

Tilottoma Barooah Memorial Lecture and Award Ceremony, 9th May, 2022

Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women Studies, Tezpur University organized Tilottoma Barooah memorial lecture and Tilottoma Barooah Memorial Award presentation on 9th May 2022. The host welcomed all the dignitaries. The dignitaries offered floral tribute to late Tilottoma Barooah. After that they were requested to take their seats on the dais. This year Tilottoma Barooah memorial award was conferred on Hemlata Baruah, a renowned social activist. However due to her health condition, she was not able to receive the award physically at the memorial award program. Respected Dr. Madhurima Goswami, Head (CSCWS) went to Baruah and recorded her speech. Hemlata Baruah said that she would be more glad to receive the award a little earlier when she was physically sound. Her family members came to receive the award on behalf of her. Nigar Sultana began the program by welcoming everyone and Dr. Madhurima Goswami explained the purpose of the program. Honourable Kamakhya Prasad Tasha (MP), Pro Vice Chancellor, Dean of Humanities and Social Sciences were welcomed on the stage. Honourable Kamakhya Prasad Tasha was felicitated by Pro Vice Chancellor. Pro Vice Chancellor and Dean of HSS were felicitated by Dr. Madhurima Goswami respectively.

Registrar of Tezpur University felicitated the special guest Prafulla Pran Mahanta. Dr Mousumi Mahanta was requested to felicitate the awardees' family and Dr Ivy Daimari felicitated registrar Biren Baishya. Professor Dhruba Kumar Bhattacharya, Pro Vice Chancellor, Tezpur University was requested to deliver welcome address. He emphasized on how Tezpur University has been working towards the upliftment of women and especially Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women Studies is working relentlessly for the women. Apart from many government schemes, this university has been taking initiative on different steps regarding women. He also talked about the contribution of Tilottoma Barooah and Hemalata Baruah. Professor Bhattacharya said that Tezpur University is creating awareness of the initiatives taken by the government towards women through this centre.

Dean of HSS, Professor Farheena Danta described how this centre is involved in both academic and practical field. Theory cannot help every time, and it is those programs or field studies which help. "The centre which was started in 2019 has been doing a lot of work without the proper support". They had to struggle and still working. This centre is conducting many programs and at the same time carrying the teaching or research activities. There are two parts of this centre. Therefore one cannot work without the other. She also referred to other women who have contributed and they were activists, social workers, freedom fighters and so on. Chandraprabha Saikiani was one of them who worked harder in making women's life better. Documentation of different issues is what Woman Studies Centre does.

Professor Danta congratulated the people of the centre on working relentlessly even though they do not have proper infrastructure. She also mentions those women organization or NGO's who are working without getting acknowledged. In the end, she thanked everyone for being present there. The host Nigar Sultana conveyed her gratitude to the dean and thanked her for emphasizing the importance of research and the importance of Women Studies Centre. Dr. Madhurima (Head of the centre) was invited to introduce the purpose of the ceremony.

Dr. Goswami started by saying it is the day of happiness and joy. It is about how we want to give the honor to those who have worked for the betterment of the society and women. Dr. Goswami also gave her heartfelt thanks to Tezpur District Mahila Samiti for attending the ceremony. She also addressed honourable Kamkhaya Prasad Tasha, and the students. This centre has been conducting such programmes from time to time. The centre is also doing its research and academics simultaneously through all these years. She mentions the struggle of 'women', 'mahila samiti', and 'centre for women studies'. "We will work towards the agenda of gender justice". She stated "we need a permanent centre."

Invited speaker, Member of Parliament Mr. Kamakhya Prasad Tasha graced the event and addressed delegates with a fruitful lecture. In the beginning, Tasha praised Hemlota Baruah, recipient of the Tilottama Barooah for her relatively good health at such old age and the concept of children harassing their elderly parents. He said that it should be our duty to look after our parents, especially mothers who bore babies for 9 months at the latter stage of life. Speaking of women empowerment, Tasha highlighted the role of Self Help groups. He mentioned the weavers weave the gamusa, ladies who prepare Assamese snack Pitha and have popularized at market. Remembering his childhood at the tea gardens, MP Tasha shared stories of the ladies of Tea plucking community. He condemned that the hardworking ladies who are still deprive of education, nutrition and other basic necessities are only remembered during the time of election as they are no more than a vote bank for politicians. Tasha also touched upon the representation of women in political sphere. He said that despite the hefty reservation for the women at the Parliament, State Assembly and Local Self Government bodies, participation of women is still disappointing. At the Gram Panchayat level, ladies contest for election but it is the male person of the household who looks after the official work.

In his concluding speech, Tasha went through the journals, research works produced by the members of Centre for Women Studies. He praised the works done with limited resources and suggested the authority to send important findings to the nodal ministry and departments so that the data can be used for future policy formulation. After that he was requested to release the news report of the centre and also the pamphlets of Tilottoma Barooah and Hemlata Baruah. The host then went

on to talk about GATI. On 28th February, 2020 on the occasion of National Science Day, honorable President of India launched the GATI project. GATI is indigenous to India and it emphasizes on the equal participation of women in science and technology. The website of GATI was launched. A total of thirteen educational institutions have been nominated for conducting the GATI pilot. In the North-East, Tezpur University has earned the distinction. Dean of Academic Affair, Professor Mrinmoy Kumar Sarmah was requested to launch the website and he congratulated the centre.

Hemlata Baruah's nephew Diganta Baruah received the award on her behalf. It was so generous of the awardee to send a short message for us to cherish. The felicitation carries an Axomiya xorai, a shawl, a gamosa and a cash award to Hemlota Baruah. Before commemorating Tilottoma Barooah Memorial Award ceremony, senior journalist and Vaisnavaite scholar Shri Prafulla Pran Mahanta was requested to throw some light on Tilottoma Barooah's life since he had been close to her. Tilottoma Barooah was born in Tezpur.

Dr. Ivy Daimari was called upon the stage to give a brief note on Hemlota Baruah. Baruah was born on 5th of November, 1928 in Tezpur. She had been a teacher, social worker, freedom fighter and she was born in a middle class family. In the year 1947, she was appointed as an assistant teacher in Tezpur Axomia Madhya Balika Vidyalaya. She joined the Tezpur District Mahila Samiti as a member from 1954 and remained so till she took volunteer retirement in 2004. She is a pioneer of cooperative organization.

Dr. Mousumi Mahanta was invited to read the citation. Honourable Tasha was requested to confer upon the Tilottoma Barooah Memorial Award to nominee Diganta Baruah.

Through the video, Hemlota Baruah said that she would have been very happy if she got the award while being in a good health. Due to her health condition, she could not attend the ceremony. Mahila Samiti is her favorite thing and she said if people work with determination, patience and sincerity, then the future is bound to be better. She requested today's youth to go on with their studies and work for the betterment of the society. The youth should be able to express themselves by working on many things.

Keynote speaker Honourable Smriti Zubin Irani, Ministry of Women and Child Development could not join due to some unavoidable engagements that she had. However, it is her greatness and value towards commitment that earlier that morning she recorded her lecture in the form of interaction. Ruhi Kashyap, a

research scholar was requested to give a brief note on honorable Union Cabinet Minister Smriti Irani.

Hon'ble Union Minister, Smt Smriti Zubin Irani interacted with the Director of the Centre for Women Studies Dr Madhurima Goswami at Chandraprabha Saikiani Centre for Women Studies Tezpur University, Assam on 9th May 2022 during the programme Tillottama Baruah Memorial Lecture.

Minister Smriti Irani asked the audience to reflect if there has been any significant change in the society culturally apart from technology. In our ancient civilisation women have always been held equal to men. After many invasions, the agenda of putting women behind the purdah to "protect" them became the mainstream practice.

Today under the leadership of Shri Narendra Modi there has been a tectonic shift in governance and policymaking. For many years governments have had the narrative that women need emancipation but Narendra Modi changed this narrative to the society's need for women-led development. This will be possible when they are equipped with education and financial security in order to have the freedom to contribute holistically to nation-building.

It is important to take note that very few people know about the contributions of women revolutionaries. It is of utmost importance to recognise local heroes and place them in popular history read by the generations to come. While we must find women who have fought for independence we must also celebrate women's pivotal roles in academic and industrial firms today. To a question raised about the marginalised women the minister promptly pointed out the bias one has while reading the stories of tribal or rural women. She said that these stories must be told to not just girls but also to men and boys to draw inspiration. Inspirational stories of great men are told to everyone but often inspirational stories about great women are only told to women.

The minister spoke extensively on the changes brought about in the New Education Policy with regard to girl students. Regarding the NEP 2020, she quoted the Prime minister's Beti Bachao Beti Padhao campaign should become a Jan Andolan. She added that the gender inclusion fund has been added to NEP. Importance is being given to local languages and technical education in local languages which remains a gap in the system, she emphasised there is a need for scientific methodologies, ways of analysis and research to be available in local languages. So that talent is not lost due to a language barrier.

Further, when it comes to changing gender roles people only talk about the need for more women to become teachers but we should think of more women in

leadership positions where they can take decisions and change the path of the institution. Women's study cells should be activated and I was instrumental in developing this when I was the minister of HRD.

On the question of state of women in India report in 1974, whether the women of this country are still lagging behind she pointed towards the changes, for e.g that had happened in last few decades to small scale enterprises, schemes like Mudra, maternity benefits, startups for women. Breaking the ceiling was not a part of the movement in India. India didn't need the suffrage movement as India had a universal adult franchise at the time of the independence. India has seen some major changes like 26 weeks of paid leave for pregnant women, under the Mudra scheme 70% of the loans were given to women, similarly to start-up India. 25 cr women now have bank accounts due to Jan Dhan accounts.

Minister threw light on bias in the discipline of sociology as it is only rooted in western philosophy and Indian women are being studied without an Indian perspective. Indians have never been taught to be 'pro men' or 'pro-women', the Indian philosophy talks about the whole world as one big family. (Vasudaiva Kutumbakam)

Minister's response to the question on human trafficking was that 9000 cr fund of money was evaluated under the Nirbhaya scheme under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi. Before 2014 not even a single penny was spent from the fund. The ministry of WCD and NIMHANS has collaborated to help the women and children who have been victims of violence A rapid transport system in metro cities has been funded, women help desks at all police stations, forensic kits, and trafficking bills have been under work. She mentioned that 704 districts have one-stop crisis centres, judicious use of the Nirbhaya fund, Anti-human trafficking units in the states, 35 women helplines, and 70 lakh women have been helped. Women's help desk in police stations. The ministry is also looking at police systems to work fast. Funding and support are provided by the ministry.

With regard to the sexual harassment of women in workplace, the Minister pointed out that the citizens need to be conscious regarding their protection of rights. The legislature has done its job and the polity cannot be blamed for everything. On the last question of history being silent about women, she emphasized people's history rather than women's history.

The minister completed her address by remembering the contribution of Tillotama and Hemalata Baruah to the field of education and expressed that their ideologies and life struggle narratives be disseminated far and wide.

At the end, Dr.Biren Das, Registrar of Tezpur University gave the vote of thanks to everyone present there.