

# DIRTY PICTURE

BY: SANYUKTA SAHA

IQBAL HASAN'S PAINTING of a young woman sitting on a chair with an older woman standing beside her makes for the cover of Anuradha Marwah's third and latest novel *Dirty Picture*. As a reader and someone who has seen these paintings in a plush Lahore restaurant called *The Cuckoo's Den*, incidentally located in the heart of the city's red light area, I immediately identified it as one of several painted by the artist to document the lives of prostitutes in this area. Most locals are shy of admitting to the existence of prostitution in the city. For them, the red light area in the fortified city still has certain *mujra* performances by 'artists' and nothing else. The painting illustrates in brush strokes what Anuradha Marwah documents in words – exploitation of women and the lower classes through a deep-rooted mechanism of inequitable gender constructions often obfuscated by ill-disguised hypocrisy.

The novel has been read as a fictionalised documentation of the [Ajmer Sex Scandal](#) of 1992. However, *Dirty Picture*, tracing the personal narratives of two sisters Reena and Bharti, uses the incident as a site to critique exploitation at the levels of gender and class.

Reena and Bharti live very different lives yet their narratives absurdly merge into each other's forthright questions about notions of love and consent. Reena, divorced from a man who was struggling with substance abuse, is engaged to the married CEO of the company that employs her. She lives a seemingly comfortable life in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai weaving dreams of a married life with her boss, Suhas, a middle-aged man inebriated by the power he wields.

In Ajmer, Bharti lives a life driven by idealism and a desire to make a difference to the parochial town and its regressive outlook. To gain clout in college politics, she befriends local politicians Anish and Sarosh, which in itself is a scandal as these are Muslim men. Sucked into a vortex of political intrigue, Bharti finds herself involved in a sex racket with no one to turn to and nowhere to go. She looks at her sister for help in the hope of escaping an Alcatraz of impending shame but Reena is caught up in her relationship, which she realizes will never evolve into more than that of mistress.

A novel that gains momentum with each word hurtling towards its fatalistic conclusion, this reads more like a journalistic account than a work of fiction. The universe of *Dirty Picture* has no clean edges to it. The world of Reena and Bharti leave the readers with a keen sense of discomfort. The journalistic gaze gains strength in the section on the making of the blue film where the writer assumes a stationary camera angle and pens an otherwise traumatic imagery in monotone, thus de-fetishising the woman's body. De-

sensationalising the issue was the writer's concern and the literary tools that she uses to describe the sexual scenes in the novel achieve the purpose quite effectively.

Marwah's writing has often been called manly. This refers perhaps to the way she handles sex in her works. According to her, when people say she does not write like a woman, they mean her writing is not internal and domesticated. She says this is only a perception about fiction by women. She herself finds writing an exercise in androgyny. The demeanour of the book as well as the attitude to writing seems like a simultaneous exercise in involvement and objectivity for the writer.

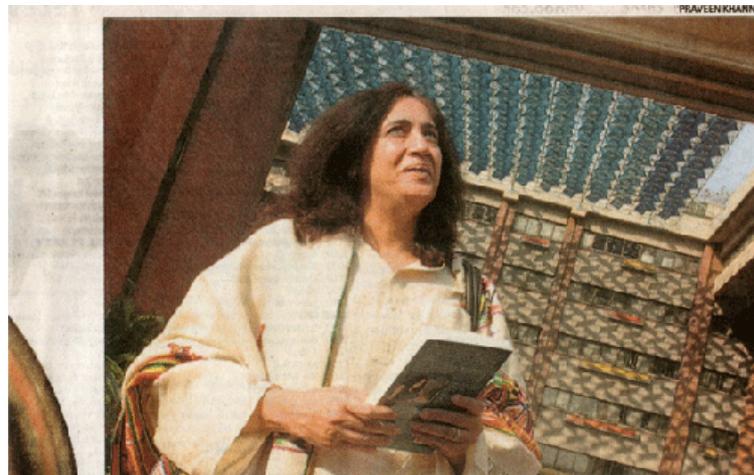
Unlike her first two novels, *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* and *Idol Love*, which negotiate the space between the personal and the political without locating a concrete political centre, Marwah's third novel is honest, brave and candid. She fleshes out each character — even the 'villains' — so non-judgmentally that they could be any of us. The nonchalant prose disallows prejudice as reader's judgments too are suspended and deferred, nudged towards a desire for deeper analysis. During her extensive research for the novel, the writer came across a number of reactions and observations to the scandal. She documents some of these in the introduction to her novel: 'Ajmer tapes' are still freely available in the blue-film circuit. Muslim men consider it their obligation to 'spoil' Hindu girls. The real culprits have escaped; the arrested men are scapegoats. The real culprits are bureaucrats and politicians; the arrested men are scapegoats. Why did the girls keep going back to their tormentors? Could it be that they were enjoying the sex act? Certain Hindu sub-communities have issued whips against their boys marrying girls from Ajmer. Three of the girls involved in the sex scandal have committed suicide. It wasn't suicide; the families murdered their girls to escape the stigma. What else could they have done?'

The victims of the scandal either committed suicide or are leading their lives in anonymity denying any association to the scandal that shocked the whole country. The victims have been coerced by the same socio-political paradigms to erase or at least pretend to erase all memory of the event. *Dirty Picture* challenges such an erasure, the coercive structures that first conceive and then erase such shameful memories, the facade of notions of women's emancipation within such structures, and most importantly, the networks that centres of power operate to veil their existence.

As Manju Kapoor, the author of *Difficult Daughters* writes, "This is a story that needs to be told, but because of its complexity, it is not an easy story to tell. But Anuradha persisted, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude that she did. This particular incident at least will not be covered by the dust of ages."

*Dirty Picture*, Author: Anuradha Marwah, Delhi: Indialog Publications  
November 2008, Price: Rs 195.

(Dirty Picture - a book review, published by Ultra Violet in November 2009)  
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## Healing through stories

Anuradha Marwah's creative writing workshops bring children together

DANISH SHAFI

**T**ALKING of traumatised children upsets her but then she says in a firm voice, "These children need to be worked on because the adults have messed up."

And that's what Anuradha Marwah has been doing through her creative classes. With communalism as the main theme—she focuses on gender and class issues too—she has taken these workshops to Kashmir and Rajasthan and some other parts of the country too.

"In Gulmarg, we took 25 Kashmiri Pandit children from refugee camps in Jammu and Delhi and 25 children from the Valley," she says. "We divided these children into two mixed groups and asked them to come up with stories," she adds.

In these workshops, Marwah would give these children a situation and ask them to add to it and develop a story around it. "The result of the workshop was mind blowing," she remembers. "At the end of the workshop, the children performed a play to a packed house in Srinagar," she adds. "One of the girls who was with us at Gulmarg has now published two short stories," she says.

Marwah started conducting these workshops for public school children in

Delhi after the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002 but wasn't too happy with the outcome. She then started organising workshops for children in slums and the response she got there gave her a "deep sense of satisfaction that she did not get anywhere else".

But why did she choose creative writing to interact with the children? "They will learn to empathise not just at an intellectual level but also at an emotional level," she answers.

Marwah who teaches English at Zakir Husain College, also writes. "My latest novel, *Dirty Picture*, was inspired by the Ajmer sex scandal in 1992 that involved school going girls," she says. "Not unlike Nithari, even in this case the childhood of these children was snatched away."

In the novel, she has talked about the trauma of the girls. Drawing a parallel with Nithari, she says, "I felt the need to tell the story of those girls. In such cases, the attention is never on the children."

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HOME / IN CONVERSATION / **ANURADHA MARWAH**

# Anuradha Marwah

January 10, 2013 | **Manish Chand**

**?** Novelist Anuradha Marwah is no stranger to desire and its daemons. If *Idol Love*, her second novel, was about the suicidal sadness of unrequited love in an India that was becoming vulnerable to seductions of religious zealots, her latest novel *Dirty Picture* is an unflinching look at soul sickness that underlies sexual exploitation in an increasingly promiscuous society.

In this conversation with Manish Chand, Roy speaks about the creative challenges of transforming a real-life sex scandal in small-town India into the redemptive fiction of her new novel, choices faced by her in exploring themes of sexuality and pornography and the liberating impulse that animates a writer in a society awash with consumerist distractions.

Excerpts from the interview:

**Q) Your latest novel *Dirty Picture* is based on a real-life sex scandal in Ajmer? How did you grapple with the creative challenges of transmuting real life incidents into fiction?**

**?** As it was a sex scandal that I was writing about the foremost challenge was to de-sensationalise. I knew I had to write in a way that would leave no room for titillation – otherwise the ‘real’ story, or at least the one I was attempting to tell, would get obfuscated.

I decided on a very simple and direct style – aiming at the heart of violence. Otherwise, compared with my first two, there were few qualitative differences in the way I approached this novel. I researched but then I had researched for my second novel as well. The concerns were the same too – the story should hang together, the characters should be convincing. I think the principles of writing fiction don't change whether you take off from facts or imagination. You have to stay up in air and make a successful landing on ground reality.

## **Q) Dirty Picture is quite different from your last novel Idol Love in theme and style? What provoked you to choose the theme of sexual exploitation of young women in small-town India?**

Having grown up in Ajmer, I know the place rather well. When the news reports started coming out, I became Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. I wanted to tell everybody what had happened.

It was the nude picture of a young girl that crashed into my life one unsuspecting morning, which made me write Dirty Picture. Her eyes in the newspaper picture were blotted out. Fully dressed men with lascivious eyes flanked her on either side, fondling a breast each. What devastated me was her hair – it was plaited into neat braids. She was obviously a schoolgirl. Dirty Picture is the story of that girl and the eyes I created for her.

The social concerns that writing about this subject implies, came after the subject had chosen me. It isn't as though coercion and blackmail don't take place in big cities. Sex scandals have been reported not only from Ajmer, Jalgaon, Jaipur and Jammu, but also from Delhi. However, it cannot be denied that the claustrophobic and sexist nature of small town societies makes it easier for the exploiters to get away with sex crimes.

## **Q) As a writer and a woman, what choices and dilemmas you faced in handling sexual abuse and pornography in your novel?**

My biggest fear was earning 'under-the-pillow' kind of reputation and I worked hard to overcome it. I think this novel has turned out to be my most mature and maturing work. I was also doing activist theatre focusing on child-rights and women's rights all through the writing. I couldn't have written it feeling weak and vulnerable.

At my book release Manju Kapur remarked that as far as dealing with sex and politics is concerned “Anuradha is not a woman”. She was talking about women’s writing and how it is falsely constructed as internal and domestic. Anyway, writing is often androgynous. While dealing with sexual abuse and pornography I was metaphorically getting under the skin of the exploiters and in the process putting them down.

**Q) There is a fair amount of politics in your novel also, with dark hints of Muslim men seducing and raping Hindu girls that could lend itself to a communal twist. Treating such a potentially volatile issue requires a lot of courage and tact, which you have done with a great deal of sensitivity. How did you manage it?**

The theme of communal strife is not new in my writing. *Idol Love* was about Hindu fundamentalism and what it did to women and minorities. In *Dirty Picture* it is clear that the sex scandal didn’t take place only because of a handful of criminal men – majority of who happened to be Muslim; it took place also because society imposes an unrealistic code of sexual conduct on women and allows too much leeway to privileged men. As I understand it, the real story of the Ajmer sex scandal is neither about communal prejudice nor sexual perversions; it is about gender iniquity and class exploitation.

I think one of the objectives of literature is to hold a mirror to society. A publisher I went to asked me to change the religion of the men – make the book more ‘politically correct’. I did not go along with the suggestion because I felt that it was important to reveal how communal prejudice had played a retarding role in both preventing the girls from seeking help and then later, in the selective dispensation of justice.

**Q) There are many sexually explicit passages in your novel. Did you feel self-conscious writing them? How do you see**

## **the larger problem writers face in evoking acts of intimacy?**

Frankly, deciding to tell the story of a sex scandal is to leave notions of 'sharam' (shame!) behind. Any censorship – especially self-censorship – would have falsified the story.

Of course, it is not easy to write about sex. There are also obvious discouragements. For instance, in England there is 'bad sex award' – awarded annually by 'Literary Review' – that is given 'on the most pretentious, tasteless, embarrassing, otiose, self-infatuated or redundant description of the sexual act'. There may not be a similar award in India but the literary establishment doesn't take too kindly to sexual themes.

## **Q) In all your novels, you explore desire and its daemons. What other themes and obsessions haunt you every time you sit down to write?**

To quote Ghalib's famous lines: "Hazaaron khwaishein aisi ki har khwaishe pe dum nikle; bahut nikle merein armaan lekin phir bhi kam nikle." In my idiosyncratic translation, " My desires are immense and so powerful that I could die for each one of them; some of my wishes were fulfilled but alas, too few."

Desire and its manifestations is a theme enough for several lifetimes. Another obsession that brings me to writing is language and its many possibilities.

## **Q) You teach English literature at a college in New Delhi. How do you see the relationship between academia and creative writing? Do you think literary theory and criticism can help you become a better writer?**

I believe we write with what we are and each facet of the writer's identity feeds into the writing. Literary theory and criticism make one more self-conscious about one's style and subject matter. It is how the writer uses the self-knowledge that would determine the success or failure of the writing.

Also, care has to be taken to not let the academic vocabulary obstruct the natural flow of creativity.

No, I don't think literary theory and criticism help automatically in creative writing. David Lodge – to give one example – has used them as his subject matter in his campus novels. But an academic theme is certainly not creative by definition.

## **Q) You are writing a book on creative writing? There aren't too many creative writing courses or workshops in India. Do you think creative writing courses and workshops really help?**

Creative writing workshops or courses cannot create a writer. They are intended to identify and hone creative talent and they are successful sometimes. However, as they are introspective as contrasted with information-heavy courses, they can act as a corrective to our syllabi. They convey a 'feel of creativity' to the students and make them sensitive to language and form.

I think it is a good time for Indian Universities to introduce Creative Writing. Delhi University already has – our book is for DU – and NCERT too is planning a book for senior school. Indian writing in English is taking off. There are a lot of young people who want to write. It would help if published writers become their mentors and guide them. Also, creative writing courses might ultimately lead to increased professionalism by raising editing and publishing standards.

## **Q) Do you write every day? How do you plan your day in terms of writing? Do you have an audience in mind when you write?**

When I am in the throes of creativity I write every minute I can spare. Otherwise, I do make it a point to touch base every day – even if it occasionally means only rereading previous work. Because of various roles – writer, lecturer, mother, theatre activist, cook – that I play, it is difficult to plan the day in any reasonable manner.

When I write I want to reach out – so the imagined audience is large and diverse.

## **Q) Do you see Indian society becoming more promiscuous?**

I do perceive a weakening of ethical standards in sexual matters but this decline is in piece with the opportunism evident in – say – the economic sphere. Our society is in transition and often the globe whirls too fast for us. We're definitely more confused now than we were before. The Mumbai portions of Dirty Picture where a CEO makes false promises to a young woman who works for him are indicative of hypocrisy and what is made to pass in the name of liberalism.

## **Q) How do you see the role of a writer in an increasingly consumerist society?**

In an increasingly consumerist society I think it is the role of literature to draw attention to what is essential and important. Too much of life – especially in the middle classes – is devoted to fluff. The concern of the writer should be to restore gravitas.

## **Q) Finally, why do you write? How does the process of writing transform you as an individual?**

I believe fiction can play an important therapeutic role. D.H. Lawrence famously observed, "We shed our sickness in our books." It is also true of societies. They diagnose and cure themselves in and through their fictions. I write about things that disturb me deeply; I write with an urge to bring about a change.

Yes, I think I am constantly growing and changing through my writing.

### **Author Profile**



**Manish Chand**

Manish Chand is Founder-CEO and Editor-in-Chief of India Writes Network ([www.indiawrites.org](http://www.indiawrites.org)) and India and World, a pioneering magazine focused on international affairs. He is CEO/Director of TGII Media Private Limited, an India-based media, publishing, research and consultancy company.

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ANURADHA MARWAH'S DIRTY PICTURE:  
TRANSVERSAL PERFORMANCE AND THE POETICS OF  
DISEMBODIMENT

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I

—We need to learn in our bodies . . . how to attach  
the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where  
we are and are not in dimensions of mental and physical space we hardly  
know how to name.“

--- Donna Haraway

Does the very notion of public sphere stem from a masculinist ideology? Is it a thoroughly compromised ideology dependent on a politics of embodiment which produces disciplined bodies? Is it possible for embodied subjects to reframe the cartography of the public sphere through a poetics of disembodiment? Is the idea of the public sphere a utopian concept or an instrument of domination? These are some of the challenges one has to confront while attempting to negotiate the heavily contested public sphere. At one level, the idea of the public sphere designates an institutional mechanism for "rationalizing" political domination by rendering states accountable to some of the citizenry. At another level, it designates a specific kind of discursive interaction. Here the public sphere connotes an ideal of unrestricted rational discussion of public matters. The discussion is to be open and accessible to all; merely private interests are to be inadmissible; inequalities of status are to be bracketed; and discussants are to deliberate

as peers. The result of such discussion would be "public opinion" in the strong sense of a consensus about the common good. In this way, at one level, the thought of general society circle assigns an institutional component for "vindicating" political command by rendering states responsible to some of the citizenry. At an alternate level, it assigns a particular sort of rambling collaboration. Here people in general circle imply unlimited objective examination of open matters. The talk is to be open and available to all; simply private diversions are to be forbidden; imbalances of status are to be sectioned; and discussants are to consider as companions. The after-effect of such exchange would be "general sentiment" in the solid feeling of an agreement about the benefit of all (Habermas 23-46).

Informed by these ideas, this paper reveals how Anuradha Marwah has charted the clearly defined boundaries of the public and the private spheres as separate and transparent units which locate the disciplined female body in the murky, obscure, and often ungratifying mosaic of human experience. However, Marwah has also shown within her account that the notion of the passive and inscribed body can be challenged by remapping the public sphere through a transversal performance and a poetics of disembodiment. *Dirty Picture* offers a new cartography for understanding women's lives in relation to the restructured public sphere which recognises the permeability of the body. This allows the body to interact with and react against the politics of embodiment and create a poetics of disembodiment. Marwah has convincingly scripted the poetics of disembodiment which encompasses the body's struggles for acquisition of agency while discarding the traditional notions of fixed boundaries and static borders.

Anuradha Marwah's *Dirty Picture* made a controversial splash into the Indian literary horizon with its release in 2007. The blurb of the book aptly describes its intent and objectives:

*Dirty Picture* is the story of two sisters whose liaisons create scandal in a small town. Leaving her husband's home in Bombay, Reena returns to Ajmer wearing the ring of a married CEO. She intends to rebuild her life even if it means stepping out of convention. Meanwhile, her teenage sister Bharti has stumbled into local politics. Although imbued with a reformatory zeal, she gets sucked into a veritable quagmire of sexual intrigue because of her naivety and inexperience.

While Bharti's life begins to disintegrate, dragging all around her into a nightmare of exploitation, Reena struggles to keep her castle in the air from imminent collapse. Circumstances become inexorable as the moral brigade closes in on the hapless Bharti and Reena discovers that the CEO is more in love with his image on T.V. Anuradha Marwah writes feelingly

about desire, abuse and small town society. Her searing third novel imaginatively explores the 'sex scandal' that shook Ajmer in the 1990s and raises deeply disturbing questions about love and consent.

In *Dirty Picture* Anuradha Marwah documents the sexploitation of women through a deep-rooted mechanism of inequitable gender constructions often obfuscated by ill-disguised hypocrisy. The novel has been read as a fictionalised documentation of the Ajmer sex scandal of 1992. However, *Dirty Picture* traces the personal narratives of two sisters Reena and Bharti, and uses the incident as a site to critique exploitation in the public sphere. Reena and Bharti live very different lives, yet their narratives absurdly merge into each other's forthright questions about notions of love and consent. Reena, divorced from a man who was struggling with substance abuse, is engaged to the married CEO of the company that employs her. She lives a seemingly comfortable life in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai weaving dreams of a married life with her boss, Suhas, a middle-aged man inebriated by the power he wields. In Ajmer, Bharti lives a life driven by idealism and a desire to make a difference to the parochial town and its regressive outlook. To gain clout in college politics, she befriends local politicians Anees and Sarosh, which in itself is a scandal as these are Muslim men. Sucked into a vortex of political intrigue, Bharti finds herself involved in a sex racket with no one to turn to and nowhere to go. She looks at her sister for help in the hope of escaping an Alcatraz of impending shame but Reena is caught up in her relationship, which she realizes will never evolve into more than that of mistress.

While reciprocating Brownmiller's views in "Pornography Hurts Women" (36-38), Marwah suggests that pornography is not the only purveyor of sexist violence in our society. One has only to watch a small selection of mainstream media to see more such sexist violence, as well as a plethora of other societal ills. Television, advertisements, movies, art, music, pop literature: all support the insidious idea that women are victims and should be subordinate to men. Soap operas perpetuate the impression that women are incomplete somehow without a man, and that the only roles available to a young girl are either nurturers and/or mothers or sexually free "bad girls"; advertisements show objectified portions of women in unnatural, pseudo-artistic poses; movies deliberately mix sex with violence, as if to say women want to be hurt; classical art classically depicts men as powerful and active, but women as passive, useful mostly for nude studies or to be acted upon by men; and some modern music seems to teach

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a message of hate and violence towards not just women, but everyone.

Marwah believes that one must start somewhere, and pornography is one of the worst offenders. However, she points out again that such a pervasive assumption (that women are victims, and subordinate to men) will not be

excised from the public mind simply by outlawing all sexually explicit materials. Furthermore, in order to censor effectively, one must eliminate all of the undesired materials from the society. Passing a law will not eliminate all pornography -- it will merely force sexual freedom of expression underground, and make it a highly desired "forbidden fruit." This will mean that pornography will increase in demand and popularity -- the opposite of Marwah's stated goal. Thus criminalization of pornography cannot improve society's view of women or stop sexist violence. Better by far for us to address concrete examples of sexist violence to actual individuals, and teach both women and the rest of society that such behavior will not and should not be tolerated.

To achieve her goal of exposing the deep rooted male pornographic imagination in our society, Marwah begins by reviewing the patriarchal structure of our society, goes on to expose the sexualisation of public sphere, and suggests the need for an alternative voice that can both resist victimization of women and structural transformation of the public sphere. The society depicted in *Dirty Picture* is hugely patriarchal which acts as the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It's a world in which women are defined as submissive, passive, and virtually inert. Their sexual definition is one of —masochistic passivityll:

—masochisticll because even men recognize their systematic sadism against women; —passivityll not because women are naturally passive, but because their chains are very heavy and as a result, they cannot move. In this society, the norm of masculinity is phallic aggression. Male sexuality is, by definition, intensely and rigidly phallic. A man's identity is located in his conception of himself, as the possessor of a phallus; a man's worth is located in his pride in phallic identity. The main characteristic of phallic identity is that worth is entirely contingent on the possession of a phallus. Since men have no other criteria for worth, no other notion of identity, those who do not have phalluses are not recognized as fully human.

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All these point to the idea of sexual politics of fear and courage—that is, how fear is learned as a function of femininity; and how courage is the red badge of masculinity. I believe that we are all products of the culture in which we live; and that in order to understand what we think of as our personal experiences, we must understand first how the culture informs what we see and how we understand. In other words, the culture in which we live determines for us to an astonishing degree how we perceive, what we perceive, how we name and value our experiences, how and why we act at

all. The first fact of this culture is that it is male supremacist: that is, men are, by birthright, law, custom, and habit, systematically and consistently defined as superior to women. Bharti understands this harsh reality about a daughter as she ruminates:

Papa makes too much of his older daughter, thought Bharti. Reena was considered the beauty of the family. Although Bharti was supposed to be quite a looker in school, according to family legend she was the 'responsible' one. Her father called her the 'son' of the home. Of course a son who also did everything a daughter is traditionally expected to do – cook, clean, serve. There's no escaping a daughter's destiny in Ajmer, Bharti complained to herself. (11)

Now, the terrible truth is that in patriarchy, possession of a phallus is the sole signet of worth, the touchstone of human identity. All positive human attributes are seen as inherent in and consequences of that single biological accident. Intellect, moral discernment, creativity, imagination—all are male, or phallic, faculties. When any woman develops any one of these faculties, she is told either that she is striving to behave—like a man or that she is—masculine. Women are made to learn fear as a function of their so-called femininity. Women are taught systematically to be afraid, and they are taught that to be afraid not only is congruent with femininity, but also inheres in it. Women are taught to be afraid so that they will not be able to act, so that they will be passive, so that they will be women—so that they will be, as Aristotle put it so charmingly, —afflicted with a natural defectiveness. ||

Bharti is neither the good nor the bad girl. She looks at the all pervasive world of patriarchy from a progressivist's perspective. She thinks that entering the realms of public sphere in a hugely paternalistic world is easy and rewarding. But, Reena understands the masculine order very well and decides to protect Bharti from the onslaught of masculinity:

Bharti was still young and unschooled in the way of the world. It was her duty to prevent those politicians

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Reena's who has

from taking advantage of her sister's innocence. Bharti was too young to understand that men are always out to take advantage of women. Especially in a place like Ajmer where even to get to talk to a girl like Bharti they would have to come up with a convincing reason. Youth Party, pah! Why should they want to recruit Bharti except because she is lovely young girl! (21)

apprehensions find a parallel in Simone de Beauvoir expressed similar concerns in *The Second Sex*:

In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not. . . like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas

woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. . . .—The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities, I said Aristotle; —we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness. II And St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an —imperfect man, II an —incidental III being... Thus, humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. (76)

However, Bharti does not learn the harsh realities of the paternalistic world until she is subjected to its horrendous face. She is date-raped by her acquaintance Saros who, along with Anees, has lured her into the world of masculine enterprises. Bharti realises with a shudder that the entry into the masculine world - the public sphere - demands a huge ransom from a woman. The patriarchal world never accepted her radical and transformative ideologies, for these are the prerogatives men enjoy. She now understands that being a woman in a socio-cultural context where women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others is a greater challenge than her aspirations. Even Saros confesses to the strange 'unusualness' in Bharti's attitude:

'unusual'

She was an unusual girl and it was impossible to predict what she would do. She spoke of masculine things like rising prices, elections, and Party politics. Her plans for the future sounded androgynous as though she expected to step into her father's shoes.... Saros felt it was shameful the way her father was projecting her into the male world. (35)

Apart from the scorn directed towards Bharti for her attitude, she is also subjected to sexual

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objectification – a powerful tool of control employed by patriarchy to dominate and colonise the public sphere. Her sexual objectification occurs when her body is separated from her as a person and she is viewed primarily as a physical object of male sexual desire. She, like most women, is portrayed in ways that emphasise her body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects. In addition, she is portrayed by men around her in a manner that makes her frequently the target of men's sexist comments (e.g., use of deprecating words to describe her), sexual remarks (e.g., comments about her body parts), and behaviors (e.g., ogling, leering, harassment). There are many occasions when Bharti's personhood has been stripped and she has been referred to as an object for physical pleasure. On one such occasion Anees reaffirms this:

On their way back, Anees put an arm around Sarosh's shoulder,

—Seems to me, Miyan, you have forgotten the purpose of this exercise. II

— Which exercise, Aneesbai? Sarosh asked, still inebriated by wine and women.

— The purpose of seducing Bharti. Anees replied.

— The purpose?

— Yes, remember we are all this for the furtherance of our careers. (67)

This is an example of how faced with the need to reaffirm his manhood in a patriarchal system, men grapple to find an outlet to express their sexual dominance. Because men can never satisfy their sexual appetite, their sexual obsession becomes normalised through sexualising and pornographising the female body. Male domination of public sphere is carried out by three powerful tools – reification, pornographisation, and victimisation of women. Men around Bharti resort to these tools to contain her from entering the prized masculine sphere. They experience a rage which calls for normalisation through pornography as —pornography can sexualize that rage, and it can make sex look like revenge... Most men feel powerless and are often angry at women, whom they perceive as having sexual power over them: the power to arouse them and to give or withhold sex (hooks 83). When Bharti is gangraped by Anees and Mukesh in the farmhouse, her victimisation enters a new and ugly realm from where there is no escape for her (108-109).

Following her gang-rape, Bharti is forced to comply with a series of sexual exploitations by Sarosh, Anees, Mukesh and uncountable men. Besides, she is also forced to lure scores of girls from her school to be sexually exploited. These harrowing experiences renders 'the once vociferous' Bharti silent.

Once known for her progressive political

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ideologies, Bharti gradually delves into a realm of silence and prefers to suffer tight lipped. The principal cause of her suffering is the inability to voice her pain and afflictions which engulf her in a post traumatic stress disorder. Bharti experiences chronic distress through acute reactions to her rape including heightened fear, increased avoidance, and symptomatic responses. She remains fearful of stigma, blame, and public disclosure after her assault; and her rape becomes a risk factor for major depression. In an important study (National Victims Center), rape victims were four times more likely than non-victims to have contemplated suicide and thirteen times more likely to have actually made a suicide attempt. Having been unable to recover her voice against the outrage and cope with her post traumatic stress disorder, Bharti puts an end to her life.

Dirty Picture recounts the ugly realities of paternalistic societies which operate through strategic exploitation of women. Marwah juxtaposes Bharti's descent into silence with her elder sister Reena's reclaiming of her voice. While Bharti fails to narrativise her trauma, Reena engages in a transversal

performance to expose the ugly realities of patriarchy and write the poetics of disembodiment. Reena, unlike Bharti, has no political ambitions, and her sole aim is lead a life fulfillment. She has emerged successfully from a disastrous marriage which seemed to choke her individuality. She is a typical Mills and Boon romance girl who dreams of her prince charming. In Suhas, a promising businessman, she finds an emotional mainstay which offers her with dreams of a new and settled life. Suhas, who does not get along with his wife, turns to Reena for an emotional and 'physical' recourse. Reena is flooded with promises of a wonderful life by Suhas. All this seem to be heading towards a happy and satisfying ending until Reena discovers the harsh realities of patriarchal world. Bharti is subjected to severe punishment for trying to make inroads into the male sphere, whereas Reena is meted out deceit for demanding too much. Both of them are sexually objectified and to the extent of disappearing as human beings. While Sarosh and his friends use Bharti and her friends as commodities by tearing into their flesh, Suhas plays with Reena's body parts to keep him emotionally stable. Both Bharti and Reena are forced to bear the most formative traumas, daily suffering and pain. The abuse they live through, the terror they live with are unspeakable because pornography silences women.

So, pornography is not defined by sexual explicitness but rather by its fusion of sexuality with male dominance and female submission. It is a general problem for oppressed people, not specific to women's oppression because oppression silences, fighting oppression requires

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developing voices, languages, and cultural and interpretive matrices for the articulation of women's experiences. It is difficult for both Bharti and Reena name their experiences and describe their worlds, for oppression puts them in a double bind. If they tell how things seem to them, they will be viewed as either complicit or crazy. Bharti's loss of voice and her inability to narrativise her traumatic experiences can be attributed to the fear of being singled out by men, their agents, and their culture as a troublemaker. Her isolation is real in that she is avoided, or ignored, or chastised, or denounced. Her victimization leads to her silence and she puts an end to her life. Both Bharti and Reena are victims of intimate partner rape which spells disaster for them. Bharti fails to raise her voice, but being raped does grant Reena's voice – the voice of the victim. Bharti's unspeakable truth finds an alternative voice in Reena as her speech becomes much more verbose and wandering as she ponders the consequences of her victimization. Reena is not silenced as her speech shows an example of how charged female language can challenge gender

power relations in a very political manner. When she meets Suhas, she replies to his 'love' saying:

Not anymore. Not since I found out that Bharti, my sister was one of the girls caught in the sex scandal. The man who took her there must have also told her he loved her. By the way, her clothes didn't catch fire, Suhas....

—She didn't understand, Suhas. My sister went away because of the shame she felt. But now I am confused. It all seems shameful to me too: love, marriage, sex! I can't distinguish between love and lust. You who betrayed me, are you a rapist too?|| (280)

The words that appeared on Bharti's suicide note are the only, and the most powerful, instance when she reclaimed her voice. Though she puts an end to her life before her voice reverberated and pounded the walls of patriarchy, she does find the alternative voice in Reena who gets the voice translated into action through her crusade against the outrage. Reena's decision to join a news paper and write life stories gives her access to media and an opportunity to challenge heteronormative power relations. Reena's writing at the individual level can be linked to her embodiment, stressing that her writing also involves allowing her voices to be heard, —seizing|| the ability to speak outside of masculine discourse. When Reena 'laughed' on Suhas's

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face (275) she embodies female self-assertion and distinction.

Reena uses the power of media to cut across the protected wall of patriarchal power relations and to disrupt and shift away from problematic discourses, attempting to create a community on mediascape where women can freely speak on their own terms. While even this act which breaks the silence technically silences the ability of sexists to express their sexism, overall this silencing aims for a world where ultimately more women can speak without being centralized around the subjugating language and institutions problematically imposed by a group of people upon others. Bharti's alternative voice (Reena) potentially serves as a transversal performance by (re)visioning the scripts of patriarchal discourse and creating a poetics of disembodiment where women can speak on their own terms. This practice can be seen in action through her 'life stories', involving a refusal to engage with a climate of sexism through the deployment of speech and the creation of a space where traumatised women can speak outside of oppressive discourse. Thus, transversal performance serves as a method of resistance, allowing women to undo oppressive scripts of discourse that creates subjects out of them through a politics of embodiment.

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## Searching for definitions

**Deepika Nath** Posted online: Sun Nov 07 2010, 23:35 hrs

*Theatre-scriptwriter Anuradha Marwah has never been a conformist*

Her literature students speak of her unorthodox teachings on feminism, her three novels reveal an alternative interpretation of women's empowerment, but for scriptwriter Anuradha Marwah, 48, social activism did not come naturally.

My mother started the oldest voluntary organisation for women's literacy in Rajasthan," says Marwah. "While growing up in Ajmer, I was averse to her Gandhian feminism and wanted to define an identity away from all her work."

She left Ajmer for Delhi at the age of 22 and started teaching English literature in 1988. She wrote her first comic novel, The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta, in 1993, and dabbled a bit in TV production before writing her second novel, Idol Love (1999), which is a dystopic vision of India in 2062.

I always considered my mother's idea of women's empowerment as regressive--her philosophy did not want to challenge the norms of society, but simply empower women through gender sympathy," she says. But when the time came, and her mother's 40-year-old Ajmer Adult Education Association was going to shut down, Marwah overlooked her cynicism and signed up as the secretary of the organisation. "My mother's death in 1997 brought me back to my roots and to her work. I rediscovered Ajmer and the importance of my mother's organisation--what they did back then helps us now," she says. While working for the organisation, Marwah also authored a novel, based on real life incidents in Ajmer, called Dirty Picture (2008) .

Marwah has now been with the organisation for 13 years and has also been teaching literature at Zakir Husain College for 22 years. She has also been with the Pandies theatre group, known for its social activism and feminist bias, for the last

10 years. Recently, her first full-length script, *Sarkari Feminism*, was staged at the Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts. The play is a multi-layered dark comedy and analyses the government's progress in its contradictory feminist policies. On one hand, the government claims to be working for the empowerment of women," she says, "but there is such an overemphasis on the traditional concept of what a family and a marriage ought to be, that there is no room for women solely as a woman. Unless you are married or part of a traditional household, the government does not consider you."

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p-ISSN 2248-9576:18-25 English Language and Literature  
Mapping Gender Discourse under the Rubric of Cultural Scripts in Anuradha  
Marwah's *Dirty Picture*  
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University of Lucknow

Beauvoir reminds us about the cultural script which mystifies the position of a woman to behave in the 'certain manner' so that she can be measured by the standards of men and society. In the rubric of cultural scripts, Feminists raised the contemporary, but, much relevant issues to transcribe their ideas into meanings. The feminist struggle against pornography is not, however, uncontroversial, and it has resulted in serious disagreements between different feminist groups. These have come particularly in the wake of Dworkin and Mackinnon's involvement in helping some American states to draft anti-pornography legislation. This legislation is based on Mackinnon's definition of pornography as:

The graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words that also includes women dehumanized as sexual objects, things, or commodities; enjoying pain or humiliation or rape; being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised, or physically hurt; in postures of sexual submission or servility or display; reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture; shown as filthy or inferior; bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual. (Intercourse 139)

The aim of the laws is to allow individuals to bring legal charges against those producing and displaying pornography for the harm that it has caused. The legislation has, however, been attacked by other feminists, who argue both that it is legally unworkable and, more fundamentally, that it will restrict women's sexual expression as well as men's. As Martha Minow explains:

For those who prized the element of the women's movement that advocated sexual liberation for women, the pornography ordinance seemed a new guise for the repression of women's sexual expression. For those who sought room for the creation of sexuality defined by women, whether heterosexual or lesbian, the pornography ordinance seemed a tool of oppression. (157)

Patriarchy is “a set of symbols and ideas that make up a culture embodied by everything from the content of everyday conversation to literature and film” (Johnson 84). “At the heart of patriarchy is the oppression of women, which takes several forms” (Johnson 11). Patriarchy colors family, work, law, individual identity, and religion; in fact, there is not a single area that can escape the effects of patriarchy. Patriarchy must be recognized as one of the underlying causes of violence against women in India. Examples which demonstrate that India is a society governed by a system where males hold the power include feticide, the disproportionate gender ratio, the fact that most women are not allowed to be employed, and the belief that from birth until death a woman’s role is to serve men. It is recognized that patriarchy and the control and dominance of women by men have significant roles to play in the violence perpetrated against women. The patriarchal ideal is that a woman’s duty is to serve her father, brothers, and husband for the entirety of her life; it is a sentiment lived out in many societies where women are subjected to spousal abuse daily.

Anuradha Marwah’s *Dirty Picture* rocked the Indian literary horizon with its release in 2007. The blurb of the book aptly describes its intent and objectives:

*Dirty Picture* is the story of two sisters whose liaisons create scandal in a small town. Leaving her husband’s home in Bombay, Reena returns to Ajmer wearing the ring of a married CEO. She intends to rebuild her life even if it means stepping out of convention. Meanwhile, her teenage sister Bharti has stumbled into local politics. Although imbued with a reformatory zeal, she gets sucked into a veritable quagmire of sexual intrigue because of her naivety and inexperience.

While Bharti’s life begins to disintegrate, dragging all around her into a nightmare of exploitation, Reena struggles to keep her castle in the air from imminent collapse. Circumstances become inexorable as the moral brigade closes in on the hapless Bharti and Reena discovers that the CEO is more in love with his image on T.V. Anuradha Marwah writes feelingly about desire, abuse and small town society. Her searing third novel imaginatively explores the ‘sex scandal’ that shook Ajmer in the 1990s and raises deeply disturbing questions about love and consent.

In *Dirty Picture*, Anuradha Marwah documents in words the exploitation of women and the lower classes through a deep-rooted mechanism of inequitable gender constructions often obfuscated by ill-disguised hypocrisy. The novel has been read as a fictionalized documentation of the Ajmer sex scandal of 1992. However, *Dirty Picture*, tracing the personal narratives of two sisters Reena and Bharti, uses the incident as a site to critique exploitation at the levels of gender and class. Reena and Bharti live very different lives yet their narratives absurdly merge into each other’s forthright questions about notions of love and consent. Reena, divorced from a man who was struggling with substance abuse, is engaged to the married CEO of

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the company that employs her. She lives a seemingly comfortable life in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai weaving dreams of a married life with her boss, Suhas, a middle-aged man inebriated by the power he wields. In Ajmer, Bharti lives a life driven by idealism and a desire to make a difference to the parochial town and its regressive outlook. To gain clout in college politics, she befriends local politicians Anees and Sarosh, which in itself is a scandal as these are Muslim men. Sucked

into a vortex of political intrigue, Bharti finds herself involved in a sex racket with no one to turn to and nowhere to go. She looks at her sister for help in the hope of escaping an Alcatraz of impending shame but Reena is caught up in her relationship, which she realizes will never evolve into more than that of mistress. In narrativising male atrocities towards women and the inexplicable silences of a gendered society, Marwah has shown similar concerns expressed by Susan Brownmiller in her article titled "Pornography Hurts Women" wherein she states that pornography affects the cultural view of women in a harmful fashion. Pornography, she believes, invariably presents women as victims and as subordinate to men. She advocates the criminalization of sexually explicit materials in order to eliminate this hurtful societal perception of women. Brownmiller has a legitimate concern — the current view of women in our society is flawed, and women are harmed by this. However, criminalization of sexually explicit materials will not stop this, since her basic assumption, on which her thesis is based, is incorrect. She believes that criminalization of pornography would end the culture's exposure to sexist, violent imagery. This is unfortunately not so (Pornography 36-38).

While reciprocating Brownmiller's views, Marwah suggests that pornography is not the only purveyor of sexist violence in our society. One has only to watch a small selection of mainstream media to see more such sexist violence, as well as a plethora of other societal ills. Television, advertisements, movies, art, music, pop literature: all support the insidious idea that women are victims and should be subordinate to men. Soap operas perpetuate the impression that women are incomplete somehow without a man, and that the only roles available to a young girl are either nurturers and/or mothers or sexually free "bad girls"; advertisements show objectified portions of women in unnatural, pseudo-artistic poses; movies deliberately mix sex with violence, as if to say women want to be hurt; classical art classically depicts men as powerful and active, but women as passive, useful mostly for nude studies or to be acted upon by men; and some modern music seems to teach a message of hate and violence towards not just women, but everyone.

Marwah believes that one must start somewhere, and pornography is one of the worst offenders. However, she points out again that such a pervasive assumption (that women are victims, and subordinate to men) will not be excised from the public mind simply by outlawing all sexually explicit materials. Furthermore, in order to censor effectively, one must eliminate all of the undesired

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materials from the society. Passing a law will not eliminate all pornography — it will merely force sexual freedom of expression underground, and make it a highly desired "forbidden fruit." This will mean that pornography will increase in demand and popularity — the opposite of Marwah's stated goal. Thus criminalization of pornography cannot improve society's view of women or stop sexist violence. Better by far for us to address concrete examples of sexist violence to actual individuals, and teach both women and the rest of society that such behavior will not and should not be tolerated.

To achieve her goal of exposing the deep rooted male pornographic imagination in our society, Marwah begins by reviewing the patriarchal structure of our society, goes on to expose the sexualisation of public sphere, and suggests the need for an

alternative voice that can both resist victimization of women and structural transformation of the public sphere. The society depicted in *Dirty Picture* is hugely patriarchal which acts as the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in the society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It's a world in which women are defined as submissive, passive, and virtually inert. Their sexual definition is one of "masochistic passivity": "masochistic" because even men recognize their systematic sadism against women; "passivity" not because women are naturally passive, but because their chains are very heavy and as a result, they cannot move. In this society, the norm of masculinity is phallic aggression. Male sexuality is, by definition, intensely and rigidly phallic. A man's identity is located in his conception of himself, as the possessor of a phallus; a man's worth is located in his pride in phallic identity. The main characteristic of phallic identity is that worth is entirely contingent on the possession of a phallus. Since men have no other criteria for worth, no other notion of identity, those who do not have phalluses are not recognized as fully human.

All this point to the idea of sexual politics of fear and courage— that is, how fear is learned as a function of femininity; and how courage is the red badge of masculinity. I believe that we are all products of the culture in which we live; and that in order to understand what we think of as our personal experiences, we must understand first how the culture informs what we see and how we understand. In other words, the culture in which we live determines for us to an astonishing degree how we perceive, what we perceive, how we name and value our experiences, how and why we act at all. The first fact of this culture is that it is male supremacist: that is, men are, by birthright, law, custom, and habit, systematically and consistently defined as superior to women. Bharti understands this harsh reality about a daughter as she ruminates:

Papa makes too much of his older daughter, thought Bharti. Reena was considered the beauty of the family. Although Bharti was supposed to be quite a looker in school, according

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to family legend she was the 'responsible' one. Her father called her the 'son' of the home. Of course a son who also did everything a daughter is traditionally expected to do – cook, clean, serve. There's no escaping a daughter's destiny in Ajmer, Bharti complained to herself. (11)

The moral of the story should, one would think, preclude a happy ending. It does not. The moral of the story is the happy ending. It tells women that happiness for a woman is to be passive, victimized, destroyed, or asleep. It tells women that happiness is for them who is good—inert, passive, victimized—and that a good woman is a happy woman. It tells them that the happy ending is when they are ended, when they live without their lives or not at all. Every organ of this male supremacist culture embodies the complex and odious system of rewards and punishments which teach a woman her proper place, her allowable sphere. Family, school, church; books, movies, television; games, songs, toys—all teach a girl to submit and conform long before she becomes a woman. The fact is that a girl is

forced, through an effective and pervasive system of rewards and punishments, to develop precisely the lack of qualities which will certify her as a woman.

Bharti is neither the good girl nor the bad girl. She looks at the all pervasive world of patriarchy from a progressivist's perspective. She thinks that entering the realms of public sphere in a hugely paternalistic world is easy and rewarding. But, Reena understands the masculine order very well and decides to protect Bharti from the onslaught of masculinity:

Bharti was still young and unschooled in the way of the world. It was her duty to prevent those politicians from taking advantage of her sister's innocence. Bharti was too young to understand that men are always out to take advantage of women.

Especially in a place like Ajmer where even to get to talk to a girl like Bharti they would have to come up with a convincing reason. Youth Party, pah! Why should they want to recruit Bharti except because she is lovely young girl! (21)

Reena's apprehensions find a parallel in Simone de Beauvoir who has expressed similar concerns in *The Second Sex*:

In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not. . . like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity. . . "The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities," said Aristotle; "we should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness." And St. Thomas for his part pronounced woman to be an "imperfect man," an "incidental" being. . . Thus, humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. (76)

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However, Bharti does not learn the harsh realities of the paternalistic world until she is subjected to its horrendous face. She is date-raped by her acquaintance Saros who, along with Anees, has lured her into the world of masculine enterprises. Bharti realises with a shudder that the entry into the masculine world, the public sphere demands a huge ransom from a woman. The patriarchal world never accepted her radical and transformative ideologies, for these are the prerogatives men enjoy. She now understands that being a woman in a socio-cultural context where women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others is a greater challenge than her aspirations. Even Saros confesses to the strange 'unusualness' in Bharti's attitude:

She was an unusual girl and it was impossible to predict what she would do. She spoke of masculine things like rising prices, elections, and Party politics. Her plans for the future sounded androgynous as though she expected to step into her father's shoes.... Saros felt it was shameful the way her father was projecting her into the male world. (35)

On their way back, Anees put an arm around Sarosh's shoulder,

"Seems to me, Miyan, you have forgotten the purpose of this exercise."

"Which exercise, Anees bhai?" Sarosh asked, still inebriated by wine and women.

"The purpose of seducing Bharti." Anees replied.

"The purpose?"

"Yes, remember we are doing all this for the furtherance of our careers." (67)

Dirty Picture recounts the ugly realities of paternalistic societies which operate through strategic exploitation of women. Marwah juxtaposes Bharti's descent into silence with her elder sister Reena's reclaiming of her voice. While Bharti fails to narrativise her trauma, Reena finds an alternative voice to expose the ugly realities of patriarchy. Reena, on the other hand, has no political ambitions like Bharti, and her sole aim is lead a life fulfillment. She has emerged successfully from a disastrous marriage which seemed to choke her individuality. She is a typical Mills and Boon romance girl who dreams of her prince charming. In Suhas, a promising businessman, she finds an emotional mainstay which offers her with dreams of a new and settled life. Suhas, who does not get along with his wife, turns to Reena for an emotional and 'physical' recourse. Reena is flooded with promises of a wonderful life by Suhas. All this seem to be heading towards a happy and satisfying ending until Reena discovers the harsh realities of patriarchal world. Bharti is subjected to severe punishment for trying to make inroads into the male sphere, where as Reena is meted out deceit for demanding too much. Both of them are sexually objectified and to the extent of disappearing as human beings. While

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Sarosh and his friends use Bharti and her friends as commodities by tearing into their flesh, Suhas plays with Reena's body parts to keep him emotionally stable. Both Bharti and Reena are forced to bear the most formative traumas, daily suffering and pain. The abuse they live through, the terror they live with are unspeakable because pornography silences women.

So pornography is not defined by sexual explicitness, but rather by its fusion of sexuality with male dominance and female submission. It is a general problem for oppressed people, not specific to women's oppression because oppression silences, fighting oppression requires developing voices, languages, and cultural and interpretive matrices for the articulation of women's experiences. It is difficult for both Bharti and Reena name their experiences and describe their worlds, for oppression puts them in a double bind. If they tell how things seem to them, they will be viewed as either complicit or crazy. Bharti's loss of voice and her inability to narrativise her traumatic experiences can be attributed to the fear of being singled out by men, their agents, and their culture as a troublemaker. Her isolation is real in that she is avoided, or ignored, or chastised, or denounced. Her victimization leads to her silence and she puts an end to her life. Both Bharti and Reena are victims of intimate partner rape which spells disaster for them. Bharti fails to raise her voice, but being raped does grant Reena a voice – the voice of the victim. Bharti's unspeakable truth finds an alternative voice in Reena as her speech becomes much more verbose and wandering as she ponders the consequences of her victimization. Reena is not silenced as her speech shows an example of how charged female language can challenge gender power relations in a very political manner. When she meets Suhas, she replies to his 'love' saying:

"Not anymore. Not since I found out that Bharti, my sister, was one of the girls caught in the sex scandal. The man who took her there must have also told her he loved her. By the way, her clothes didn't catch fire, Suhas.... She didn't understand, Suhas. My sister went away because of the shame she felt. But now I am confused. It all seems shameful to me too: love, marriage, sex! I can't distinguish between love and lust. You who betrayed me, are you a rapist too?" (280)

The words that appeared on Bharti's suicide note are the only, and the most powerful, instance when she reclaimed her voice. Though she puts an end to her life before her voice reverberated and pounded the walls of patriarchy, she does find the alternative voice in Reena who gets the voice translated into action through her crusade against the outrage. Reena's decision to join a newspaper and write life stories gives her access to media and an opportunity to challenge heteronormative power relations. Reena's writing at the individual level can be linked to her embodiment, stressing that her writing also involves allowing her voices to be heard, "seizing" the ability to speak outside of masculine discourse. When Reena 'laughed' on Suhas's face (275) she embodies female self-assertion and distinction.

#### Mapping Gender Discourse under the Rubric... 25

Reena uses the power of media to cut across the protected wall of patriarchal power relations and to disrupt and shift away from problematic discourses, attempting to create a community on media scape where women can freely speak on their own terms. While even this act which breaks the silence technically silences the ability of sexists to express their sexism, overall this silencing aims for a world where ultimately more women can speak without being centralized around the subjugating language and institutions problematically imposed by a group of people upon others. Bharti's alternative voice (Reena) potentially serves as a war machine by shifting the scripts of patriarchal discourse such that women can speak on their own terms. This practice can be seen in action through her 'life stories', involving a refusal to engage with a climate of sexism through the deployment of speech and the creation of a space where marginalized women can speak outside of oppressive discourse. Thus, alternative voice is a promising method of feminist resistance, allowing women to shift oppressive scripts of discourse that discourage women from speaking to a context where they can speak on their own terms.

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## DIRTY PICTURE

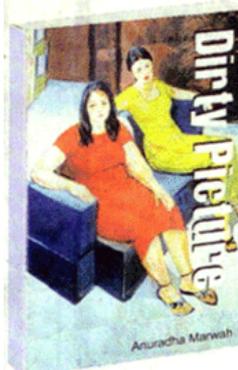
BY ANURADHA MARWAH  
*Indialog*  
Rs 195, pp.286

**T**he story of two sisters whose liaisons create scandal in a small town. Leaving her husband's home in Mumbai, Reena returns to Ajmer wearing the ring of a married CEO. She intends to rebuild her life even if it means stepping out of convention. Meanwhile, her teenage sister, Bharti has stumbled into local politics. Although, imbued with a reformatory zeal, she

gets sucked into a veritable quagmire of sexual intrigue because of her naivety and inexperience. While Bharti's life begins to disintegrate, dragging all around her into a nightmare of exploitation, Reena struggles to keep her castle in the air from imminent collapse. Circumstances become inexorable as the moral brigade closes in on the hapless Bharti and Reena discovers that the CEO is more in love with this image in TV.

## Hindustan Times New Delhi Friday 8, 2008

SET THE TONE FOR A PERFECT WEEKEND WITH AN ADDICTIVE DOSE OF ROMANTIC FILMS, LIP-SMACKING DELICACIES AND AN UNPUTDOWNABLE BOOK



## BOOK

### DIRTY PICTURE

It is a story of two sisters whose liaisons create scandal in a small town. Leaving her husband's home in Bombay, Reena returns to Ajmer wearing the ring of a married CEO. She intends to rebuild her life even if it means stepping out of convention.

**Author:** Anuradha Marwah  
**Price:** Rs 195  
**Publisher:** Indialog

विश्व पुस्तक मेला



# बुलेटिन



08 फरवरी, 2008, शुक्रवार

## 'डर्टी पिक्चर' की नाट्य प्रस्तुति

'डर्टी पिक्चर' नामक उपन्यास के आशिक नाट्य रूपांतर ने पुस्तक मेले में आए लोगों को आकर्षित किया। इंडियालॉग पब्लिकेशंस प्रा.लि. द्वारा प्रकाशित अनुराधा मारवाह के उपन्यास की पृष्ठभूमि अजमेर सेक्स स्कैंडल है। लेखिका अनुराधा के अनुसार इस कांड की गूज देश के छोटे-बड़े शहरों तक सुनाई पड़ती रहती है। सनद रहे इस कांड में सियासत और पुलिस, दोनों का बेहद विकृत रूप सामने आया था। अनुराधा के बारे में खुशवंत सिंह की यह टिप्पणी बहुत सटीक लगती है कि "वे ज्ञानी हैं, उनमें शब्दों की जादूगरी है और ध्यान देने पर मजबूर कर देती हैं।"

# Beyond Scandal

Working with kids to change society and writing a book based on an actual sex scandal, Anuradha Marwah believes that if you want to do something, you can.  
By Purabi Shridhar

"I'm concerned about issues of communalism, and what better way of changing society than changing kids? Creative writing workshops are the best way I know of getting kids to empathise, understand what violence is all about, why it should be abjured — the impact is more emotional than intellectual."

That's Anuradha Marwah, author, lecturer in English and creative writing at Delhi's Zakir Husain College, scriptwriter and theatre activist. There is an intensity about her, a sense of someone ready to take, head on, issues usually swept under the carpet. "I have an activist sensibility even when I write," she agrees. And write she has, with three books under her wings, the latest, 'Dirty Picture', a work of fiction based on the Ajmer sex scandal.

Anuradha has also "hooked up" with Delhi-based theatre group Pandies Theatre to devise workshops to reach out to kids and "talk about contentious issues like communalism." The narratives are turned into play scripts, and then into a play.

So what made an academician step out of her security zone and take up contentious issues? "After the Gujarat riots, I felt that one must reach out and talk about things; and so the creative writing workshops," explains



Anuradha. "I have done them at colleges, the University of Stirling, Scotland, and the University of Warwick, England. I began with public school kids and then expanded to less privileged and differently-abled kids. The response has been amazing. They are alive and

It is reality that sets us free in the true sense of the word, not beguiling fantasies



WINOD KUMAR

>> Writing is not elite anymore

Anu Bhambhani | South Delhi

Several small towns with many big cars." That's Anuradha Marwah, Delhi's favourite city. She has just released her third book 'Dirty Picture', Marwah, teaching

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HE RELEASE  
WORLD

"I hope Marwah... sident of Vasant is more in love with for its "clean and gives you a lot of t. Plus our whole cturer community in Old Delhi at the jali and Karim's other international Delhi."

s not penning down the form of a book, s and when she is auradha is holding workshops for stu- schools in Delhi s are asked to imag- say in a riot situa- their experiences. become empathetic others," says Mar-

ing to be the subject of? "Life of a single shares Marwah.



bristling with ideas; they are the best instrument of change." She relates the experience in Jammu & Kashmir where 25 Kashmiri Pundit kids and 25 Muslim kids from Srinagar underwent a week-long intensive workshop, following which they came up with four narratives. The most heartrending one was about the return of a Kashmiri Pundit girl, who left the valley with her family after her father was shot dead by the militants, and how her neighbours, including children, helped her find his murderers and get them punished.

#### DIRTY BUT TRUE

Even as she loves the challenges of working with kids, Anuradha is also handling the "strong response" to her book 'Dirty Picture'. Based on the Ajmer sex scandal, it traces the lives of sisters Reena and Bharti, alongside sex scandals, politics and the inevitable sad outcome. Says Anuradha, "I believe the book will change the way we look at sex scandals," but candidly admits that, "while I had no trouble finding publishers for my first two novels ('Idol Love' and 'The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta'), the third was the most difficult, perhaps because of its political content." But having found one (Hdialog), she hopes it will act as an eye opener. Sex is a touchy issue in Indian society, so how did this mother write about it? Agrees Anuradha, "The sexual bits were very difficult to write. It was a challenge. The sex was overpowering for the girls caught in the sex scandal — it overrode their lives, but to censor these portions would have falsified

the story." Still, she points out, "'Dirty Picture' is not a cautionary tale for the young. It is about the bestial side of life that people want to overlook. It is reality that sets us free in the true sense of the world, not beguiling fantasies."

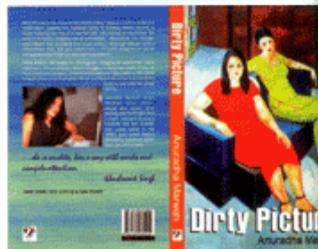
Interestingly, Anuradha grew up in Ajmer. "I grew up in a small town so I am an insider," she says. "Small towns are like cauldrons; a lot of untold stories are bubbling away. There is already a lot in Indian fiction in English about East-West encounters, exiles, multiculturalism, etc; there isn't that much about provincial life. I think we need more about that 'other' India in English fiction to deepen our understanding and make our craft more sensitive."

To weave in fact and fiction, biographical and imaginative elements and structure a story that will hold readers' interests could not have been an easy task. "I believe we write with what we are, no matter what our subject might be, and the best writing is straight from the centre of identity," Anuradha maintains. "Of course, imagination is primary in creativity; there should be no point-to-point correspondence between life and art. But to be successful, art must connect with life at a very intimate level. Ours is the only life we really know, so with what would we write if not our own experiences, emotions and intellect?"

Where publishing is concerned, Anuradha claims that much more needs to be done. She feels that though there has been perceptible difference in the publishing scene, not all of it is positive: "Things have opened up, but networking has also

#### FACT AND FICTION

The Ajmer sex scandal rocked the nation in the 1990s when it was found that a gang of people befriended schoolgirls, raped them, took their photographs in compromising positions and used these to exploit them. Eight persons were convicted of rape and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Trial Court. But the High Court acquitted four and the Supreme Court later reduced the other four's life imprisonment to 10 years. Anuradha's 'Dirty Picture' follows the lives of two sisters, Reena and Bharti, whose liaisons create a scandal in a small town. Says Anuradha, "I feel we need to be deeply disturbed when young bodies are exploited, and they are being exploited continuously. Sex scandals have been reported from Jalgaon, Japur, Jammu and even Delhi. We should go into why they happen and perhaps weep a little. It would be therapeutic grief and might change things for the better."



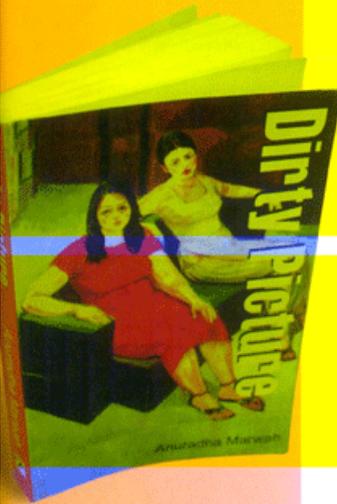
become crucial. We need more professionalism and more rigorous editing standards and less hype about 'new discoveries'. Writers are being paid more now even by Indian publishers, but of course, it is only with a foreign publisher that anyone can manage as a fulltime writer."

Teaching, writing and above all, working with children to change the ways of the society... Anuradha does a neat balancing act. She is researching on women novelists, a non-fiction undertaking that could become a book, and a "funny story about a single woman in Delhi, that might grow into a novel." ■

# the DIRTY truth

Author Anuradha Marwah revisits the 1992 Ajmer sex scandal with her book *Dirty Picture*, while interspersing the true account with fictional stories.

words PREETIKA MATHEW



persand > 15 March - 14 April 2008 > 114

In the acknowledgment section of *Dirty Picture*, author Anuradha Marwah writes, "Like many fictions, this novel too is based partially on facts, some of which may already be known to the reader via media coverage." In 1992, a sex scandal involving underage girls shook Ajmer, raising concern about love and consent in small Indian towns. I was too young to have known about what Anuradha writes about now. I'm glad.

## Their Lives

Blame it on the novel being sufficiently disturbing, or on the fact that the lives of the protagonists in the novel could be anyone's story today, either way, *Dirty Picture* in its 'cut and dried' format is evocative. It follows the story of two sisters, Reena and Bharti, who, while they try to make more of life, are also trying to break free of the shackles that bind small town living. While the elder daughter Reena walks out of a stifling marriage only to enter into an adulterous relationship, the younger Bharti, a bright impressionable 17-year-old, while nurturing her dreams of becoming a political leader, gets swept into a web of sex, betrayal and pornography. In the conservative, caste sensitive town that is Ajmer, eyebrows are raised, scorn is cast, and the family is shamed.

It's painful to read of the plight of these two women who are stranded not so much because of their choices, as they are due to the circumstances in which their lives exist. "Being a woman in India is still a stigma," a friend of mine remarked. The statement rings true. Peeping out from every corner of India are the exploited stories of Reena and Bharti that come to us day after day in

Blame it on the novel being sufficiently disturbing, or on the fact that the lives of the protagonists could be anyone's story, either way, *Dirty Picture* in its 'cut and dried' format is evocative.

the form of news clippings and voyeuristic news cameras. The author's matter-of-fact approach to caste stereotypes that haunt India, i.e., the great Hindu-Muslim divide, couples with the stories of the protagonists to create destructive consequences.

## Truth be Told

Bharti's story is almost real, written after Anuradha spoke to the girls and family members whose lives the Ajmer sex scandal directly affected. The other stories are fiction though.

Anuradha paints a true picture, written devoid of any emotion. Its 'say-it-like-it-happened' format, at times, leaves the reader cold, wondering after the reasons for a reportage, rather than an emotional account. Perhaps the author chose to make it this way to create an impact that culminates in a heartbreaking end. Or maybe painting the naked picture, things as they were, justifies the truth in the story. Either way, if one can get past the no-frills dry narrative of most part of the book, the end justifies the means. &.

# 'सामाजिक विकृतियां दूर करना साहित्यकारों का काम'

कानपुर, 31 मार्च (सं.)

वीएसएसडी कालेज नवम्बर में आज अंग्रेजी विभाग द्वारा एक थोड़ी का आयोजन किया गया। थोड़ी का विषय 'ड्रॉमैटिक प्रेजेंटेशन ऑफ नोवेल' था इसमें विभागाध्यक्ष अनुराधा मारवाह के संयोजन में उपस्थित डॉ. अशोक सिंह, डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह आदि साहित्यकारों की संस्था का आयोजन किया गया।

इस संभव में डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता विभागाध्यक्ष अंग्रेजी विभाग ने बताया कि अनुराधा मारवाह ने सिर्फ एक जगह नहीं उपन्यासकार है बल्कि कविता, गद्य कथा, डेजी वीरचित्त की रचना लेखिका होने के साथ साथ एक थिएटर आर्टिस्ट भी है। उपन्यास व नाटक की विधाओं को साहित्य में समानता देने का प्रयत्न करने का अंग्रेजी विभाग का उद्देश्य है।

कार्यक्रम में स्त्री सेक्सों के बढ़ते हुए संवेदन पर भी बात की गयी। इसमें डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह, डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह आदि साहित्यकारों का सहभाग था।



वर्तमान समाज में फैली हुई विकृतियों को दूर करने भी साहित्यकारों का ही काम है। इस उपन्यास में स्त्री सड़कियों की वेबसाइट के माध्यम से

उनका शोषण करने व उन्हें आत्महत्या को मजबूर कर देने जैसे विषयों का चित्रण किया गया है।

दूसरी तरफ अतिशुद्ध विन्दु में

आप का शोषण करने का लक्ष्य भी रोग के चरित्र द्वारा दर्शाया गया है डॉ. नीरू टंडन ने उपन्यास के चरित्र द्वारा दर्शाया गया है कि उनके उपन्यास में

थोड़ी की कुछ बर्तमानवाद में चित्रण किया गया है कि हुआ यह है कि काली से निकले गंध को, किसी पुरुष के हाथों न हो अब औरत तकल को, थोड़ा की खा में थोड़े हुए है थोड़े और अंधकार की सुविधों से छत्रों के नकार लिए आते हैं।

कार्यक्रम में प्रमुख रूप से डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह, डॉ. आरपी प्रधान ने विशेष सहयोग किया। डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह, डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह आदि साहित्यकारों की संस्था का आयोजन किया गया।

कार्यक्रम के अंत में अंग्रेजी विभाग की डॉ. नीरू टंडन द्वारा प्रिजेंट किया गया विभागाध्यक्ष अनुराधा मारवाह द्वारा किया गया। डॉ. नीरू टंडन ने बताया कि वे विभाग के साथ साथ एन ए प्रोग्राम के छात्रों के लिए भी बहुत उपरोक्त हैं। इसीलिए साहित्य को जाना जा सकता है वे नीरू की छठी कविता है।

## एक नजर



### वीएसएसडी में 'डर्टी पिक्चर' का मंचन

कानपुर। स्त्री सेक्सों के वेबसाइट के माध्यम से उनका शोषण करने व उन्हें आत्महत्या के लिए मजबूर कर देने वाले जैसे विषयों का चित्रण करने वाली अनुराधा मारवाह के उपन्यास 'डर्टी पिक्चर' का सोमवार को वीएसएसडी कॉलेज के अंग्रेजी विभाग में नाटकीय प्रदर्शन किया गया। इसमें शोदीतुत विद्यार्थी में अत्याचार का विरोध करने का साहस भी मंचन हुआ। यहाँ पर अंग्रेजी विभाग की डॉ. नीरू टंडन की लिखी कविता 'अनिता देसाई एण्ड हर फिक्शन वर्ल्ड' का विमोचन उपन्यासकार अनुराधा मारवाह ने किया। इसमें डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता आदि मौजूद थीं।

## ...ताकि स्कैंडल में न फंसे छात्राएं

कानपुर, सिटी रिपोर्टर : वीएसएसडी कॉलेज में डॉ. नीरू टंडन की पुस्तक 'अनिता देसाई एण्ड हर फिक्शन वर्ल्ड' का विमोचन हुआ। इस मौके पर छात्राओं को सेक्स स्कैंडल के प्रति सचेत करने वाले नाटक का भी मंचन किया गया।

अनिता देसाई पर पढ़ाये जाने वाले अंग्रेजी साहित्य को आसान बनाने के लिए डॉ. नीरू टंडन ने इस पर आलोचनात्मक अध्ययन कर

### • वीएसएसडी कॉलेज में पुस्तक विमोचन व नाटक

पुस्तक लिखी। 'अनिता देसाई एण्ड हर फिक्शन वर्ल्ड' पुस्तक का विमोचन दिल्ली की क्रिएटिव लेखिका प्रो. अनुराधा मारवाह द्वारा किया गया। इसके बाद दिल्ली के पंडी थिएटर ग्रुप के कलाकारों द्वारा अनुराधा मारवाह के उपन्यास 'डर्टी पिक्चर' पर नाटक का मंचन हुआ। छात्राओं को सेक्स स्कैंडल में फंस्कने व उनका शोषण कर आत्महत्या की मजबूर कर देने का चित्रण किया गया। कार्यक्रम में डॉ. सुप्रिया सुक्ता, डॉ. आरपी प्रधान, डॉ. महेन्द्र सिंह आदि उपस्थित रहे। प्राचार्य डॉ. केके तिवारी ने अध्यक्षता किया।



जीवंत अभिनय वीएसएसडी कॉलेज में अंग्रेजी कार्यशाला में नाटक का मंचन करते कलाकार।



अभिनव

40814

वीएसएचटी  
कालेज के  
दुर्गमिषा विभाग  
में आयोजित  
संगोष्ठी में  
लेखिका  
अनुराधा नारवाह  
के नाट्य पर  
दृष्टा होने का  
छात्र।

संबंधित छात्र  
पंज-8 पर

अपन उपनाम

## 'डर्टी पिक्चर' उपन्यास नहीं औरत की कहानी है

कानपुर। 'अप तो दुआ रही है कि बातों से निकले वह कोई, किसी भी पुरुष के हाथों न हो औरत तबह कोई...' यह पंक्तिवा किम्बी जिगल्स की नहीं बल्कि उम 'डर्टी पिक्चर' उपन्यास की समर्पित है जो इंडियन इंफ्लिन्स उपन्यासकार प्रोफेसर अनुराधा नारवाह (दिल्ली) ने आजमेर की सच्ची घटना पर लिखी है। उपन्यास पर यह खंड पंक्तिवा स्लेमकर को वीएसएचटी डिग्री कालेज में इंग्लिश डिपार्टमेंट की डा. नीरू टंडन ने सुनाई। डा. टंडन यहां प्रोफेसर अनुराधा के उपन्यास पर आयोजित संगोष्ठी में खेल रही थी।

लड़कियों के दैहिक शोषण की सच्ची घटना पर लिखा गया है। शोषित लड़कियों ने न्यूड फोटो छपने से आत्महत्या कर ली थी' उपन्यास के खंड पाने पड़ कर छात्रों को



सुनार और समाज में रुझे शोषण की समस्या से उबरने के लिए चिंतित कर दिया। इस दौरान छात्रों-शिक्षकों और डा.

अनुराधा के बीच देर तक सबलों का मिलसिला चलता रहा। महिला कालेज की डा. ज्योति और वीएवी की डा. अलका ने कई सवाल किए। उन्होंने कहा यह सिर्फ

**'पैडी थियेट्र-दिल्ली' के कलाकारों ने वीएसएचटी कालेज में इंडियन इंग्लिश उपन्यासकार डा. अनुराधा नारवाह के 'डर्टी पिक्चर' उपन्यास पर नाटक का मंचन किया**

एक उपन्यास नहीं है यह देत की हर औरत की कहानी है। इस अवसर पर 'पैडी थियेट्र-दिल्ली' के 11 कलाकारों ने 'डर्टी

पिक्चर' को नाटक रूप में मंचित किया और शोषण के खेल में फंसी लड़कियों की कहानी प्रस्तुत की। इस मौके पर उन्होंने डा. नीरू द्वारा लिखी किताब 'अनीस देसाई एंड हर फिक्शनल वर्ल्ड-अनीस देसाई बुकर पुरस्कार पाने वाली किरन देसाई की मां और जानी-मानी इंडियन इंग्लिश नॉवलिस्ट है, किताब में अनीस देसाई के संपूर्ण साहित्य का अध्ययन है' का विमोचन किया। विभागाध्यक्ष इंग्लिश, डा. सुदीप शुक्ल और प्राचार्य डा.केके तिवारी ने सभी अतिथियों का स्वागत किया। कार्यक्रम में डा. छाया जैन, डा. एम सिंह, डा. अरुण प्रधान, अरुण कुमार, रश्मि सिंह, कविश खुरान, अंकुर, रखा, ललित समेत विभाग के शिक्षक मौजूद थे।

## बुराइयां दूर करना साहित्यकारों का कार्य



सहारा न्यूज व्यूरो

कानपुर, 31 मार्च। वीएसएसडी कालेज नवाबगंज में आज अंग्रेजी विभाग की ओर से 'ड्रामेटिक प्रजेंटेशन ऑफ ए नावेल' विषय पर सेमिनार हुआ। जिसमें प्रमुख उपन्यासकार प्रो. अनुराधा मारवाह

के तीसरे उपन्यास 'डर्टी पिक्चर' पर नाट्य रूपान्तर के जरिए समाज को संदेश दिया गया।

सेमिनार में विभागाध्यक्ष सुप्रिया शुक्ला ने कहा, प्रो. अनुराधा मारवाह ने उपन्यास व नाटक दो विधाओं को साहित्य में समन्वय करके अनेका काम किया है। डा. नीरू टंडन ने कहा, साहित्य समाज का दर्पण है। समाज में फैली विकृति को दूर करना भी साहित्यकारों का काम है। उपन्यास 'डर्टी पिक्चर' में स्कूली छात्रों को सेक्स स्कैंडल में कसने, उनका शोषण व अत्याचारों को मजबूर कर देने जैसे विषयों का चित्रण किया गया है। दूसरी तरफ शारीशुद्धा बिंदारी ने अत्याचार का विरोध करने का साहस भी रीना के पात्र के जरिए दर्शाया गया है। भारतीय अंग्रेजी साहित्य में स्त्री लेखकों के बढ़ते वर्चस्व पर भी चर्चा हुई।

वीएसएसडी कालेज

### ड्रामेटिक प्रजेंटेशन ऑफ ए नावेल विषय पर सेमिनार

इस मौके पर डा. नीरू टंडन द्वारा लिखी पुस्तक 'अनीता देसाई रीडर फिल्लानल वर्ड' का विमोचन उपन्यासकार अनुराधा मारवाह ने किया। कहा कि यह पुस्तक रिसर्च स्कालर के साथ एमए फाइनेल अंग्रेजी के छात्रों के लिए उपयोगी साबित होगी। जिसमें आलोचनात्मक अध्ययन द्वारा अनीता देसाई के सम्पूर्ण साहित्य को जाना जा सकता है। सेमिनार में प्राचार्य डा. केके ठिवारी, डा. छाया जैन, डा. महेन्द्र सिंह व डा. आरपी प्रधान उपस्थित थे।

## OFF THE RACKS



### For bird-watching in the city

**About Indian Birds**  
Salim Ali and Laeeq  
Futehally  
Photographs by  
Nikhil Devasar  
Wisdom Tree  
122 pages  
Rs495



If you have not yet been bitten by the bug that makes you immediately entranced by a rosy starling or a purple-rumped sunbird, a spotted owl or even a white-rumped vulture, then *About Indian Birds: Including Birds Of Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Pakistan And Bangladesh*, a delightful little book, is as good a way as any of becoming an amateur ornithologist. Fortunately, there are still enough birds in and around Mumbai to make bird-watching a very satisfying hobby. Salim Ali was India's greatest birdman and Futehally is his niece. This is an easy accessible reference with lovely pictures. Ideal for beginners.

—Ranjana Banerji

**Dirty Picture**  
Anuradha Marwah  
Indialog  
286 pages  
Rs195



A tale of two sisters, a study in contrasts, but surprisingly similar. They both create scandal, but in different ways. Reena marries a man in Mumbai but leaves him soon after getting involved with a married CEO. She travels back to the small town she once called home, determined to rebuild her life the way she wants it to be. Bharti gets unexpectedly involved in local politics, wanting to change the world for the better. But she is young and gullible, and gets mixed up in some unsavoury events with a highly charged sexual flavour. Her life starts slowly falling apart. Both sisters have one common enemy to face: the moral brigade. There is ambition, desire, politics and much more in this novel about small town India. An interesting read.

**Four Crises And A  
Peace Process**  
PR Chari, Pervaz  
Iqbal Cheema, and  
Stephen P Cohen  
Harper Collins  
252 pages  
Rs495



South Asia is a region that has been prone to eruptions of dire instability. In fact, over the past 20 years, there have been at least four such fairly serious situations. This book takes a look at the four major crises: the Brasstacks Crisis of 1986-87, the Compound Crisis of 1990, the Kargil Conflict of 1999, and the Border Confrontation Crisis of 2001-02. Each of these was in some way linked to the development of nuclear weapons by both India and Pakistan, and their inclusion into their respective national arsenals. The causes of these crises have been examined and the policy implications discussed, along with the larger issues of conflict resolution.

—Ratna Samra