

Bharat Ratna Dr B. R. Ambedkar University, Delhi

MA Gender Studies Entrance Exam (2012)

5th July, 2012
Time: 2 hours
(10.30 am- 12.30 pm)

Please answer each of the following questions in 500-600 words. All questions carry equal weightage

Q1. Soni Sori: Woman's resistance/ terrorist / casualty (victim) of conflict? Please comment.

7 March 2012

India: Release Soni Sori on International Women's Day

The Indian authorities must release Soni Sori, an activist and school teacher imprisoned and allegedly tortured for speaking out against human rights abuses, Amnesty International said in a call to mark International Women's Day on 8 March. The Amnesty International prisoner of conscience was arrested after she criticised Maoists as well as state forces for human rights violations in the armed insurgency in central India. Her father was shot in the leg by Maoists, while her husband has been in jail for one year on charges of having collaborated with the left wing group.

"On International Women's Day, Indian authorities should be applauding the work of brave women like Soni Sori, who dare to speak up for human rights," said Amnesty International's India researcher Ramesh Gopalakrishnan. Indian activists have criticized the authorities for their treatment of Soni Sori and, in collaboration with Amnesty International, have launched a video campaign featuring activists holding up symbolic garlands with the words "shame" on them. "Activists in India are sending the government a clear message: Soni Sori's treatment is shameful – hence the garlands of shame." said Gopalakrishnan.

Arrested on 4 October 2011 in New Delhi, Soni Sori was charged by Chhattisgarh state police with acting as a courier and transferring funds of 1.5 million Indian rupees (US \$300,000) from a corporate mining firm, Essar, to the Maoists as "protection money", to ensure mining operations could be carried out unhindered. She and five others including her nephew Lingaram Kodopi, face trial on 13 March.

Following her arrest, she was held in police custody for two days on 8 and 9 October and intensively questioned. In a letter to India's Supreme Court, Soni Sori alleged that she was tortured. A police official, she alleged, forced her out of her cell, stripped her and gave her electric shocks, causing acute pain all over her body, head and spine. By the time of her appearance in Dantewada court on 10 October, she was unable to walk. On 29 October, the government medical college hospital in Kolkata examined her under court order, reporting back on 14 November that two stones had been inserted in her vagina and one in her rectum, and that she had annular tears in her spine. On 2 December the court asked the Chhattisgarh authorities to respond to allegations of torture, and ordered her transferred from Jagdalpur prison to Raipur central prison where she is currently held.

"Soni Sori must be released unconditionally and an independent investigation mounted into allegations of torture. Those police officials responsible including those at the highest levels of command should be

prosecuted, in line with international law,” said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan. Meanwhile, a senior Chattisgarh police official, accused by Soni Sori of ordering her alleged torture while she was being interrogated, has been awarded a gallantry award by authorities. “Awarding gallantry medals to people who should be investigated is insulting,” said Ramesh Gopalakrishnan.

Soni Sori is an Adivasi and an advocate of Gandhian peaceful protest. Her case will be heard again in late March 2012.

Source: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/india-release-soni-sori-international-women-s-day-2012-03-07>
(Last accessed 27 June 2012).

Q2. Who is the narrator in the story? How is she treated by others? Why do you think she is treated in this way? Discuss with reference to the excerpt from ‘Girls’ (1990) given below.

The day we left with Ma for Naani’s house, Baabu broke a surahi. I don’t know whether he did it on purpose or by accident, but anyway the floor was flooded with water. Ma held up her sari and called Saru’s mother – who was trying to eavesdrop from the adjacent room – to mop up the water, because if someone were to slip and break their bones it would be yet another problem. To Ma, everything in life is a problem. As far as she is concerned, whether we are at home or at school, ill or just playing around, we are a problem. While mopping the floor, Saru’s mother looked up at Ma and asked, ‘This time you’ll be away for at least three months, won’t you?’ Ma put her hands on her thighs as if she were assessing their weight, squatted down and said, ‘Yes, they won’t allow me to come back sooner.’ She turned to me and ordered me to go out and play. I always seemed to turn up at the wrong time and at the wrong place. As I was leaving the room I managed to pick up a piece of the broken surahi which I enjoyed sucking, and I overheard Ma addressing either Saru’s mother or the cobwebs hanging from the roof: ‘I hope it’s a boy this time. It will relieve me of the nuisance of going through another pregnancy.’ I could just imagine Saru’s mother, in her usual manner, shaking her head and saying, ‘Why not?... Why not?’

Maama was waiting to receive us at the station. On the way to Naani’s I sat next to Maami... when we reached the house... I trod hard on my younger sister’s sandal, nearly tripping her up. ‘You are the cause of all my problems!’ Ma hissed at me through tightly clenched teeth so that no one could hear...

I was told to bend down and touch Naani’s feet. Someone from the family said, ‘Not like that... bend properly. You are born a girl and you will have to bend for the rest of your life, so you might as well learn. Naani blessed me by waving her hand over my bowed back...

‘Move aside’, says Hari’s mother who is carrying a tray laden with glasses of tea into the room. ‘Move. This is not for you, it’s for the grown ups. Move out of my way’...

‘Oh Hari’s ma, what’s happening?’ asks Maasi irritably from the room. ‘Are you going to bring the tea next year, or what?’ Hari’s mother knits her thick eyebrows together and says, ‘This Lali’s middle daughter won’t let me’...

I can hear Ma naming me and saying, ‘That girl must be harassing her. She was born only to plague my life.’ Someone in the room advises her that she should not get angry in her condition.

For a long time I sit outside the house watching the birds flying and wishing that I had been born a bird. ‘Do mother birds too think their girl birds are inferior?’ I wonder.

‘Where are you? Girls?’ calls Naani with a tray of crimson power in her hands. In front of her there is a dish of halwa and a plate filled with puris. She has prepared those as offerings to the devi on Ashtami day. A mat has been spread in front of her for us to sit on. I hear Naani saying, ‘Come now, let me do aarti to all of you’ My two sisters and Maama’s beautiful daughters sit cross-legged in front of Naani. Naani puts a tikka on each forehead and then rings a bell. Exactly like the guard on the train... I am suddenly transformed into a railway engine and race around the ledge of the courtyard...

In the background I hear Naani saying, ‘Come on dear, let me put the tikka on you. You are my kanyakumari, aren’t you?’ ‘No’, I retort, ‘I am an engine’... Suddenly I see Ma waddling towards me and my stomach grows tight with fear... The elderly neighbour intervenes and says, ‘Have you gone mad, Lali?’ She signals to me to obey, and adds, ‘She is after all a child, a kanyakumari. Today is Ashtami, the devi’s day; you mustn’t hit a kanyakumari, it is a sin’... ‘Go on. Take the prasad from Naani. Why do you make your mother cry when she is in this condition?’ Maasi asks me irritably.

‘When you people don’t love girls, why do you pretend to worship them?’ My voice breaks into a sob... I don’t want to cry in front of them. Hari’s mother puts a hand up to her cheek and says in wonder, ‘Ma-ri-ma, just listen to her. What a temper for a girl to show!’

I start moving back towards the wall and screaming ‘I don’t want all this halwa-puri, tikka or money. I don’t want to be a goddess!’ (adapted from Mrinal Pande’s *Girls* (1992: 57-64))

Q 3. Answer either A OR B

A). Read the excerpt below, and give your opinion regarding the importance of a ‘gender analytical lens’ in understanding the interaction between Bolai and Fazlur. Bolai, the speaker is a Bangladeshi landless labourer. At the time, 20 taka (including food) was the daily male wage in the area.

Listen, let me tell you something. It was the lean time, and we weren’t getting work anywhere. I’d come back home from work and my kids were crying: Dad, I’m hungry; and I had nothing to give you to eat. So we went to Fazlur and asked if he had any work. He said that he has some earth work that needed doing, how much would we take? So we thought: it’s the lean time, there’s no point in hustling and asking a lot. If we get six Taka we can just about manage. So that’s what we asked for.

So he said: O, my son just bought a Honda, six Taka, how can I manage that! So, there we are, listening to the tale of his woes. In the end he says: I’ll give you three Taka. Three Taka for a day’s work! S we though and said, Give us one taka more, give us four. And he said: O how can I manage that? I’ll give you three and half Taka, take it or leave it, that’s my last word. So we took it. What can we do? They knew we have no choice. (White,1992:47)

The primary context of this interaction is clearly one of class relations. It provides a text book account of the reproduction of class inequality to the advantage of the rich and the further impoverishment of the poor. But interestingly, both of the protagonists also draw on their gender identities. Bolai’s position as a labourer, and Fazlur’s capacity as employer are both based on their identities as men. Both of them also make reference to their (gender) role as father in mitigating their part in the interaction. Bolai frames his acceptance of the low rates of pay in terms of his responsibilities as father, perhaps thereby reclaiming some masculine honour from otherwise shaming subordination. Fazlur legitimates his refusal to provide a living wage by reference to his own need to provide his son with a motorbike — itself a totem of masculinity in that village context. Bolai’s bargaining strength is further undermined by his ethnicity— a minority Adivasi— against Fazlur’s dominant status as Muslim Bengali. Class interests are thus expressed in gender-related ways, but the role that gender plays is equivocal: it at once helps structure the system of domination and is used by both actors to bargain over the terms of the engagement.

OR

B). Critically reflecting on the excerpt below, tell us whether and how your life has been influenced by the valuing of ‘masculine’ characteristics over ‘feminine’ ones.

In many south Asian cultures the birth of a son is celebrated, the birth of a daughter is bemoaned; sons are showered with love, respect, better food and health care. Boys are encouraged to be tough and outgoing, girls are encouraged to be demure and home-bound. There is nothing in a girl’s body which stops her from wearing shorts, or climbing trees or riding bicycles, and there is nothing in a boy’s body which stops him from playing with dolls, looking after younger siblings or helping with cooking or cleaning the house. All these differences are gender differences and they are created by society. Proof of the fact that gender is a cultural and social attribute rather than a natural one, is that it keeps changing — over time, in different places and among different social groups. For example a middle class girl may be confined to the home or school while a tribal girl may roam around in the jungles freely, taking the animals for grazing, or climbing trees for fruits, leaves or branches. They are both girls but they develop very different capabilities, aspirations and dreams, in spite of the fact that their bodies are the same.

Similarly, in many families girls were traditionally not sent to school or allowed to go out of the houses after they were 10 or 11, and were often married at puberty. But now things have changed. So, too the education, roles and responsibilities of men have changed, although perhaps not as much. This is what is meant when we say gender is variable; it is or may be different in different families or communities and at different times in the same family.

Even our bodies can be shaped or changed by us, society or culture. We can change the size, shape and strength of our bodies through training, use, disuse, misuse or abuse. Obvious examples are bodies of male and female wrestlers, body builders, athletes, dancers, yoga practitioners and so on.

Similarly, women’s bodies are such that they can procreate, but we can choose whether to have children, how many to have and at what intervals to have them. Reproduction is not inevitable in the same way for women as it is for the female animals.

If a woman can cook, so can a man, because a woman doesn’t cook with her womb!

What follows from this is that the different status women and men enjoy in society is indeed socially and culturally determined; it is man-made, nature has very little to do with it. It is gender and not sex which has determined that, (almost) everywhere, women as a group are considered inferior to men. They enjoy fewer rights, control fewer resources, work longer hours than men but their work is either undervalued, or underpaid. They face systemic violence at the hands of men and society; they have little decision making power in social, economic and political institutions.

“No social order in history has extended, distorted and used the natural difference between the sexes as brutally and systematically as ours. This order first transformed natural sex into a social artificial gender, made ‘men’ out of men, and ‘women’ out of women – in fact, turned ‘men’ into ‘human race’ and women into simply a sex as such.... And finally, having created these differences, it declares them to be ‘natural’ again, in order to render them economically exploitable.” Claudia Von Werlhof

Every Society prescribes different norms for girls and boys

Kamla Bhasin’s *Understanding Gender* (2004: 4-6)