Feminist Futures: Art, Activism, and South Asian Womanhood Curated by Dr. Arshiya Lokhandwala

Taragaon Cultural Center and Saraf Foundation presents Feminist Futures: Art, Activism, and South Asian Womanhood an exhibition of ten visionary women artists from across South Asia to critically confront the complex intersections of contemporary feminist thought and the deeply rooted societal structures of the region. The exhibition seeks to interrogate the nuanced dynamics of gendered power, exploring themes of patriarchy, colonial legacies, and socio-religious constructs through the lens of art and activism.

South Asia occupies a uniquely multifaceted position in feminist discourse, embodying a paradoxical relationship with women's empowerment. Historical legacies such as goddess worship and cultural reverence for female figures coexist with stark realities of systemic violence, gender inequality, and cultural conservatism. Feminist Futures sheds light on this dichotomy, offering a platform for creative agency and a radical reimagining of the roles and representations of women in the region.

Featuring works by Anita Dube (India), Anoli Perera (Sri Lanka), Ashmina Ranjit (Nepal), Bidhata KC (Nepal), Mithu Sen (India), Naiza Khan (Pakistan), Pushpamala N (India), Sheba Chhachhi (India), Tayeba Begum Lipi (Bangladesh), and Uma Bista (Nepal). Each artist uniquely reclaims narratives of womanhood while addressing issues of identity, justice, and resilience. The exhibition challenges audiences to engage with urgent questions of gender and power, acting as both a call to action and a space for solidarity as they navigate, and challenge deeply entrenched hegemonic societal frameworks.

For example, the work of Pushpamala N and Ashmina Ranjit delve into the enduring impact of mythology and tradition on women's lives. Pushpamala N's performative photograph Apaharana/Abduction (2012), from the series Avega — The Passion, reimagines Sita's abduction from the Ramayana, drawing parallels to the violence and treatment of women in contemporary society."

Ashmina Ranjit's performance Sita! The Ideal Wife? (2025) critiques the Hindu tradition of Kanyadan (the giving away of the bride) codified in the Manu Smriti. The work highlights the loss of agency women endure within marriage and caste structures, while her performance video Damal (2024), draws from the historical Muluki Ain of 1854, which legalized caste-based punishments, embedding societal hierarchies in Nepalese life.

Tayeba Begum Lipi's multimedia works critique the performative rituals of marriage and their dualities. In I Wed Myself (2010), Lipi subverts traditional gender roles by embodying both bride and groom, interrogating societal paradoxes around marriage. Her recent works Wedlock (2024) and Garland of the Wedding (2025) utilize safety pins and razor blades as metaphors for the duality of marriage—its potential for connection and its capacity for control that could possibly also lead to violence or harm.

Uma Bista amplifies the voices of Nepali women, through her ongoing series Stay Home, Sisters (2020–) critiques menstrual taboos like Chhaupadi, while Devotion (2025) examines the veneration of the virgin goddess. In I // (2022), Bista celebrates women who defying societal expectations, showcasing their sacrifices and triumphs in creating spaces of resilience and strength.

Bidhata KC's works interrogate the intersection of gender, ritual, and societal expectations in Nepal. In My Left is Right (2022), KC critiques the stigmatization of the left hand in Hindu culture, challenging the validity of rituals performed by women with the left hand. Her performance installation Chori Manche Bhayera..... Keti Manche Bhayera..... (2023), invites women to share their aspirations, disrupting restrictive gender roles imposed by phrases like "being a daughter, being a girl."

Anita Dube, Naiza Khan, and Anoli Perera explore the female body as a political and empowering site. Anita Dube's Eye Photos (2000-2012), made using votive eyes, confront institutional power, demanding the dismantling of the male-dominated structures and systems. Naiza Khan's Heavenly Ornaments (2007–2009) and Henna Hands (2002–2022) investigate female subjectivity and the gendered battlegrounds of public spaces through sculpture, drawing, and installation. Anoli Perera's I Let My Hair Loose: Protest Series (2010-2011), transforms hair into a defiant symbol of protest, disrupting the male gaze and reclaiming female agency.