

In Memoriam ♦ 2014

In Memoriam



Sixtieth birthday celebration at Lotika Sarkar's New Delhi home, 1987.

From left to right, Swarna Jayaweera (Sri Lanka), Vina Mazumdar and Hanna Papanek (USA). All three were born in 1927

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

CONCEPT AND DESIGN
Sundaresh and Malavika Karlekar

TEXT: Leela Kasturi, Malavika Karlekar, Veena Poonacha (SNDT), colleagues at CWDS

PHOTOGRAPHS: Nandan (CWDS), Veena Poonacha (SNDT), Hanna Papanek, Mukul Dube (New Delhi) and others

We thank all those who have provided inputs regarding photographs and captions. We are also grateful to Brinda Datta for help with the cover design.



Neera Desai, Vina Mazumdar and Leela Dube, St. Mary's Campus Montreal Canada, c. 1980s

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

In Memoriam

On December 31, 1974, Towards Equality, the path-breaking report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India was presented to the Government of India. Forty years later, through our calendar, we celebrate the lives of four women associated with the report. Charting their own paths, Lotika Sarkar, Leela Dube, Neera Desai and Vina Mazumdar were gurus, founding mothers of the discipline of women's studies and the contemporary Indian women's movement. Initiating new ways of thinking about women, they fought for many personal freedoms that succeeding generations continue to take for granted. Despite differences – and indeed being very different people – the four were in close touch with each other, good friends, who worked to expose the stubbornly patriarchal nature of our society. The reforms that they were able to bring about – legal, political and social – continue to be the basis of much that is possible today.

The oldest of this amazing quartet, Lotika Sarkar (1923-2013) was a lawyer by profession, teaching and researching at Faculty of Law, Delhi University and Indian Law Institute. She wrote the chapter on law and Indian women in Towards Equality and was a founder of Centre for Women's Development Studies. Lotika was one of the four authors of the Open Letter written to the Chief Justice of India that argued against the acquittal by the Supreme Court of two policemen charged for raping a young tribal woman (Mathura) in police custody. This was in 1978, and it became known as the Mathura case, a cause celebre, leading to a change in the law on rape. Lotika was an early advocate of Public Interest Litigation whereby ordinary citizens could move court against violations of fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution. Leela Dube (1923-2012) brought the expertise of an anthropologist to the fledgling discipline of women's studies and conversely, introduced the insights of women's studies into mainstream social anthropology. She wrote the chapter on the social role of women in Towards Equality and her work among the Muslim matrilineal community in Lakshadweep and the Himalayan tribes practising polyandry remain of great significance. Examining gender, kinship, culture and caste through folk tales and songs, proverbs, legends and myths in addition to written accounts, interviews and personal observations, Leela brought a vibrancy to her prodigious body of work.

Neera Desai (1925-2009) established Research Centre for Women's Studies and Centre for Rural Development at SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. To her, as women's studies was not just a sterile discipline, but an instrument of social change, she broke the academic isolation of higher education by democratizing knowledge systems through community engagement and activism. Participation in the nationalist movement honed her feminist consciousness and she actively worked on issues of social and economic reform and empowerment. Born into a progressive middle-class family of Calcutta, Vina Mazumdar (1927 – 2013) saw herself as one placed

between 'tradition, counter-tradition and heresy'. After years of teaching in Bihar, she migrated to New Delhi in the 1960s, first to join the University Grants Commission, and then the Indian Council of Social Science Research. As Member-Secretary of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, she coordinated the work of its large team of members, supporting researchers and staff to produce Towards Equality, acknowledged as the 'founding text' of the women's movement. In 1980 she established Centre for Women's Development Studies to undertake research and activism in issues pertaining to women in both rural and urban India. Its work among the tribal women of Bankura (West Bengal) soon became well known as a model of grassroots' women's empowerment. .

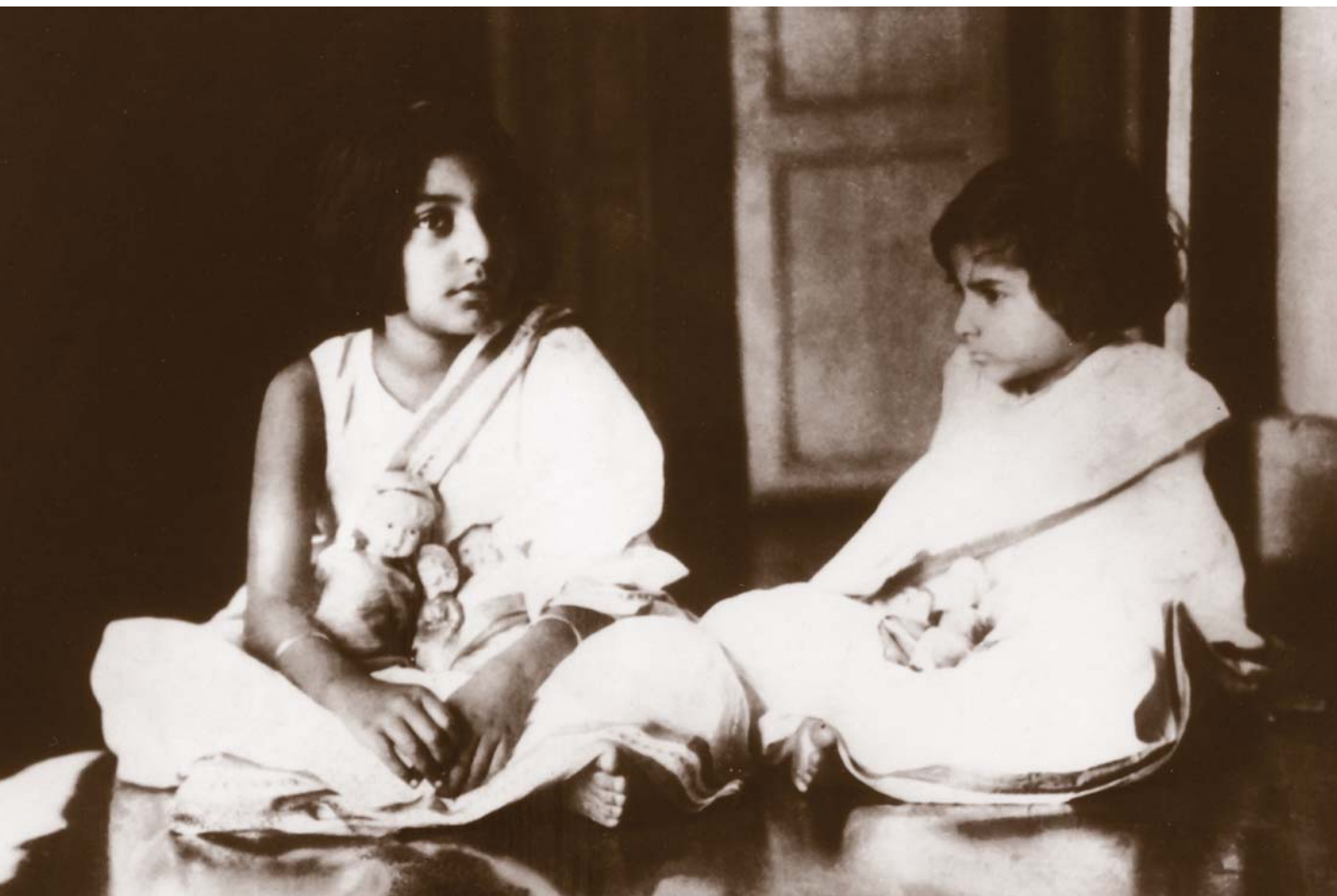
From the 1980s onwards, all four were deeply involved with planning, strategising and implementing programmes and policies for women – whether these concerned the mired issue of reservations, violence, discrimination, education or overall development of rural women. On occasion, their work has been at the behest of government and other agencies. Very concerned about the establishment of women's studies and research on women, they formed the Indian Association of Women's Studies in 1982. Today, women's studies and the women's movement in India owes much to the individual and collective achievements of these feisty women. We celebrate them here through our collection of rare photos that memorialise personal moments as well as their roles as significant public figures of independent India.

Leela Kasturi and Malavika Karlekar with inputs from Veena Poonacha, Indu Agnihotri and Mary John

Lotika Sarkar, Vina Mazumdar and Kumud Sharma, Bankura, 1992

Courtesy: Hanna Papaneke, USA





Lotika Mitra (later Sarkar) with sister Basanti to her left, taken by their mother, Suchandra, a keen amateur photographer, 1935

Courtesy: The late Basanti Mitra, Kolkata

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			● 1 <i>New Year's Day</i>	2	3	4
5	6	7	☾ 8 <i>Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday</i>	9	10	11
12	13	14 Milad-Un-Nabi (Id-E-Milad) (Birthday of Prophet Mohammed) <i>Makar Sankranti Pongal</i>	15	○ 16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	● 24	25
26 Republic Day	27	28	29	30	● 31	

January 2014

December						
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A pigtailed Vina Majumdar
(later Mazumdar), on a family
picnic, Ranchi, 1936

*Courtesy: the late Sunil Kumar Sen,
Kolkata*



Leela Dube with her older son, Mukul

At the time, Leela Dube was teaching at the Department of Sociology, Osmania University, Hyderabad, 1953

Courtesy: Mukul Dube, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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○ 16 <i>Holika Dahan</i>	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	☾ 24 Holi	25	26	27	28	29

March 2014

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Neera Desai with Margaret Mead

Neera Desai with legendary anthropologist Margaret Mead. Vice Chancellor of SNDT Women's University Sharada Diwan is reading out a citation on the occasion of felicitating Dr Mead with an honorary degree, 1973

Courtesy: Veena Poonacha, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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6	7	8 Ram Navami	9	10	11	12
13 Mahavir Jayanti	14 Vaisakhi/ Vishu/ Mesadi	15 Vaisakhadi (Bengal)/ Bahag Bihu (Assam)	16	17	18 Good Friday	19
20 Easter Sunday	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

April 2014

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At a rural camp for training women in Tajpur village (Jullundur), 1982

From left: Phulrenu Guha, Andrea Singh at the back, Kamlesh Jhurani, Rita Sarin, Vina Mazumdar in the front and Savitri Rawat (later Savitri Ray) with a group of village women. They were discussing feasible projects for income generation.

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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18	19	Hazarat Ali's Birthday	Buddha Purnima	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	●	29	31

May 2014

April

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June

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Gender sensitization for village leaders in Udwada, Pardi Taluka South Gujarat, 1982

Neera Desai conducting a meeting at Udwada in Valsad District, where she ran a rural development project. Also present in the photograph is Kumud Shanbag, her colleague and friend, who worked closely with Neeraben to develop the Centre for Rural Development, SNTD Women's University, and Ranjan Parikh.

Courtesy: Veena Poonacha, SNTD Women's University, Mumbai

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
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23	24	25	26	●	27	28
30						Rath Yatra

June 2014

May							July						
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First National Conference of Indian Association for Women's Studies, Bombay, 1981

Neera Desai sipping tea is in the centre with Surinder Jetley to her left and Maithreyi Krishnaraj on her right. Vina Mazumdar is sitting next to Maithreyi while Jyotsna Sanjanwala is standing exactly behind Neera Desai, Sharayu Anantram is next to Surinder.

Courtesy: Courtesy: Veena Poonacha, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai

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● 27	28	29	30	31	Jamat-UI-Vida	
		Idu'l Fitr				

June

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July 2014



Neera Desai, with Leela Dube and Vina Mazumdar, St. Mary's College, Montreal, Canada, c. 1980s

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
31					1	2
3	☾ 4	5	6	7	8	9
☉ 10 <i>Raksha Bandhan</i>	11	12	13	14	15 <i>Independence Day</i>	16
☾ 17 <i>Janmashtami</i> <i>Parsi New Year's Day</i>	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	● 25	26	27	28	29 <i>Vinayaka Chaturthi/</i> <i>Ganesh Chaturthi</i>	30

August 2014

July							September							
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27	28	29	30	31				28	29	30				



Reunion of some members of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, c. 1990s

From left, Leela Dube, Sakina Hasan, Phulrenu Guha, Lotika Sarkar, Vina Mazumdar and Kumud Sharma.

Phulrenu Guha was the Chairperson of the CSWI while Vina Mazumdar was its Member-Secretary

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

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Onam						
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28	29	30				

September 2014




















August						
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October						
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**Lotika Sarkar hugging Phulrenu Guha, at the time Chairperson of CWDS, New Delhi
c. 1990s**

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1  <i>Dussehra (Maha Saptami)</i>	2  Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday <i>Dussehra (Maha Ashtami)</i>	3  Dussehra (Maha Navmi)	4 
5 	6  Idu'l Zuha (Bakrid)	7 	8  <i>Maharishi Valmiki's Birthday</i>	9 	10 	11  <i>Karaka Chaturthi (Karva Chouth)</i>
12 	13 	14 	15 	16 	17 	18 
19 	20 	21 	22  <i>Deepavali (South India) Naraka Chaturdasi</i>	23  Diwali (Deepavali)	24  <i>Govardhan Pooja</i>	25  <i>Bhai Duj</i>
26 	27 	28 	29  <i>Pratihara Sashthi / Surya Sashthi (Chhat Puja)</i>	30 	31 	

October 2014

September							November						
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Leela Dube with K. Saradamoni, activist and women's studies scholar

Courtesy: Mukul Dube, New Delhi

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		Muharram		Guru Nanak's Birthday		
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23	24	25	26	27	28	● 29
	Guru Teg Bahadur's Martyrdom Day					

November 2014

October							December							
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Vina Mazumdar makes a point vociferously while Debabrata Bandyopadhyay and Lotika Sarkar look on. c. late 1990s

Possibly taken at either Bankura or at a meeting at Vidyasagar University

Courtesy: Nandan, CWDS, New Delhi

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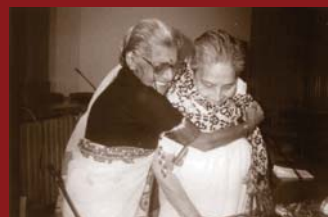
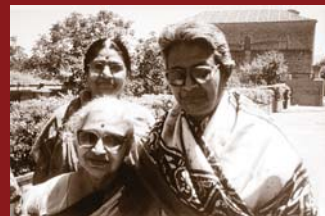
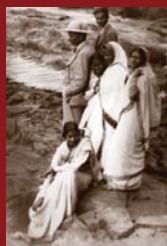
November

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December 2014



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