice. Currently the issue is being debated in detail between the National Commission for Women, Ministry of Law and Justice and Ministry of Women and Child Welfare.

Evaluation

Though overall it has been a year of high energy activities and fair amount of visibility for the legal centre serious financial instability has marred some of its impact. Due to paucity of funding one of its most vibrant projects, Fellowship to Women Lawyers in District Town, had to be stalled this year.

Feminist jurisprudence in practice and also in training methodology is a complex issue and at an average it needs three to five years of rigorous supervision to develop a lawyer fit for the job. The uncertainty of funding severely affects this process. Additionally, though it is claimed that Indian economy is booming, in reality the poor and the women are increasingly being pushed to the margin. Hence the work load on a centre like Majlis increases by the day. Thus the infrastructural and personnel requirement too increase rapidly. The irregularities of funding not only makes the concern people insecure and stops them from pledging long term association with the organization it also affects the continuity in litigation and campaigns.

Centre for Inter-Disciplinary Art Initiatives

In this reporting period the centre primarily worked in the area of Cinema City project and brought all other previous concerns – pedagogy, critical research, production prototype, interface between theory and art works, dissemination, mobilisation and archiving; into the fold of the single project. Collaborations with academic institutions such as KRVI (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture), SNDT women's University, Film and Television Institute of India; support from cultural institutions such as Doordarshan, the national television channel; Max Mueller Bhavan and Open Space in Pune and participation from large number of free lance artists, filmmakers, architects and academics have elevated the project to a stage of high visibility and multi-layered productivity. In the following years we plan to evolve more devices to disseminate the project at various pockets within popular culture, pedagogy and academic and urban development.

List of selected shows and presentations:

- a) May 2010: Telecast of films at Doordarshan. These films are co-produced with PSBT (Public Service Broadcast Trust). Doordarshan being the free national television has the widest outreach in the country.
- b) June 2010: Cinema city films at 3rd International short film and documentary festival of Kerala.
- c) July 2010: Cinema City Exhibition at SNDT University, Mumbai for the launch of the Certificate Course. This exhibition that ran for three days was attended by the collaborators of the project, participants of the course, researchers of cultural study and urban study as well as the general students of the university.
- d) July 2010: Cinema City project presentation at Jadavpur University, Kolkata

- e) July-September 2010: Public screenings of World Cinema on Cities on every Thursday at Edward Theatre, Mumbai as part of the Certificate Course. Each screening was attended by an average crowd of hundred. The mixed audience comprised of the students of the course, the cine enthusiasts of the city and the traditional working class patrons of the theatre.
- f) September 2010: Screening of Cinema City films at Open Frame Film Festival, Delhi, Organised by PSBT (Public Service Broadcast Trust). The Cinema city films were screened as inaugural programme of the annual festival of PSBT.
- g) November 2011: Cinema City project presentation at National Art University of Korea, Seoul. This was part of our attempt to initiate similar projects in other cinema producing Asian cities.
- h) November 2011: Cinema City films at Mindpirates Film Society, Berlin and at Jeevika (livelihood) film festival, India.
- i) January 2011: Cinema City project presentation at Mumbai University. This session was part of the refreshers' course for the teachers of the university. This was an opportunity to for us to incorporate the research, data and the film and art works of the project into the teaching methodology of the university.
- j) January 2011: Exhibition, film shows and panel discussion at FTII, Pune (presented by Open Space and Film & Television Institute of India on occasion of golden jubilee of FTII). The three day long exhibition was attended by the students and the faculty of the institute and also by the general public. We consider this show as an important intervention into the bastion of film teaching.
- k) April 2011: Five Cinema City films shown at the exhibition- Jugaad Urbanism: Resourceful Strategies for Indian Cities, New York. The films were part of their Indian film series.
- l) April 2011: Cinema City was invited to showcase few of the art works for an exhibition in Delhi, called India@100. The show was a futuristic exhibition celebrating 100 years of India and was initiated by professionals from the field of architecture and urban planning.

Besides these NDTV made a special half an hour programme on the Cinema City and international scholars such as Nicole Wolf, Goldsmith University and Bhaskar Sarkar, University of California, Santa Babra presented academic papers on various aspects of Cinema City project at international conferences.

Cinema City: Research Art and Archive Project

Cinema City is a multi-phased inter-disciplinary project that archives the cinema producing city of Mumbai through a circular process of research, collation, production, dissemination and recycling. This is the third year of the project and we had spent it on disseminating the earlier works as well as producing newer research and art works. Though the paucity of funding has forced us to limit the scope of the project to some extent. It seems the multi-disciplinary nature of the project has affected its funding possibility. The existing funding portfolios follow rigid disciplinary binaries – documentary film production, art exhibition, academic research, digital archive and so on. The multiple input and output sources, that are the main strength of the project, seem to have worked against its ability to attract funding. After the initial fund from the Ford Foundation and HIVOS we failed get any other funding from sources such as the Tata Trust, India Foundation for Art, Prince Claus Foundation etc. Only additional funding that we could generate in this reporting period is a short term grant from the Global Fund for Women to document women's access to urban public space. Still the work continued mainly due to the co-operation from a large number of artists based on the good will earned through the relentless works over the last two decades.

We envisage the project to run in its full steam for minimum another two years. In the next year we plan to produce a few more art works based on the ongoing research and work towards a publication as a wrap up of the project. Through the 2012 we plan to showcase the works in exhibitions at public places, in various scales and registers.

Textual Research and Cartography Production

Collaborator: KR VIA (Kamla Raheja Vidyanidhi Institute of Architecture and Environmental Studies)

Though the funding for this programme has come to an end in the previous year we managed to continue to work on this through generous contribution from KR VIA students and faculty and inputs from interns and volunteers. Additionally the participants in the two pedagogical courses (undergraduate and postgraduate) too contributed in this programme through their dissertations and project works. Thus this programme could truly evolve a methodology for participatory documentation and mapping of the contemporary where students and interns develop skills and theoretical understanding through various programme at Majlis and then work briefly on designated neighbourhoods as retainers to the archive.

The works that are accomplished in this reporting period

i. The studio set ups and the surrounding neighbourhoods:

A comprehensive list of the studios that have/had occupied significant spaces in the city with labour infrastructure and ancillary industries has been drawn. This data graphs film industry's relationship with urban development, the changing pattern of labour employment in the film industry, the pattern of space use by the entertainment sector in the city, and also the changing mode of capital investment in the entertainment sector. The documentation had been developed through drawings of the studios, history of productions related to those studios as well as the land deeds. As the This study will be reflected both in the final archive and in the final publication.

ii. The neighbourhood cinema theatres (construction and demolition) by the decade:

This data base is initially prepared by the students of the pedagogical courses by studying their own neighbourhoods and by documenting memoirs of their neighbours and family members. In the second phase the list is upgraded with relevant official documents, municipality and other civic reports and newspaper entries. This chart of rise-decline-rise of neighbourhood theatres since 1920 indicates the development pattern of the city and its various campaigns for gentrification. But most importantly it raises various issues regarding citizens' access to public spaces in relation to the gentrification process of the city and the resultant marginalization of the poor and the migrants. With the maps of construction and demolition of cinema theatres the trend of shrinking spaces of access for ordinary citizens becomes graphically clear.

iii. The spatial and cultural representation of neighbourhoods in cinema:

In this reporting period we have also developed a large data base of the various representations of the 'city' in cinema. This compilation, comprises of film clips, video testimonies, film related announcements and articles, and brings forward the popular perceptions around a neighbourhood – the anxieties over ghettos and poorer areas, the valorisation of certain city cultures, the process of stigmatizations of the 'other' and also the occasional notes of dissent to hegemonic order. This spatial history of city cinema, in a way, carries the story of evolution of the urban settlements and also helps us understand the contemporary threat to its multi-cultural fabric. Through this research and documentation process we have managed to create a resource where various representations of a settlement, such as the erstwhile textile industry area, the bazaar area of old Bombay, the Muslim ghettos of the suburb, the migrant settlements in the distant suburb etc, can be sourced in one place along with other documents and maps. For example, the bazaar area of South Bombay can be seen in various films centred around courtesans and sex workers; it is also seen in certain orientalist narratives; it is portrayed in gangster flicks and smuggling stories around the docks; popular stories around cosmopolitanism and multi-culturalism such as Amar Akbar Antony too are based on this area; it is traditionally known as refuge for

migrants of disparate language, ethnic and religious background; many working class and dalit narratives are also written on this vicinity. The same area is often portrayed as a Muslim ghetto and a kind of base for terrorism. Our study and documentation comprise of all these complimentary and contesting representations along with testimonies of the people of the neighbourhoods.

iv. The relationship between production and the neighbourhoods:

This was an extremely innovative way of documenting the city that the students of the certificate course evolved as part of their field project. They have made a list of all the spaces in the city that are named after some material or production process. For example: Battery street, Paper Street, Chuna Bhatti (Limestone kiln), Bori Bunder (Port of sacks), Chandan Wadi (Sandalwood area – known for its funeral pyre where sandalwood is used) Chor Bazaar (market of thieves) etc. Ten such areas were studied in detail and documented by the origin of the names, how the local productions and enterprises changed in time and how that has changed the social structure of the local population. This data was then juxtaposed with the Hindi films that are made on these areas and how the neighbourhoods are perceived in popular imagination. The students have processed the research into a set of picture postcards comprising images and texts on each area. It is an extremely innovative project and a good example of converting research into public art and popular pedagogy.

The works commenced in the previous year

- i. Dateline:** A comprehensive dateline on City-Cinema-Modernity had been evolved employing multiple methodology of anthropology, geography, history, sociology, economics, town planning and cultural study. It is extensively used in the pedagogy courses on Cinema City that are conducted in this reporting period. It will also be part of the final Cinema City Publication and hopefully will turn out to be a major resource for urban study and cultural study.

The Dateline has also been disseminated and displayed in a playful and entertaining mode through a Bioscope. It is a tribute to the earliest mode of motion picture exhibition as well as an exercise in creative pedagogy. In the bioscope the viewer can actively play with various snippets of history and attempt to create different chronology by constantly rearranging the alignment of the brief texts. The Bioscope has been part of all Cinema City interim exhibitions.

Another by-product of the Dateline is an innovative programme called Calendar series. In this the dateline document is shared with visual artists, filmmakers and students in order to facilitate them to visualise a popular calendar on any given year of the 20th century. This exercise is conceived to create a contemporary and creative pictorial text out of the research on the past. As we progress more and more artists align themselves with the project in various scales and registers and so the repertoire of the calendar is steadily growing. This programme also gives us an opportunity to involve large number of artists and students with the Cinema City project. So far 40 calendars have been produced and exhibited. They are varied in form, style and discipline and so, in a way, also collate the wide and varied practices in contemporary visual arts. Contributions from senior artists such as Nilima Sheikh (also a trustee of Majlis), Arpita Singh, Gulammohammed Sheikh, Sudhir Patwardhan etc. had given the project certain validity and helped mobilising younger people into the exercise.

- ii. Entertainment district:** Pila House (hybridisation of Play house) was marked as the entertainment district by the British Govt in 1857, in an area which was earlier designated as a graveyard. Catering initially to the floating population of the port and the large bazaars, the theatres were surrounded on one side by Kamathipura, the red light area and on the other side by Congress House (called so as it stands opposite the head office of National Congress), the residence of traditional musicians and dancers who migrated to the city after the feudal patronage dried up, including the much romanticized and much

abused courtesans (tawaifs). Along with the bazaars, the ports, the red light area and the Congress House performers – all immigrants to the city of Mumbai, the Pila house theatres were the symbol of urbanization and urbane entertainment at the beginning of the 20th century.

These theatres on Falkland Road, transformed their fares from variety entertainments to Parsi theatre to silent cinema to talkies through the first few decades of the 20th century. Some of these theatres, a cluster of a dozen to be precise, still run at least three shows a day. The tickets are still priced at the rate of rupees twelve and fifteen (as against rupees one hundred and fifty and two hundred and fifty in the multiplexes). Today's audience is the much maligned migrants - the wage workers from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. An important aspect of the architecture of the place is the presence of religious shrines (durgahs and mazars) in the same compound of the theatres. The theatres are also surrounded by various obsolete practices that were once an integral part of the entertainment sector – photo studios with painted background and cut outs of film stars and studios of hand painted banners.

This area that epitomises the urban cultural ethos and a confluence of immigrants' cultures was studied by the volunteers from KRVA and then the study was converted into a set of drawings, maps, graphics, photos and video testimonies. Based on the study Abeer Gupta compiled a video titled Notes on Pila House. The video has been telecasted on Doordarshan, the national television.

- iii. **Labour and space:** Contrary to the popular belief the spaces of cinema productions are neither opulent nor glamorous. In reality they resemble claustrophobic sweat shops and a regime of cheap migrant labours. In this programme we researched and documented tiny production units that lie scattered across the city and the network that connect them together to create the illusion of the dream machine.

This research was then converted into two art works – a video installation on the sweat shops of cinema and a dossier titled Cinema City Lived.

Cinema Settlements

Another important area of work in this reporting period was the two documentary projects on the indigenous cinemas of Manipur and Malegaon. Both the projects have been researched, shot and edited in this period. This programme is envisaged to address the issues of non-hegemonic practices in cinema that are being evolved from the lands away from the metropolises. These cinemas are local, both in terms of language of cinema and production process, self sufficient and far more agile than the industrialized cinema of the main centres. Further, due to the agile characteristics of digital format these cinema conventions are not bound by any geographical borders and instead are in the process of constantly evolving a hybrid form through variety of influences. The marginalization of the land and the settlement, in an interesting way, has manifested in their organic and yet hybrid cinema. The cinema settlements of Manipur and Malegaon are the prototypes of indigenous cultural centres of 21st century. We had sent two documentary units to set up a dialogue with these independent centres of cinema.

Fried Fish, Chicken Soup and a Premier Show

Director: Mamta Murthy

The conflict ridden context of Manipur necessitated a guerilla, adaptive film process.

After a couple of research and recce trips to Manipur, a script was drawn up but it was clear right from the outset that the script would only act as a broad guideline. Extending the archival impulse of the overall Cinema City project, it was decided to document the entire process of making of a

contemporary Manipuri film as primary resource. In order to facilitate an environment of exchanges and dialogue except the director the entire documentary unit was constituted of local technicians.

After much deliberation the under production film '21st century Kunti' was decided on as it epitomised Imphal's digital film scenario in many ways. For one, it was based on a popular play, a traditional form called Shumang Leela or Courtyard plays (many of the erstwhile members of the theatre production were involved with the film too). It was an independent production by first time producers. It featured many of the leading stars and technicians of the Manipuri film industry. Most importantly, the story's trajectory of mythology to theatre to popular cinema was evocative and the story's war genealogy albeit with a female lead protagonist resonated strongly in Manipur's current context.

The documentation process of the filming of *Kunti* opened up some room for communication between the Majlis unit and the Manipuri unit. But the dominant reality where every individual is constantly under threat from multiple sources (often unseen), the communication was very cautious, polite but distant. It was a very slow and vigorous process before we could achieve an equilibrium of functional trust. Additionally, there was very little secondary research into Manipur's film history leave alone on its current fascination with the digital format. It was clear that the film would need stealthier tools of engagement than interviews. We sought anecdotes, photographs, maps, cuttings, you tube videos, film collections tucked away in dusty cupboards...constantly probing on a Brechtian note - in the dark times what do people sing about, film about, surf about?

The documentary

This film toys with the cartographic, investigative and archival possibilities of cinema, not just of it as a product but also in its processes. As an essential characteristic of 'recreations of life', filmmaking necessitates an entry into multiple spaces, lives, rituals and beliefs thereof. Using this as a starting point, the documentary unit traverses through Imphal following the feature film. At one level it functions like a docu tour through the city's traditional and modern houses, markets and airport, shops and offices, streets and courtyards. At another, this anthology of everyday incidents on and off the sets of *Kunti* wherein the unit negotiates through limited resources and abundant censorship with an uncanny calm also becomes a metaphor for Manipuris' crafting of normalcy in the face of endless violence and surveillance.

The epic tale of the film *Kunti* – of a mother caught between warring brothers is played out epically in every Manipuri household whose only insulation from violence and extortion is to ensure it has a son each in the police force and the separatist underground forces. The familial intimacy of the filmmaking process, the minimal hierarchy of Manipuri social interaction, the inclusive geometry of the courtyard (where the entire film unit gathers) is on the same map as protest splattered public spaces and the aloof, arrogant cavalcade of Indian army convoys and their legacy - the wannabe army of Manipuri police.

Besides engaging with the filming process of the unit, both physically and critically, our documentary deploys other devices to locate Kunti's mythological account within Manipur's contemporary chequered existence. One such is a trajectory of Manipuri films since its inception over a century ago through film excerpts. Apart from cinema, the unit had also dug up other archives – personal and public, looking for action. It finds that just as epics need multiple tongues to live on, cinema needs different mediums to stay relevant, a city needs many languages to find its speech, a people need diverse signage to be on the map.

Film Industry of Malegaon

Every civilization has its popular, pedestrian comedy which falls into the category of popular entertainment and yet documents the contemporary.

Malegaon, a textile industry town with large Muslim population, has a distinction of producing indigenous cinema for last 35 years. Many local film-makers, actors, script-writers (often all rolled

into one), are power-loom workers by the day and film-makers in their hours of leisure. The Malegaon films distributed mainly through VCD sale is distinct in its production process and narrative style. The textile mills workers double up as filmmakers and actors. This multiple identities of workers and artists seem natural and seamless in the context of Malegaon. While working on Cinema City project we decided to get engaged with the Malegaon practice as something which can be called indigenous cinema as well as urban working class culture in the era of digitality.

After spending substantial amount of time researching in Malegaon and evolving a date line of its city and cinema we realized that Malegaon cinema, like any other, has many conventions. While some practices stem from the specifics of the area some others are actually off shoot of other dominant film cultures of Hollywood and Bollywood. Among the various conventions of Malegaon cinema that exist simultaneously there is an actor, Asif Albela, who is a comic character-actor. He plays a set of stock characters that resembles more the folk theatre convention than any filmmaking practice. Yet his relationship with digital narrative is easy and innovative. Further, the genre of comedy, by convention, is deeply related to the everyday of a society. Its appeal stems from its inherent agility to draw resources from the mundane and the immediate. Comedy is also regarded as a source of relief from the daily grind of life. But what is unique in Malegaon cinema is the use of comedy in the process of negotiating dominant, mainstream narratives and occasionally even subverting them into local narratives.

Over a span of time, Asif has created a host of stock characters. One such stock character that is immensely popular in this region is that of *Janiya*- a confused, well-meaning, meddlesome man who resembles the classical village fool to some extent. Along with films, Asif is one of the very few people within Malegaon, who also does stage shows- as a mimic and comedian. His shows are extremely popular, and his stature is that of a big star in and around Malegaon town. Interestingly, Asif also takes on the role of women (one of his stock characters being that of *Jethani* – elder sister-in-law). It is important to mention that no woman from Malegaon is accepted as actress in local films. Women's participation in films is looked down upon and thus all Malegaon film heroines are imported from neighbouring towns. In this context, Asif's endeavour to impersonate a female character is very intriguing.

We have documented extensively Asif's shows, rehearsals, shooting methodology, interaction with his crew and the audience reception. The documentation process was guided by a few central points: the layered identity of worker / filmmaker; comedy in folk / digital narratives and non-industrial cinema culture. Though we have managed to collate a substantial volume of footage on various aspects of Malegaon cinema the material is yet to be processed into a film or video art work. The lack of available theoretical tools on phenomena such as Malegaon cinema is coming on the way to process the material.

Research on Gender and Public culture/Space

This was a research grant from Global Fund for Women to assess the impact of migration/displacement on women and their isolation from public culture/public space. Though a large number of women are associated with the film industry, mostly as home-based labourers, their access to cinema and other public cultures is limited. Besides, most women in the industry; working as junior artists, minor dancers and small scale designers of various kinds; too are struggling for due recognition. As the women's movement and women's studies centres are warming up to the issues of migration, displacement, immobility, access and invisibility in public domain the demand for newer research material is rising. This project was conceived in response to that.

A primary research and video documentation on urban women's relationship with cinema as against home bound entertainment such as television and radio is conducted. Fortyfive Women across class, community, age and geographical locations within the city on issues of leisure, entertainment and strategies of negotiation with the urban spaces. As the largest metropolis in the region the city witnesses large scale external migration and internal displacements and re-locatings. With each such movement women of the community/family need to re-negotiate their

access vis-à-vis the domestic space as well as the public space. The project aimed to understand the process of this re-negotiation that the women evolve through their own initiative and agility. Since the purview of the documentation was cinema, women participated in it with a sense of fun and active agency. While discussing entertainment they felt free of their roles as home makers, mothers, daughters, wives etc. and related agonies. Hence they could discuss their desires and transgressive acts with an innocent sense of mischief.

The research indicates towards a loss of women's access to public places and public amenities including cinema theatres in recent years due to various reasons ranging from development policies to neo-conservatism of the community to rise of ticket price in cinema halls. As entertainment becomes a home based and private/familial affair women's access to public spaces through the common activity of watching films in theatre shrinks drastically. The death of popular conventions such as matinee shows, *zenana* shows could not / did not manifested in any newer convention that is conducive to women.

With the already collated material we have created a video art work that was exhibited at the Cinea City exhibition at FTII. Though we plan to work further on this project in the next phase.

Dissemination:

The dissemination of the Cinema City project is designed as the logical development from its research and production processes. It is being achieved through pedagogical initiatives, digital and text publications and public events.

Post Graduate Certificate Course

This course was conducted in collaboration with SNTD University and Max Mueller Bhavan-Goethe Institute. The course was imagined as a blend between theory, practicals, encounters, conversations, film screenings and field works. The title of the course was City Narratives in Literature and Cinema. It was a 16 weeks course with 4 modules – Asian city narratives, Imagining Bombay/Mumbai, Representation and Narrative structures. The course syllabus was developed keeping in mind the University regulations for post graduate certificate course. At the end of the course the participants were conferred completion certificate signed by the representatives of Goethe Institute, SNTD University and Majlis.

Course announcement

The course was announced in the month of April through a well attended public event at the auditorium of Max Mueller Bhavan. The evening programme was designed as dialogues between senior and young members of various disciplines of cultural practices. Young architect Rohan Shivkumar talked to revered painter Sudhir Patwardhan; filmmaker Paromita Vohra was the discussant with veteran filmmaker Saeed Mirza and young poet Arundhati Subramaniam read her poems along with the works of senior poets Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolatkar and Namdeo Dasal. This unique event created a buzz in the city and the hall was bursting in the seam with people. This event also set the tone of the whole course as an innovative space where the new could converse with the old around the issues of cultural practices and urbanity. On that evening a dedicated website for the course (www.cinemacitycourse.com) was launched and call for applications was released. The call was also circulated through various list serves, facebook entry and postering in colleges and university departments.

Selection and course launch

We had selected 20 students out of the 65 applications received. The selection was based on the merit of the essay that the applicants were asked to write on the city that they live in. The course was launched on 9th July at the mini auditorium of SNTD University, Juhu campus by the vice chancellor. Other than the selected participants and the resource people of the course large number of cityphils and cineasts attended the launch programme. A special exhibition on Cinema City with all the art works produced till then was mounted on that occasion.

The evening programme begun with addresses by Marla Stukenberg, the director of Max Mueller Bhavan Mumbai and Dr. Mitra Parikh, Head of the Dept. of Post Graduate Studies, SNDT University. The central attraction was the premier of **Anna Sound Please**, a film directed by Madhavi Tangelle, on the slum cinema that cater to migrant Tamil wage workers followed by a panel discussion on Cinematic Cities. The speakers in the panel were veteran journalist Sadanand Menon, sociologist Rahul Srivastava and filmmaker Madhusree Dutta, the session was chaired by film historian Kaushik Bhaumik.

The launch programme, the exhibition and the course was widely written about in the press. Times of India published multiple articles on various components of the project. NDTV made a half an hour film on the Cinema City exhibition and held several telecasts.

Course schedule

Every Saturday the classes took place in the SNDT campus at Juhu. The sprawling campus facilitated practical classes such as camera exercises and writing workshops. Every Monday the lecture-demonstrations took place in Max Mueller Bhavan in South Bombay. This was planned such a way that the participants, many of whom were working in the South Bombay area, could attend the evening classes. Every Tuesday was marked for public lectures, interactions with practicing artists/filmmakers/writers and short film screenings. For these sessions eminent resource people were invited and the sessions were made open to public in order to share the resources with other citizens.

More than twenty resource people including academics and artists taught in the course. The list of resource people are not only drawn from the city of Bombay but also traced from the visiting guests from other cities and universities. In order to expose the students to the actual grind of filmmaking field visits to shooting studios, post production units and sound studios too were organised.

Public screenings

Every Thursday we held public screenings of world cinema on city narratives at the Edward theatre. Edward theatre is an 80 years old enterprise and situated at the corner of the dense bazaar area of South Bombay. This theatre has a unique colonial architecture that itself became a subject of study for the students. With an unbelievably cheap ticket rate of Rs.28 (less than 50 pence) the current patrons of the theatre are members of the working class who live or work in the vicinity. For these screenings we sourced film prints from the embassies of foreign countries and from NFAI (National Film Archive of India) and FD (Films Division). Though this project entailed lot of hard work and complicated liaison it served the project of Cinema City extremely well. Many city newspapers and culture magazines wrote about the course in the context of screenings at Edward theatre. This event has opened up a new possibility of cultural intervention in the city and we hope it will be replicated by other initiatives.

Resource material

A resource library was developed with 75 DVDs and 60 books and kept at a special section at Max Mueller Bhavan library for the students to access them any day of the week. The library was built with books on city literature, urban study texts, architectural texts, visual art catalogues, cinema texts and film scripts. The DVD library comprised of both local and world cinema on the cities. A special section was built to deal with Asian literature and cinema around urbanism. Rare and unpublished articles were uploaded on course website. The website was made free access as we wanted people who could not join the course too get benefited from the resources.

Convocation

At the end of the course the students presented their dissertations. The best works were displayed to an invited audience and the faculty on the day of the convocation. The certificate of participation had been given away by the renowned visual artist Sudhir Patwardhan. Some of the research, creative writings and art works commenced during the course have become part of the Cinema City archive.

Besides this the Cinema City short films are used by many academic courses as resource material. For example Neera Adarkar, the trustee of Majlis has initiated an exercise for her students in Rachana Sansad Academy of Architecture to develop a case study on any of the locations in the city that is depicted in the films.

Digital Archive

Parallel to the reasearch and production process the digital archive of Cinema City is being developed. The volume of material, its varied forms and complicated intersections have made it a challenging endeavour. Throughout the year we have been tweaking and fine tuning the architecture of the archive with the help of software designers. At every public exhibition (Berlinale international film festival, at SNTD University and FTII) we exhibited the interim off line archive to get feed back from the users/

However the archive is not yet available for public, either offline or online, as we are still producing and collating material for it. So far we have created enough resources for the western suburb and old city area. But the collection and collating work on other important areas such as Parel (the textile industry area), Dadar (the early cinema production centre), South Bombay (the colonial city) etc. are yet to be fully accomplished. Currently the Cinema City Digital Archive is too heavy to upload on the net from an Indian server. We are in the process of downsizing it for that purpose. We hope to release the archive in early 2012, both in offline and online versions.

Publication

The work on Cinema City publication has also started in the reporting year with the ambition of getting it out by mid-2012. It will be edited by Kaushik Bhaumik, film historian; Madhusree Dutta, filmmaker and Rohan Shivkumar, Architect and urban study scholar and published by Tulika Books. The book is being envisaged and designed as an archive on print and thus incorporates critical texts and found texts; interviews and memoirs; maps, art works and film clips and dateline and anecdotes. Currently we are working on evolving strategies to represent the entire project in prints. The contributors in the book comprise of senior scholars such as Geeta Kapur and Jyotindra Jain to younger practitioners from various disciplines.

Submitted by

Madhusree Dutta

(Executive Director)

Approved by

Neera Adarkar

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Encl. Statement of Accounts