Subject: THREAD Indian Women and Violence
From: Frank Conlon <conlon@U.WASHINGTON.EDU>
To: Multiple recipients of list H-ASIA <H-ASIA@h-net.msu.edu>
Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence
H-ASIA
September 17, 1996
Responses (2) to query on sources re: violence against women in India

*********************************************************************
From: Fem.Hist@jhu.edu
(Antoinette Burton)
For an historical perspective see:

Other references:
Radha Kumar, _The History of Doing_ (London: Verso, 1993)
Mala Sen, _India's Bandit Queen the true story of Phoolan Devi_ Rev. and updated ed. (London and San Francisco: Pandora, 1995) (and film "Bandit Queen")


"Bhaji on the Beach" (film about domestic violence in Indian community in Britain)

Antoinette Burton

Johns Hopkins University

hiburton@jhuvms.hcf.jhu.edu

*********************************************************************
2.)

From: Jana Everett <jeverett@carbon.cudenver.edu>

Some resources on women's responses to violence in India:


Chhaya Datar. 1993. _The Struggle Against Violence_. Calcutta: Stree. (essays on anti-rape campaign, campaign against sex determination tests)


Jana Everett

University of Colorado at Denver

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Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA September 18, 1996

Response to query re: violence against women in India

Ed. note: Sudipto Chatterjee here offers a different perspective on violence against women, in his translations of songs in Bengali by Suman Chatterjee. Translations are copyrighted by Sudipto Chatterjee.

F.F.C.
From: chattrj@is3.nyu.edu (Sudipto Chatterjee)

In response to Heather Dell's posting, here are the texts of three songs on women and violence by Suman Chatterjee (a political singer from Calcutta) that I have translated. At Frank Conlon's suggestion, I do want to make clear that these translations are under copyright, but may be used for educational purposes, so long as the copyright statement is included.

Sudipto Chatterjee
Dept. of Performance Studies
New York University

FORGIVE US, ANITA DEWAN

[Anita Dewan was a social worker who was raped and brutally murdered by hoodlums in Bantala, a poor neighborhood in suburban Calcutta.]

I hear the cries time and again
Cries that my heart penetrate
Martyrs' pulpit inside my body
Martyrs' pulpit within my head.
Foul and filthy Bantala is but
Another Calcutta neighborhood
Three women are assaulted with
Three hundred men in pursuit.
Manhood now makes me shameful
Before myself I hang my head
The blood of the three women sits
In our conscience, still and dead.
Does Anita Dewan's carcass
Make Civility feel some shame?
I have put my shame in song
You can, for yourself, do the same.
I hear cries time and again
Cries that my heart penetrate
Martyrs' pulpit inside my body
Martyrs' pulpit within my head.
The real mark of barbarism lies
In this silence of heads without torso
Calcutta, meanwhile, dances dirty,
Celebrates three hundred years or so.
Your enjoyment puts me to shame
A shame that is too, too dogged
Martyrs' pulpit inside my body
Martyrs' pulpit within my head.
There's blood in your new apartments
In water faucets, at dusk and dawn,
It's the blood of raped women that flows,
Blood telling tales of the land goes on.
Look! it's blood upon the snack-bar,
On your mutton-roll! it's blood
It is, again, sprinkled blood that
My bowl of fish curry floods.
The same invisible blood has now
The flag of the same color wetted
The colored world of politics
Is stained in blood unabatted.
Anita Dewan's blood will not
Erase itself, it is so obstinate
Martyrs' pulpit inside my body
Martyrs' pulpit in my head.
Blood is on your raga Malkosh
Blood is in your music chambers
The harmonium's wet with blood
Blood rehearses melodic numbers.
Blood stains your culture and
Blood is in your juvenile memory
there's blood even in Tagore-songs
Rape becomes your identity.
Covering blood with painted design
Is that your civilized barbarity?
I am of the same order, too,
I am Calcutta; the mega-city.

PAAPRI DE

[Paapri De was a four year old girl who, after swallowing a pen-cap in play, first suffered from lack of treatment and then died when a certain Dr. Mal injected her with adult dose tranquilizers since it was very late at night.] >

Little Paapri is too foolish
Ate something other than food
That's how in the little throat
The pain got stuck and stood.
Gulp it down little girl, gulp
The pain stopping your breath
Life in this land only means
Swallowing the pain of death.
Little Paapri is too foolish
A little dull, I have to say,
Else she’d know such things
Are happening everyday.

Little Paapri is too foolish
Hasn’t learnt to swallow pain,
How dare you spend, little girl,
The country's time in vain!

Little Paapri is too foolish
The medical tools are gone
Out-of-order; so what?
Democracy lives on!

"Little Paapri is too foolish,"
Thinks Doctor Mal,
"Why be a doctor this late,
With no sleep at all?"

Sleep, little Paapri, go to sleep.
Why at all were you born ever?
I've made and sung my song,
Now with a sigh I'll slumber.

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WHACK! THE SUN SLAPPED...
Whack! the Sun slapped the Sky across the face
Scared Dawn, unwillingly, stays out of the race.
Understandably flushed is the Cloud's forehead
While Morning smiles like a girl newly wed.
Smile, my Morning, the newly wedded bride,
You'd remember if you really were a bride
In this country your father had to sell his land,
To make you a bride on another man's demand.
Your man took his dowries without a blush
Hard cash, jewelries and a shoe shining brush
Because the skin of your face is quite like a shoe
The scars on your face must be kept shining, too!
The scars on your heart you'd hide with a smile
(This country is, after all, a foreign land defiled)
Lying on the bed that was your father's gratuity,
With a smile you would rip apart your virginity.
In this land that swears upon the Mother goddess
Hair flowing, you'd rock your baby without recess.
Rock, you would yourself time and time again
Your father died with your dowry unattained.
But your kid's father wouldn't stand such a flaw;
An undowried groom is no less than a tiger's paw!
One day, graced with the same tiger-paw's blessing,
Hung by your neck, you'd dangle from the ceiling...
As a ghoul, you'd see your dangling corpse turn
And laugh as the night would fade into morn.
The Morn has blushed, actually, out of shame;
Has turned to the Sun for justice, all the same....
And having seen the plight of the human race
Whack! the Sun slapped the Sky across the face.

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Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

Further responses (3) to query on sources re: violence against women in India

********************1.)

From: gminault@utxvms.cc.utexas.edu (Gail Minault)

Re. Indian women and violence - I teach a course on women in South Asia, and find that issues of the journal MANUSHI are very good on issues of women and violence, women and labor, and a variety of current concerns. In addition, there is a book of excerpts from the first ten years of MANUSHI, edited by Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita, entitled _In Search of Answers_, and one section of it deals specifically with women and violence. It was originally published by Zed Press in London, but has been reprinted in India.

In this country, it is available from South Asia Books, PO Box 502, Columbia., MO 65205.

Gail Minault

History

University of Texas, Austin

gminault@utxvms.cc.utexas.edu
Ed. note. South Asia Books has an e-mail address <sab@socketis.net> F.F.C.

********************************************************************* (2.)

From: Laura.Parsons@harpercollins.com

Violence against women in India is also treated in:


Laura Parsons

Westview Press

laura.parsons@harpercollins.com

*********************************************************************

From: "Laxman D. Satya" <lsatya@eagle.lhup.edu>


A firsthand account of the voices of working women from South Asia.

Laxman D. Satya

Lockhaven University

Ed. note: Professor Satya's post calls to mind another, rather less widely distributed publication of interest:


Title: Women and struggle : a report of the Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan, Patna, 1988 by Gail
Omvedt, Chetna Gala, Govind Kelkar.


Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 19, 1996

Further response to query on sources re: violence against women in India

*********************************************************************From:  Kathinka Frcystad  <KATHINKA@prio.no>

Violence against women in India: further response

In addition to the sources already mentioned, you might want to look at the following book:


One of the essays gives an interesting perspective on rape and abduction of women during Partition, and of the fallacy of the State and NGOs to deal with the problem.

Best regards,

Kathinka Frcystad

Kathinka Froystad
Research Fellow
PRIO
Fuglehauggt. 11
0260 Oslo
During a train journey in India, I witnessed a brutal beating of a young Indian woman by her husband from whom she was separated. She was commuting to a primary school where she was a teacher, and her enraged husband boarded the train at a station. He was following her. First he used abusive language then took his shoes out and started to beat her. I was shocked that none of the men in the compartment protested. I then asked them why are we silent when such criminal act is being perpetrated? Then some elderly men joined me and we stopped the husband’s violence, and forced him to leave at the next station. I wanted to call the police and to report this, but the passengers and the woman herself objected. She said he would kill her if he heard of my action. I had personally realized to be true what I have been reading in the American women missionaries’ reports and diaries of the 19th century for my projected book, "American Women's Activism and Indian Women's Response, 1869-1922." I have collected convincing evidence to show that violence against Indian women, especially wives, was not considered a crime until the women missionaries protested to the British government, who were reluctant to interfere in 'India's social affairs'.

A dramatic appeal was published in _The Heathen Woman's Friend_ (vol.II, 1870, p. 15) by American missionary women "to save their Indian sisters". It stated that around the city of Amritsar some 300 children, all of them girls, had been carried away by wolves. The British government, which had prohibited female infanticide among the soldier class, could not prevent such a "good taste, as this, on the part of the wolves!" The authorities would not prevent such deception by parents; only American volunteer women could by joining their crusade against female infanticide. I will attempt to give more detail on this discourse that the missionary women created on Indian women in a panel that I am chairing on “The Construction of a Discourse on Indian Women in British India” for the New York State Conference on Asian Studies that would be held on October 11-12, 1996 at Dowling College, Oakdale, New York, 11769.

This shameful practice has now taken a different dimension: instead of throwing them to the wolves or crocodiles, modern parents use technology: amniocentesis. CNN recently reported that out of 6000 abortions at a Mumbai (Bombay) clinic, only 2 were males. A World Bank report (extensively quoted by _India Abroad_ of August 9, 1996) has also shown staggering statistics that during 1981-1991, there were 4.2 million female child deaths and an estimated 1.2 million female babies were either aborted or were victims of infanticide in India. This paper also reported that nearly 6000 brides are burned every year due to lack of dowries. The statistics on sati, rape, and female child abuse have yet
to be compiled. Some statistics were recently given at the International Conference on Child Abuse that was recently held in Sweden (anyone has these statistics on female child abuse in India?).

Although good lists have been given for readings on violence against women, we should include books on female infanticide and sati. I found the following books useful (missionary accounts did exaggerate some reports, but I only accepted their accounts which were confirmed by other sources).

E. Storrow, _Our Sisters in India_, New York, n.d.


Shahid Refai

College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY 12203

(refais@rosnet.strose.edu)

Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 20, 1996

Further re: violence against women in India

*********************************************************************From: Laura.Parsons@harpercollins.com

Shahid Refai's call to include sati and female infanticide when considering violence against Indian women reminded me that Jack Hawley recently edited a collection of essays on sati and the Roop Kanwar case:

_Sati, the blessing and the curse_. New York, Oxford University

Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 20, 1996

Further sources re: violence against women in India

*****************************************************************************

From: Philip McEldowney <pm9k@poe.acc.virginia.edu>


ISBN: 2020282038

The following article may also be of interest


Philip McEldowney

University of Virginia

pm9k@virginia.edu
Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 21, 1996

Further reflections on the discussion of violence against women in India

From: Jana Everett <jeverett@carbon.cudenver.edu>

In reading recent contributions on this thread, I have gotten uncomfortable. When I teach about gender issues in India, I often encounter student reactions along the lines of “thank god I am American,” “backward customs are the problem—modern values are the solution.” I try to counter this by a comparative approach that identifies structures of domination and strategies of resistance in different types of historical/cultural contexts—which is what I read into the original posting. In my classes I also try to problematize the traditional/modern dichotomy, e.g. showing the political-economic influences on Roop Kanwar's "sati." I think we need to discourage the "othering" which too easily can go on. Anyway, I'm uncomfortable with the assertion that Westerners put gender violence issues on the political agenda in India. Mary Daly made that argument in _Gyn/Ecology: the metaethics of radical feminism_ (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) overlooking the efforts of Indians; Audre Lorde made the best critique of Daly that I have read in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua eds., _This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Women of Color_. New York: Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, 1983.

I think any analysis of gender violence needs to look into how the changing political economy affects gender relations. Veena Talwar Oldenburg has a suggestive essay on how colonialism contributed to an increase in the dowry burden in the 19th century:


Jana Everett
Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 22, 1996

Comment on previous posting re: violence against women in India

From: Rajagopal Vakulabharanam <RVAKULAB@macc.wisc.edu>

With reference to Professor Refai's post on the role of American missionaries in publicizing issues of violence against women in India: his sounds to me like the revival of a very old debate, that between Katherine Mayo and Gandhi, that took place when Gandhi wrote about Mayo's book called 'Mother India' that talked about the degraded state of Indian women and general prevalence of apathy to it.

There is oppression of women in Indian society, just as there is oppression of women in most other societies. I would count myself among those who want to oppose this oppression both in India and elsewhere. But Shahid Refai's posting, which seems to draw heavily from what the American and other >missionaries have to say about the status of Indian women raises other issues.

1. The debates that arose among Indian nationalists, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when the colonial govt. sought to legislate on Indian social matters, like the minimum marriageable age for Indian women etc, are also relevant here. The question was not only whether certain practices were right or wrong, but it was also whether an alien government could legislate in matters that were internal to Indian society.

Things have changed quite a bit since then, and Indians now have their own government, and they can handle criticism of their own society in a more self-confident way. But some of the questions also remain. What is the nature and status of critique of those who either do not belong to/ or do not have a sense of responsibility for what happens in a given society?

2. Reliance on missionary writings on Indian women can lead to critiques, that can have other implicit assumptions too. Is the 'degraded' nature of women in Indian society attributable to the essential nature of Indian society? What is the way out? Does the solution lie in 'Westernization' of Indian society?
These are issues about which a lot of debate has already taken place. I am not very comfortable with the invocation of missionary materials by people who want to talk about ‘amelioration’ of Indian women. I have no doubt that a great deal remains to be done, before Indian women attain a status of equality with men. But Indian people can draw from their own cultural resources, as well as what they need to learn from contact with ‘modernity’ in raising the status of women in their own society, and can very well do without inputs from missionaries, American or otherwise.

(Let me take this opportunity to recall that sometime last year, there were few emails on H-Asia which listed books by Katherine Mayo. It would have been good to have a discussion of the books as well as the controversy with nationalists. It does not seem to have happened, though I do not fully know as I was away in summer. Let’s hope some debate on that will take place now.)

Rajagopal, V.
University of Wisconsin at Madison

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Date: Sun, 22 Sep 1996 11:01:18 -0700
From: Frank Conlon <conlon@U.WASHINGTON.EDU>
Reply-To: H-Net list for Asian History and Culture <H-ASIA@h-net.msu.edu>
To: Multiple recipients of list H-ASIA <H-ASIA@h-net.msu.edu>
Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 22, 1996

Response re: violence against women in India.

Ed. note: I must note that this post was received prior to the Rajagopalan message just posted, and is in response to earlier posts.

F.F.C.

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From: srefai@juno.com (SHAHID REFAI)

In response to the recent remarks on my post on violence against Indian women, I offer the following thoughts.

During the initial stages of my research on American Women's activism, I felt very uncomfortable with the 'horror stories' of sati, infanticide, child marriages, etc. I attempted, as other Indian scholars may have done, to explain these as the construction of the 'other'. But I found that the Indian women like Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Lilavati Singh (1880-1911), Laxmibai Tilak (1868-1936), and Dr. Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887) had themselves appealed to American women missionaries to intervene 'to save their sisters' (Ramabai had appealed to WCTU convention to save babies from infanticide in Rajputana, Dyer. Helen S. 1900.


When a twelve year-old wife Phoolmani Dasi was murdered by her husband in June 1890, Dr Mrs Mansell of Lucknow mission wrote a memorial to the British Government to pass a legislation protecting such child wives. This stimulated eighteen hundred Indian women from all over India to send a similar petition (Fuller. Mrs. Marcus. B. 1900. _The Wrongs of Indian Womanhood_ pp.196-197).

It was my journey from political correctness to historical correctness. I strongly felt that although objective reality is difficult to gauge through the instrument of rationality, why should the historical correctness be sacrificed at the altar of political correctness or at the paradigm of 'the other'? In India my friends, who had watched trashy tv talk shows that are now being beamed live from the US, often told me, "thank God we don't live in America, you do." Such remarks at their face value are meant to be comfort zones. But they do not alter the reality of tv as an instrument of change in India.
I admit my perspective has been enriched by 'Subaltern school'. I am also deeply sensitive to deconstructionist paradigms of Saidian 'Orientalism'.

However, 'stimulus diffusion' was and still is a disturbing element in modern vis-a-vis traditional dichotomy. Although I am not a determinist historian, I strongly feel that despite traditional societies' attempts to erect Olympian barriers by taking down disk antennas or raising great walls in cyberspace, the floods of information technology would smash these status quo cultures and change would eventually triumph.

I am not comfortable with analogies, but the missionaries and colonial reformers could be described as disk antenna equivalents or information super-highways, who are not merely agents of cultural imperialism but worse than that, they are winds of change. I was initially in opposition to hegemonic paradigm of western stimulation and eastern response. But then I realized that those who attacked these paradigms --Octave Mannoni, Frantz Fannon, Albert Memmi, and my favorite, Edward Said are also basically western. Let us not pretend that they have not stimulated 'subaltern school' or others who are now more interested in 'deconstructionism' per se than in objective reality of history.

The West did feel uncomfortable in borrowing such structures as the Arabic numerals, medicine and algebra from Islamic Spain, but they could not have survived with the status quo of Roman numerals or medieval medicine of the barbers. Similarly, Indians could not have survived without Greek coinage or Gandhara art. So I am reluctant to see as an agent of cultural imperialism Frances Willard (leader of Women's Christian Temperance Union) who stood next to Pandita Ramabai at Boston's Trinity Church in 1887, and appealed to fund a college for high caste widows in India. Willard later published this appeal in American newspapers to raise $70,000, and then initiated a Ramabai Association in Boston to sustain this college in Poona.

Shahid Refai (refais@rosnet.strose.edu)
College of Saint Rose, Albany, NY 12203

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---------- Forwarded message ---------

Date: Fri, 27 Sep 1996 07:00:38 -0700

From: Frank Conlon <conlon@U.WASHINGTON.EDU>

Reply-To: H-Net list for Asian History and Culture <H-ASIA@h-net.msu.edu>

To: Multiple recipients of list H-ASIA <H-ASIA@h-net.msu.edu>

Subject: H-ASIA: Indian women and violence

H-ASIA

September 27, 1996

Response to comment re: violence against women in India

**********

From: Dr P. Kumar <Kumar@pixie.udw.ac.za>

In response to Reiko Shinno's comment regarding the need for statistical information on domestic violence, I just want to point out few problems relating to violence against women whether in India or elsewhere. While I agree with much of what she has said in her comments, I think looking for statistical information is going on a wild goose chase. Most of the domestic violence if often very subtle--i.e., there may not be any physical abuse, but very subtle ways in which men and women in the family context abuse each other mentally, psychologically and in various other ways. This kind of abuse is difficult for statistical data to come to grips with. Besides, a lot of it, especially in India, is never reported and will never be reported because the issues are too complex and they involve not just wife and husband and children but a whole network of relations both within the family and outside.

Secondly, one of the issues that relates to Dowry (which is often the context in which Indian violence against women takes place) is the role that women themselves play in the whole transaction of Dowry. It is ironical that it is often a woman who decides how much dowry her son should receive. If you ever participate in those negotiations, it is obvious that in most cases men often leave those matters to women to decide. I have known cases in which women particularly demand a higher dowry from her future daughter-in-law because she herself paid so much when she was married. Thus it is vicious cycle in which you get caught. Another such complicated issue is that it is easy to show sympathy towards the father who is now old and is having to find this enormous amount to pay as dowry. But we tend to forget that the same old man when he was young did take his share of dowry.
Unless such thorny issues are addressed by women, we will not progress much in dealing with the violence in the family.

P Kumar

Prof. P. Kumar (Associate Professor)
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Further reflections on discussion of violence against women in India

*********************************************************************
From: Carla Petievich <PETIEVICH@saturn.montclair.edu>
Reiko Shinno's thoughtful letter has inspired me to add my 2 cents worth, though I am not a subscriber, and having been getting only selected pieces forwarded to me by a friend. So perhaps what I say will duplicate what others have said. I applaud Shinno's observation that we seem to be operating on the assumption that political correctness and historical correctness are mutually exclusive locations. But I also--though sympathetic to Prof. Rafai's main point--wonder why we, as historians, are even pretending that there is such a thing as historical correctness at all!

As historians, it seems to me, we have to gather whatever information we can, and put together what seems to us to be the most plausible version of what happened and why, and try to defend that version's plausibility to us when challenged, without any guarantees that everyone else will always (or even ever) agree with us.

To discount historical data from colonial sources because we abhor colonialism; or Nazi sources because we abhor the holocaust; just does not strike me as intellectually honest.

Sincerely,

Carla Petievich
Dept. of History
Montclair State University
Upper Montclair, NJ

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