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**Conversation: Kalpana Kannabiran in conversation with Rukmini Sen**

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## Kalpana Kannabiran in conversation with Rukmini Sen

[Transcript\* of the interview held on September 16, 2021]

### Introduction

**Kalpana Kannabiran** is a sociologist (with a Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) and a lawyer (with Bachelors and Masters Law degrees from Osmania University, Hyderabad). She received the Rockefeller Humanist-in-Residence Fellowship, Women's Studies Program, Hunter College, City University of New York in 1992-1993. She received the VKRV Rao Prize for Social Science Research in 2003 for her work in the field of Social Aspects of Law and the Amartya Sen Award for Distinguished Social Scientists in 2012 for her work in the discipline of Law. Both these awards were conferred by the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Part of the founding faculty of NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad, where she taught sociology and law for a decade (1999-2009), she was also Regional Director, Council for Social Development, Southern Regional Centre, a research institute recognised and supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, from 2011-2021. Alongside her academic career, she is co-founder of Asmita Resource Centre for Women, set up in 1991 in Hyderabad, where she has led the legal services and outreach and pro-bono counselling services for women survivors of violence and women in difficult situations. [Please check her [website](#) for details on her projects and publications]

**Rukmini Sen** is Professor, School of Liberal Studies, Dr B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD), and currently Director, Outreach and Extension Division and Centre for Publishing, AUD.

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**Rukmini Sen (RS):** First of all, thank you very much for agreeing to do this, Kalpana. Given that this conversation will be part of an issue which will contain a special section on 'Sociology of Law', I was actually hoping to begin with interdisciplinarity. While there have been various efforts towards

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\* Rukmini Sen thanks Emil Skaria Abraham, a communication professional based in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala for the transcription of the interview.

interdisciplinarity that has happened in different university spaces, yet somehow it just feels that it is still something that is extra, based on individual interest rather than naturally a part of the system. Despite the five-year law school model thinking about interdisciplinarity, despite even the discipline of sociology kind of always boasting that they are more interdisciplinary than other social sciences, and yet there is something amiss. I am kind of thinking through your own experience of – as student, during your student days, as a teacher, as well as in your activism – the different sides and the way in which you would have practiced interdisciplinarity.

**Kalpana Kannabiran (KK):** Thank you for asking me to do this, Rukmini. Speaking of my student days, it was just Sociology – both at the undergraduate and the postgraduate levels. At the undergrad, of course, I also had Economics and Geography, but I didn't do very much with either of those; in my mind it was Sociology and I wasn't actually thinking about interdisciplinarity at all at that time. But by the time I was in my final-year BA or so, the women's groups had started forming, I myself was part of one, so I would finish college and go off to demonstrations, and attend meetings of the dowry death investigation committees and those kinds of things. The Rameeza Bee incident happened around then, when I was in my BA, so one just got exposed to issues particularly related to violence against women – domestic violence, dowry deaths, rape – not that they were happening suddenly, but there was a lot of activity around those issues; resistance had built up. So, I think the beginnings were in a very obtuse manner thinking about the efficacy of law, the necessity of law, and trying to match what you understood, with what you were learning in classes with what you saw. Interestingly, MA was more insular than BA, because in BA I was also doing other subjects. But that insularity in my MA, in Hyderabad Central University, was kind of offset by the fact that I was more active in women's groups.

In my own mind I hadn't actually thought through the idea of interdisciplinarity but I was thinking along two tracks, you know, the activist track and the Masters track; and they didn't necessarily come together at the Masters level. In fact, I know there were teachers in Central University who actually resented the fact that I was in street plays on dowry deaths and would say they wished I put more time into my course, that kind of thing. Then I went in for an MPhil also in Central University and almost naturally my choice of research area was women in the unorganised sector. My MPhil dissertation was an ethnographic study of *beedi* makers in urban Hyderabad. For the dissertation, I didn't have too many

resources by way of readings in the Sociology department of the University. All my resources came from my feminist friends. But even there I don't think I was consciously thinking about interdisciplinarity. I just did things...I just went fumbling along and finding my way.

Then with my PhD, it was just a series of errors that again got me hurtling towards law without my planning it all. I planned to do a village study focussing on caste and gender. I chose a remote village in southern Tamil Nadu which has a predominantly Telugu population.

I must digress a bit here. The way I was socialised – I come from a Communist family three generations up, and I had married by that time, by choice. My father-in-law was a single parent who lived an austere life and was not really hooked onto religion or caste, etc. He was just focussed on his work and his daily walks. So caste was never really a question I grappled with in my personal life or outside – there were no barriers. Plenty of intermarriages across caste and religion, and we never really thought about these things growing up. But in Sociology it was a huge thing. Thus, there was this break between my personal life and sociological training.

When I went for fieldwork in Tamil Nadu to look at caste and gender, I suddenly found that people were decoding my speech, my accent, my language, my demeanour, and in less than a day, they had mapped my caste. We are Tamil immigrants in Telangana, and I married a Telugu person. I was bilingual, but far more at home with Telugu. So I was speaking to the people in the village in Telugu. I don't know how, but through my scattered Tamil speech they figured out everything and slotted me in their Vaishnava order. I was extremely uncomfortable. I did my fieldwork there for a year and a half, but each time I went it was getting more and more uncomfortable. And good old Professor Yogendra Singh, my supervisor, said, 'okay Kalpana, this is your last field visit. Come back in three months and write up your thesis'. I said okay but I came back from the last field trip completely traumatised and told him I didn't want to write a thesis on this subject – I did not want to write a thesis on caste where I was implicated in the caste system. I was not a resident of Tamil Nadu, I was not a resident of that village, I didn't belong to that ecosystem at all. Nor did I belong in that ideological framework. I was insistent on my refusal to continue with the research. He was very distraught and upset – he thought that here I was going to

finish my thesis – I had already spent three years on my PhD by then. But he was really good to me and agreed to go along.

I had actually fled the field and gone to Madurai. While I was browsing through the Madurai archives rather aimlessly, I stumbled upon a whole lot of Inam settlement records of *devadasis*. I photocopied the entire lot, came to Delhi and announced that I was going to work on Inam settlements of devadasis in Ramnad district. I had never studied History, and had no formal training. I had finished three years of fieldwork in Sociology, and now I wanted to step into a totally new area. Yogendra Singh asked, ‘where are you going to find devadasis to do your fieldwork?’ I told him archival materials are primary sources. He looked at me completely baffled, he said, Kalpana, in Sociology, archival is a secondary source. I made my first case for interdisciplinarity – but in History, it is primary.

I worked in Teen Murti Library and studied the Muthulakshmi Reddy papers and soon found enough material on the devadasi Inam settlements in Madras Presidency. I had come across two or three references to late 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> century Madras High Court Reports, so I told my father that I wanted to work in the High Court library in Hyderabad. He was going to court very regularly at that time; this was in the late 1980s. He introduced me to one of his friends in the library, and they gave me access to the old reports. I would just go and sit in the High Court and either copy or photocopy all of the cases; about seventy-five cases between late-19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. By this time, despite Professor Y. Singh’s insistence, I did not agree to do fieldwork with devadasis. I was looking at 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> century archaeological records of Tanjore, the epigraphic series of Travancore, the Tirupati Devasthanam epigraphic series, Inam settlements, the epigraphic records of military chiefs branding women who were then rebranded when they were transferred to another chief. There were all these kinds of records that kept floating up. I zeroed in on looking at political economy and social history through archival, archaeological, and judicial records. That was my primary data. But even then, I had not theorised interdisciplinarity.

Whenever there was a problem that interested or excited me, I didn’t let a disciplinary boundary fetter me or obstruct me from looking at other stuff. That was in fact the first time I looked at case law at great length. That was my tryst with interdisciplinarity, but until then I hadn’t actually studied Law. Meanwhile, just before I submitted my thesis, we had started [Asmita](#) in Hyderabad. Here I had my second encounter with law. With the pro-bono counselling we did in Asmita, I

found it impossible to deal with lawyers because they assumed you are illiterate where it concerns the law, you don't know anything about courtcraft, and they were reluctant to explain to a non-professional how and why they took the decisions they did, although the cases were cases you had entrusted to them. To get around this, I just told our counsellors – there were two of them and me – ‘why don't we take the law entrance? It's not a big deal, you know, we can just do the three-year law degree’. I was working full-time in Asmita at that time. So we took the entrance but I was the only one who finished. And I did it, like I said, for a totally different reason – to be able to keep our lawyers in check. After this I joined NALSAR, and did LLM, while I was teaching there.

I have never actually looked at myself as firmly located within Law. I identified as a sociologist. But I have never done traditional Sociology, either. Never. You know, none of my writing, none of what I do, has been in sociology alone. It has rather been kind of like a potted selection of a bit of this and a bit of that. So, like you said, I don't think interdisciplinarity was a choice. It just happened.

**RS:** Exactly!

**KK:** Why Law particularly? Because, like gender, law is never absent. I wonder how sociologists are able to narrate violence without invoking a sensibility of the law at all. I think the question is really the interconnections, and as feminists we can't afford to allow ourselves to be fenced in by boundaries – either disciplinary, or activism-academics...It doesn't make very much sense if you are engaged in certain kinds of work that intersects constantly.

**RS:** Right. I hadn't thought of this previously but as you speak, there is something which is coming to my mind which has also been there through my own readings around the Sociology of Law, etc. which is, I somehow found it strange that a discipline in the Indian university system – Sociology – which is doing village studies, and is doing caste and family studies, right, how is it even possible that that discipline is actually not engaging with law in a more direct way? I am just thinking, it was very poignant as you said, you think of yourself as a sociologist and yet you do not anchor yourself in the traditional way in which sociology is done. So maybe it is from there that I am curious to know what do you think, where was this amiss, why was this not done, the sociology engaging with caste and family and yet not engaging with the legal equation?

**KK:** I think it has to do with the idea that societies are to be studied in particular ways; in methodological questions about how you study societies and how you map the normative in societies; but the law has a very different normative protocol. There is, in a sense, the separation at both ends, because the Law also separates itself from other non-law disciplines like Sociology.

**RS:** But then if we think about it, then you find that even the normative in Sociology is constituted by a legal, moral sensibility. The legal and the moral are very closely tied. I mean, we can call it legal pluralism but that's still law, right?

**KK:** Take the example of village government – that's still law. But you don't feel comfortable talking very much about the law if you have not spent time familiarising yourself with the internal protocols of law. It makes a difference if you have handled cases, if you've counselled cases, if you've studied legal provisions, even if you haven't studied law. If you've studied and tried to understand legal provisions, it makes a huge difference. And of course, within the law, they just believe that they are totally autonomous. I remember the year that I taught Law & Poverty in NALSAR, that was only one year, the students said this is Sociology III. I said, well, you know, so be it.

**RS:** Do you look at law as something that connects people, citizens, state but it is also something that disrupts relationships or both connecting relations between people and institutions, but also that which disrupts, people, institutions, etc. Is that the reason why, in all your writings, law is the thread? Or you would want to call it something else?

**KK:** I actually don't think outside the space of law. It's perhaps a limitation, but I cannot actually frame a problem without recourse to law. Whether the law as disruptive or the law as restitutive, or the law as enabling, in whatever form, I can't actually frame a problem in absence of the law. And yet, my relationship with practice and courtcraft – formal law – is very tenuous. I can never be a professional lawyer. 60 years is a bit late to begin. I don't see myself standing in court and arguing. It's basically the professional protocols that I have simply not been schooled into.

**RS:** I was thinking of your own experience with the Equality Commission or in CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against

Women); these would be closest to actually working and writing for an already given legal institutional framework that exists. So how would you reflect on that?

**KK:** They are two very different experiences. With CEDAW, my major contribution was to get people to write, bringing all of that together, editing it according to the required framework, making sure that all the nuances of a particular problem are in, rewriting parts where they needed to be rewritten, preparing the summaries – basically my work had to do with the preparation of the document. Because the thing that I really enjoy the most is writing. In both the CEDAW Committee meetings, in New York and Geneva, my task was quite clearly defined.

The fact of being in academics and at the intersection of Law came in very handy for me when I was part of the CEDAW effort. People had wonderful ideas, they had wonderful lobbying skills, but in terms of writing in a particular template – that was something I think that I did contribute to.

With the Expert Group on the Equal Opportunity Commission (EOC), it was a good experience for me working with a very diverse group – I was the only woman, and was added on later. Professor Madhava Menon chaired this group. It was an interesting exercise because I had never worked with the government before that. We used to meet in the Department of the Ministry of Minority Affairs; we did enjoy writing that report but nothing came of it. I was just kind of soaking in the experience. The following year, the Government of Kerala asked Professor Menon to devise a blueprint that would link all the autonomous and government law colleges and the national law college in Cochin, to a common curricular ecosystem. What the Education Minister wanted to get was a blueprint so that all law teaching institutions could be networked into a single system and have a common entrance, and students can choose to study close to home or far away depending on where they want to go, but all will offer roughly the same curriculum, maybe options would differ, but the base curriculum would be the same. This was a fantastic idea which can only happen in Kerala. Prof. Menon was all excited about this. And I made two or three trips to Kerala. It was most amazing. I think I visited every single Law Department, every single Law College in Kerala as part of that effort. We submitted a very detailed report on reform of legal education in Kerala to the Kerala Government. This was around 2008/09. So for me, the EOC effort is much more remembered because of the Kerala experiment.



**RS:** It's interesting that having done all my degrees in Sociology, till MA one didn't study Kalpana Kannabiran, but it was the teaching at the Law School which brought me to read you. BA was probably more spread out, I did History and Political Science together with Sociology so, therefore, there was some amount of interdisciplinary reading, but MA had nothing; and then after MA, I started teaching at the law school in Kolkata, and with Prof. Menon you are just forced to study the law, you just couldn't be at the law school without studying the law, and so in fact, the first book that I read of yours was the *Violence of Normal Times*, and then one eventually went towards *From Mathura to Manorama*, by that time, with also my own engagement with women groups in Calcutta had begun. But I was actually thinking today that when you wrote the *Violence of Normal Times*, I think what struck me most was the fact that we would always look at violence as something that is extraordinary or something that is episodic and not something which is constantly there, that one is actually living with it. One still did have the vocabulary of 'everyday' at that point of time. But then I was thinking how similar are the times that we are living in, how has fear and violence become normalised in our everyday life and yet, how is it that in our teaching we teach it or don't teach it. Violence, as courses actually do not exist, again, women sociology within law, we at AUD have an elective course on Sociology of Violence that we have been able to do only twice, and I don't know whether law schools actually even do a separate course around violence. So I was just kind of thinking about if you want to tie a few of these together through the book, of course.

**KK:** My earlier book which I co-authored with my mother was also on violence – *De-eroticizing Assault* – and so the spectre of violence was always kind of there and I never actually felt I could evade it. It's possibly because of work around questions of domestic violence within the movement. It's also possibly my very early exposure to state violence at very close quarters, seeing torture victims in our home there, which was also a safe house. With Asmita, I would have women coming, ever so normally, show me unimaginable injuries and asked me what they could do, and we talked about it or didn't talk about it or they just came to sit because they just wanted place out of that situation. There was something that was so eerily normal about the way survivors conducted themselves, about how not just violence but trauma was normalised as well. I had actually been processing cases, and it's from that experience I think that a phrase like *Violence of Normal Times* emerged, not consciously, but because everywhere around me, it was not

the extraordinary rape and encounter killing, it was the more everyday forms of violence, that were traumatic.

And also your other point on violence itself not being taught, that's actually true, it's not even taught in criminal law. Criminal Law teaches you the law of crimes but it never tells you that the crimes are violent, nor does it tell you that punishment is violent. It never tells you that the death penalty is violent. In fact you are taught to see the death penalty as punishment, not violence; so nothing – incarceration, death penalty, nothing within Criminal Law is framed in terms of violence, not even terror. On the one hand, you have the whole discourse on non-violence but you don't have the corresponding discourse on violence; the corresponding discourse is on law and order.

**RS:** So, as you were saying that there is a discourse on non-violence and we don't teach violence, is it also because there is a limitation in our understanding on how we even study violence. You know the methods of studying violence, I am kind of thinking about the early women studies writings around how difficult it is to do research on domestic violence. And from there, to how difficult is it to do research, let's say with death row prisoners, and you know one is thinking about the Death Penalty Project that National Law University Delhi has been doing, so I am wondering, does it also have to do with the fact that we are not training people with how to study violence.

**KK:** I think there are many layers in the study of violence. For instance, I have never been able to 'study' violence to this day. I have worked with survivors, I have worked with testimonies, I have worked with case law, which is one step removed, but I haven't actually ever, I think, interviewed a sample of women who are survivors of violence and published the findings. That is a balance that every researcher has to strike up. What is it that you will use, what are your own limitations, basically, the feeling in your gut; What can you deal with, what can't you deal with? Emotionally, how do you connect to a problem, how much are you able to distance yourself, and at what level are you able to distance yourself.

**RS:** And definitely involves questions on ethics...

**KK:** Ethics, of course, first of all. But once you cross the problem of ethics, or rather once you settle the issue of ethics, you still have a series of choices. On what your materials of study will be, and that can be any of a range. It can be

prisoners, under trials, survivors, victims' families, it can be any of a range of options, and with each then you have a fresh set of ethical questions that arise, except where you are looking at reported cases from the public record, where you only have to settle up your ethical question once. In a sense, it's a bit of an easy exit.

**RS:** As you're saying this, I'm finding a connection with this set of things that you said, you worked with testimonies, case laws, you've worked with survivors with public reports but not done detailed, in-depth interviews, or even if you have done cases, you've not used it. And these in some sense seem to be connected with your PhD thesis where you were being asked to find out and do interviews with devadasis but you were working with records and Imam Settlements and other kinds of written records.

**RS:** With the book *From Mathura to Manorama* one of the thoughts with the book's title that I had was why the names in the title? While, of course, one knew these names and yet one was also aware of all debates by the 2000s about anonymising, etc. But one of the thoughts that has remained with me is that if violence is actually everyday and normalised then why would we want to remember moments in women's movements? Mathura and Manorama, of course play very important roles as movements, legal transformations, etc., but still a certain kind of unease, I would think, I was just thinking that.

**KK:** If we just historicise the anonymising debate, both Rameeza and Mathura were prior to it, and if you don't say Mathura or don't say Rameeza, you don't know the case. If I say, Tukaram vs. State it may not ring a bell. Rameeza's name is even mentioned in the Justice Mukhtadhar Commission Report that was tabled before the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly. She is named as Rameeza Bee in the official records. All the rape law reform campaigns named Mathura in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is a 'watershed' in the women's movement. Both the Rameeza and the Mathura cases cascaded into huge campaigns that forced the general public to take note of the fact that these are injustices. That is something that can't be forgotten. Thangjam Manorama had died. The protest of the Meira Paibis was unparalleled. Our focus was on the continuum of violence and on the continuum of protest against violence. Because this was a book on feminists organising against violence, so that's the reason why we said okay let's use these two historical moments, the campaign for justice for Mathura and the protest

against the murder of Manorama – the focus was on suffering and harm and importantly on feminist organising.

**RS:** The other questions that I had was around Telangana studies and as I was looking through, this was something that I just read in your website; I haven't followed the series, but the question that I was thinking about as a sociologist was that, how important do you think is studying specific political, cultural, spaces and context in India, and to what extent do you think that the discipline of Sociology does that, because we gave up village studies, we've shifted from there to doing urban studies; studying the cities is now becoming somewhat popular, going to the rural is another thing that we do. Some departments either in Sociology or in Women's Study tried to do north-east writings, etc. So keeping these as background in mind, what we still go on doing is Indian Sociology or Sociology of India, those are the kinds of courses that we still end up doing and as if we're also saying that the other courses there aren't India, it is in this course that you could do. So I think two kinds of things that I'm curious to ask, one is, why Telangana studies, two, where is the space of this kind of discourse within Sociology?

**KK:** Belonging to Telangana, the whole idea of the cultural specificity of Telangana is something that I grew up with. In 2007-09, when the movement for separate Telangana really picked up, a bunch of us just went off on a road trip to all the districts in Telangana talking to everybody on the streets. There were Joint Action Committees in every village, every town. So we just got into a jeep and went all over the state, in forest areas, outside, everywhere just asking people why they support the demand for a separate Telangana. And the responses we got were really amazing; we put it out in an article on EPW in 2009 called 'On the Telangana Trail'. Later I joined an ICSSR institute supported by the state government. There had to be a research partnership with the government. We had a rather friendly bureaucrat who had done his MPhil from SIS in JNU who was in charge of planning – BP Acharya. It was in conversation with him that the idea of putting out a Social Development Report for Telangana emerged. We brought in researchers from outside. We had Padmini Swaminathan, formerly with Madras Institute of Development Studies, and J. Jeyaranjan, who is now the Vice Chair of the State Planning Commission in Tamil Nadu – both economists – and me, coordinating this entire effort with other scholars involved as well. We put together two reports. The second Telangana Social Development Report (2018) focused on Gender Access and Well-being. In this report, we included crimes

against women as a social indicator of well-being. It's possibly the only report which has district-wise figures on crimes against women using data from NCRB, NSSO and census. So where the Telangana Studies is concerned, I think it was much more institutionally driven, it wasn't really something I was personally interested in. It definitely is a regional perspective and therefore important.

**RS:** Right, I think we have come to the last set of thoughts today, which is, your teaching, you as a teacher in the law school, and in your website you do write about the thesis that you have supervised, and there is one which is still ongoing, and I'm just wondering that you will not be a traditional Sociology teacher and you've not taught in a Sociology department, which itself is something very noteworthy, I think, and yet I am still trying to think about the kind of courses that you taught in the law school, curriculum building, as well as transacting these courses to law students. Given the resistance that would have remained in the way in which – you did mention about the Law and Poverty thing that we are doing Sociology 3 – and yet what is it that you would say as your role as a teacher who is not consciously doing interdisciplinarity and yet is using so many kinds of materials (which I thought is the most important thing). What are your reflections on teaching?

**KK:** The years that I spent in NALSAR were actually in terms of my teaching, the best. Because after that, I moved out of undergraduate and was only doing research supervision. I was teaching Introduction to Sociology and Sociology of Law. I also taught a bit of Labour Law for a couple of years, I shared the course on Criminal Law for a year or two. And then I did seminar courses for two years and taught the LLM Human Rights course. But the one that I enjoyed the most was teaching the Sociology course to the first year students because you're actually in a conversation where a new world is literally opening out. For them and also for you, because you haven't actually met eighty different young people who have come with a baggage of experiences. I was getting stories about discrimination on campus, discrimination by faculty members, by other students, homophobia, silences, battering at campus, battering at home, all kinds of things. I engaged with them in my lectures, because I was teaching the family, I was teaching caste, I was teaching social stratification. I had split the Criminal Law course with a Criminal Law teacher and I was teaching the sexual offenses chapter – offences against the body – and there was no censoring, we talked about everything, we talked about why something is rape, why something is not rape, how can something be outraging modesty, we had these conversations very

openly in class and I just said, everybody should participate. If you have a disagreement with me, you have to tell me and tell me why. Then came along a retired judge who was appointed Criminal Law teacher; when it came to offences against the body, he would teach murder and homicide, and the rest of it, he would say were not important.

Already in Sociology, I was teaching Article 17 because Constitutional Law never teaches you Article 17. I started sexual offenses in Sociology so my Sociology was a default setting. Nothing was really outside the domain of Sociology. Everything the kids felt was getting left out somewhere came into Sociology.

I was very strict in class – insisted that if you are in class, you have to listen, you have to engage. I am not giving you a choice on that, you can't just sit and do your own texting, you have to tune in. Even that was a gamble that worked. I mean they have to be willing to listen to you, they have to trust you enough to listen to you and I was just lucky. I got lucky many times over. In the fifth year, when I offered seminar courses, I had quite a few students opting for my seminar courses. And several of them are now practicing in Delhi. But if you are a social science teacher who is not familiar with law at all, then you don't have the basis for a conversation with these students. That was what I realised.

With the Council for Social Development, it was basically courses on research methods. I haven't supervised too many, I have supervised two LLM dissertations in Human Rights in NALSAR. At CSD, I had six PhD students, of whom five were in women's studies and one in social sciences. But even so, I found it kind of a good experience. Of the six, five students are from TISS. Of the four that have already been awarded their PhDs, they are all people who are much older, people who returned for a PhD quite late after a long gap. One of them finished when she completed 60 in 2019... Lata... She worked on women in the OBC movement.

**RS:** How endearing is that!

**KK:** The other student Vaishali, who also came in after a very long time in Human Rights and looked at Dalit women in employment and then there was Rimi, who was from Arunachal who did a wonderful thesis on Apatanis of Arunachal.

**RS:** The last question I have is at this juncture where social science teaching and practice is undergoing a huge transformation. It has been undergoing a transformation for long. So I necessarily don't see it happening only now through the NEP, it has been happening through, from the National Knowledge Commission, Yashpal Committee Report and all of that. What would you have to say to early-career researchers, teachers, as to what would be non-negotiables in teaching and research of social sciences?

**KK:** I think the first is certainly revisiting the canon. That we haven't begun to do, I mean we are still doing the fathers of sociology and then adding the mothers and other beings. We do need to revisit the canon, both in terms of materials that have emerged from the subcontinent historically, and materials and writings outside. For instance, Ambedkar, Tarabai Shinde, just to name two, would be absolutely central. But also Gloria Anzaldúa, Zora Neale Hurston, I mean, we need to look at the structuring of the canon differently. And then look for the criss-crossing of concepts, methods, and approaches to study. So we can actually look at different sets of people and read, conceptualise the key concepts, reformulate the key concepts, reformulate the canon, do a completely fresh curriculum that it is not meant to set the old one right but displaces the old one and put something radically different in its place, more contemporary.

A lot more literature is needed; creative writing does not enter the Sociology curriculum at all. And creative writing is just so rich in its possibilities of understanding socialities, resistance, emotions, all of which are a huge part of Sociology. We don't teach the sociology of emotions. How do you re-conceptualise your core and your electives in such a way that even if I don't take an elective, the areas of that elective already figure in the core. Because as of now, we may not study rural sociology at all, then if we don't take an elective in rural sociology we get out of the Masters without studying rural sociology. Rather than doing that, what are the spaces that we must cover – work, family, emotions, socialities, hierarchies, inequalities, boundaries, relationships, intimacy, citizenship. Reimagining the discipline is the key.

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