

## **Report of the Webinar conducted by the Women's Cell**

### **COVID-19 and its Impact on Women**

Rapporteur: Ms. Minakshi Biswas.

The theme of the Webinar conducted by the Women's Cell of Bamanpukur Humayaun Kabir served to be pertinent and in keeping with the contemporary times confronting women in particular and the society in general. The Webinar began with a brief introductory note by the convenor of the Women's Cell of BHKM, Ms. Madhu Srivastav. Professor Srivastav outlined the significance of discussing issues pertaining to women folks in the trying times plagued with the COVID-19. She highlighted why is it evident for the women to be facing monumental challenges in times identified with lockdown as a strategic measure to contain the SARS CoV-2 and yet is a difficult phase for the female population overall. In her short speech is underlined various aspects troubling women in times of the ongoing pandemic.

Professor. Srivastav then invited the Principal of BHKM, Dr. Subhash Biswas to commemorate the webinar with his inaugural speech. The Principal brought forth several aspects concerning women and their survival in times of COVID-19. Among the significant issues raised by him, matters of domestic violence took the fore. She also highlighted how for many people the tiny homes identified with single rooms or so that they possess due to lack of access to resources do not serve to accommodate all members fully well. Dr. Biswas also spoke about the the rural setting in which BHKM is located and the need for conversation and comprehension of issues concerning women in rural India in the COVID-19 period. He went on to argue that experiences of women differ based on their location in urban and rural India as well. Hence it becomes imperative to study the different experiences that are associated with women residing in the countryside. He also threw light upon the considerations of female students of rural India at present. The other major aspect that Dr. Biswas talked about resonated with the problems and challenges confronting the third gender in the difficult times caused by the Pandemic. Upon commencement of Principal, BHKM inaugural speech, the keynote speaker for the day's webinar was invited to deliver her presentation.

Dr. Runa Das Chaudhuri, Assistant Professor (HOD), Department of Sociology introduced and invited the first keynote speaker of the Webinar titled, “COVID-19 and Its Impact on Women”. The first speaker of the day was Dr. Nibedita Mukherjee, Professor at the Department of English, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University.

Professor. Mukherjee titled her presentation as, “For Women there is no Relief: The ‘Working class’ in the Pandemic”. She suggested at the very outset of her presentation that the nomenclature ‘working class’ is denotative of a different kind of a category of workers and does not hold resemblance with the way in which Marxists comprehend the terminology working class. Here, Prof. Mukherjee implied that working class in her sense in this presentation is representative of the category of the population that identifies as women and who are working all the time, be in in the confines of the private sphere or the public domain. She then went on to trace the trajectory of pandemics that have occurred historically. Within the layout of an array of pandemics that have taken place she contextualized how the women folks have always faced more challenges and problems in comparison to their male counterparts. Prof. Mukherjee contended that the Spanish Flu a more historically newer phenomenon is the one that the world is reflecting back upon in its ways and means. She mentioned that recent epidemics and pandemics that have occurred are the Asian Flu and the Swine Flu caused by H1N1 virus in 1957 and 2009 respectively.

Prof. Mukherjee then went on to argue that Capitalism and Patriarchy have together been responsible for oppressive practices that have subjugated women in general. She also made mention of several Marxist thinkers in this context. She referred to Friedrich Engles’ work titled, ‘The Origin of Family, Private Propert and the State’ and threw light upon how women are disregarded in the domestic sphere. Prof. Mukherjee divided the central theme of her presentation into three sub-segments, namely, economic, social and healthcare aspects within which she laid out the present conditions of women in the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic. In the social context vis-à-vis the present Pandemic, she argued that the female population is at the brink of the economic misery with them having been largely part of the informal sector of economy. As portions of the unorganized sector they have lost jobs, lost livelihoods and their bases of social respect. Within the social sphere, the women, Professor Mukherjee opined have faced serious challenges with domestic violence being meted out against them. She also talked

about how the World Health Organisation, the topmost health regulatory international forum has remained silent on the issues of reproductive rights of women during the Pandemic. She suggested that contraceptive measures and clinical abortions have become difficult for women to access in the period of lockdown. In the context of Healthcare, Prof. Mukherjee argued that women who are regarded as caregivers in the domestic sphere contribute in huge numbers as healthcare workers in the public domain as well. She submitted that women face discrimination in this sphere as well with lack and shortage of protective gears. Also, the PPE's are manufactured in keeping with the male standards. She concluded her presentation stating that social protective measures that have a bearing in other aspects of women's lives in this Pandemic need to be made available and implementable in order to make room for survival strategies of the female population in the current situation.

The presentation was followed by a question-answer session conducted by Ms. Minakshi Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, BHKM. Out of the many queries addressed to Professor. Nibedita Mukherjee with regard to her presentation, some that merit attention are on issues pertaining to reproductive rights of women, the institution of marriage as a construct to restrain women and so on.

The next and final speaker of the day's Webinar, Dr. Ketaki Datta was introduced by, Ms. Prajna Paromita Podder, Assistant Professor (HOD), Department of History, BHKM. Dr. Ketaki Datta, the keynote speaker of the second session of the Webinar serves as an Associate Professor of English at Bidhannagar College (Govt).

Professor Datta provided with various literary insights of Women associated with Pandemics that have struck in the history of humankind. She referred to poems and verses from Western Literature tracing the plight of women in times of plagues and pandemics. She suggested while mentioning of a prose written during the Spanish Flu of 1918 that with more deaths occurring among the male population then, movements associated with equal suffrage rights and equal pay of women gained impetus during 1918-1923. Dr. Datta went on to argue that this phenomenon accounted for a progressive stance in times that were ravaged with patriarchal norms and practices.

Talking about the present COVID-19 Pandemic she brought forth her personal accounts to substantiate the notion of discriminatory practices troubling women at present. She made mention of a woman from Bihar, during one of her train journey. She had found out in course of her conversation with the woman that she was a construction worker in Delhi who had migrated from Bihar. With this woman Prof. Datta had exchanged contact details then. This same woman called her up after the imposition of lockdown on the March 25, 2020. This construction worker's encounter with the Dr. Datta had exposed her to the harsh realities of a woman working in an unorganized sector who went jobless after the lockdown and whose economic woes added to the rest of her deprivation. Prof. Datta provided several such personal accounts in order to highlight the miseries of the female population during the period of lockdown imposed due to the Pandemic.

Dr. Datta also suggested that the lockdown has implied different things to different women. In this context she mentioned of a child who is a victim of incest, whom she had invited to come and stay with her in order to save her from the act. Although the social distancing, the strategy helped the child to keep away from the perpetrator, she feared what her plight would be after the lockdown and COVID-19 fear ends. Dr. Datta also talked about her personal encounters with some female students who were exposed to trauma and fear due to the extended and restricted indoor staying to whom she suggested and provided therapeutic healing.

The lecture was followed by a question-answer session conducted by Ms. Minakshi Biswas, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, BHKM. This segment was subsequently followed by a Vote of Thanks delivered by Ms. Sumita Chatterjee, Assistant Professor(HOD), Department of Education, BHKM.



One Day State Level Webinar on  
COVID-19 and It's Impact on Women

Organized by  
Women's Cell, Bamanpukur Humayun Kabir Mahavidyalaya,  
Minakhan, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal 743425

Date: 14<sup>th</sup> August, Friday, 2020  
Time: 3.00P.M.-5.00P.M.

Concept Note

COVID-19 has been inflicting death and destruction all over the world. However preliminary figures show that the mortality rate is higher for men potentially due to sex-based immunological reasons. But research on previous epidemics, such as SARS and Ebola and the ongoing evidence of COVID 19 indicates that women are impacted differently by health crises and epidemics. Already the pandemic has been declared a disaster for gender justice. At a time when people are confined within their homes in a locked down situation women live in a higher risk from the perspective of health issues as it increases their vulnerability to experience exploitation and abuse in the hands of close family members. The scars of abuse, visible and invisible remain on their lives forever. Feminism has been locked-down and the progress of achieving gender-equality seems to be slowing down, arrested in the hand cuffs of the pandemic. We are wearing masks to keep the virus at bay but the brutalities of patriarchy have been ruthlessly unmasked during the pandemic. As we stand witness to such unprecedented times our response must be informed, urgent and historic for women as far as possible. This Webinar aims to focus on the state of women in general and how the pandemic has deepened existing chasms and inequalities in our society by escalating its effects.

PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

OF  
One Day State Level Webinar on  
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Organized by  
**Women's Cell, Bamanpukur Humayun Kabir Mahavidyalaya,**  
**Bamanpukur, North 24 Parganas, West Bengal 743425**  
14<sup>th</sup> August, Friday, 2020

S/no	Event	Person
1.	Introduction of the Webinar and invitation to Principal for inaugural speech	Madhu Srivastav
2.	Invitation and introduction of first resource person- Dr. Nibedita Mukherjee	Dr. Runa Das Chaudhuri
4.	Invitation and introduction of second resource person- Dr. Ketaki Dutta	Prajna Paromita Podder
5.	Discussion of Questions and Answers arising from the talk.	Minakshi Biswas
6.	Vote of thanks	Sumita Chatterjee

Resource Persons



Dr Nibedita Mukherjee  
Professor of English  
Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University



Dr Ketaki Datta  
Associate Professor of English  
Bidhannagar College (Govt.)

**Patron: Dr. Subhash Biswas, Principal,**  
**Bamanpukur Humayun Kabir Mahavidyalaya.**

**Organizing Secretary and Convenor**  
**Madhu Srivastav**  
**H.O.D Dept. of English**

**Organizing Committee**  
Smt. Sumita Chatterjee  
Smt. Prajna Paromita Podder  
Dr. Runa Das Chaudhuri  
Smt. Minakshi Biswas  
Smt. Sukanya Mallik

Click [here](https://forms.gle/1iqZMtiDUJwankTJ6) for registration: <https://forms.gle/1iqZMtiDUJwankTJ6>

\*Platform: Google Meet. Entry will be on a first come first basis. Link will be given to registered participants by email.

\*No registration fee is required.

\*Participants will receive e-certificates on successful submission of duly filled in feedback form after 15 days following the webinar.

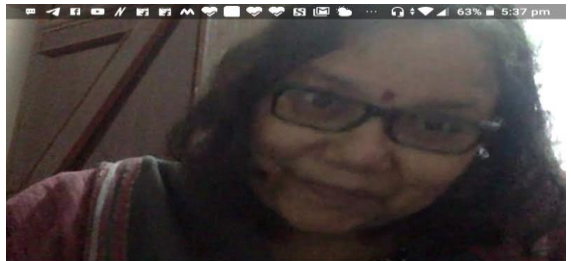
\* All participants are requested to join google meet 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the webinar.



- (8)
- Sumita Chatterjee (You)
  - Runa Daschoudhuri
  - Madhu Sriwastav
  - Prajna Paromita Podder
- Others in the meeting (4)
- June Mallik
  - minakshi biswas **NEW**



- (47)
- Sumita Chatterjee (You)
  - Runa Daschoudhuri
  - Madhu Sriwastav
  - Subhash Biswas
- Others in the meeting (43)
- Afreen Begum
  - Alice Gomes



- (40)
- Sumita Chatterjee (You)
  - minakshi biswas
  - Madhu Sriwastav
  - Ketaki Datta
- Others in the meeting (36)
- adity lama
  - Afreen Begum



- (48)
- Sumita Chatterjee (You)
  - Biswajit Das
  - Nibedita Mukherjee
  - Nibedita Mukherjee
- Others in the meeting (44)
- adity lama
  - Alice Gomes