

How To Have Your Voice Heard

Thursday June 5th saw the latest event held by Women Empowered. The theme for the night was on how one could harness the power of the internet and social media and posed the question that in a world on 7 billion people can one person really have their voice heard?

Newly appointed Councillor, **Reena Ranger** welcomed the guests and explained the rationale of the evening's event by saying "When we first pictured this event it was through the somewhat naive and narrow lens of how social media has transformed people's ability to start ventures from home or anywhere and how it can be used to differentiate and market those ventures to a wider audience at a relatively low cost and with relative ease.

"Enterprises can now tap into markets and geographical locations they may have never heard of and reach more people than they could ever have imagined all with the touch of a button. But recent events in India, Pakistan, Syria and Sudan have really shown us what people power and social media can do.

"It can bring worldwide attention to causes and events that have been taking place for decades but just have been unspoken and or unseen by the world because there was no way to get the message out to so many, so quickly. But social media has now changed that - our eyes and ears can now be opened in real-time"

The speakers for the evening included **Rupa Ganatra**, co-founder of Men's e-commerce site Yes-Sir.com and brandusocial.com, which organises Social Media and Digital



Photo courtesy: Sriram Sivasankaran

conferences for the fashion and beauty industry, **Farzana Baduel**, founder and managing director, Curzon PR, a London-based strategic public relations and digital communications agency and **Sunny Hundal**, author, journalist, blogger and academic. He is best known as the former editor for the UK's most popular centre-left blog 'Liberal Conspiracy'.

Rupa Ganatra talked about the use of social media in the recent electoral campaign of **Narendra Modi** in India and how he was engaging and having a conversation with millions of people every day through its use. She emphasised how one must engage with their clients and customers.

Farzana Baduel provided a full and insightful talk into social media and the benefits to the business. She said that often for certain businesses social media may not generate leads or revenue, but it is a medium for communication with your clients.

Sunny Hundal talked about social media and his journey. He told the audience how he started as a blogger after feeling constrained by mainstream media. He shared tips on blogging learnt from his own experiences and men-

tioned that blogs should be short and interesting. He also spoke about ensuring content on social media should be applicable and relevant and went on to advise on what should be avoided when posting on sites.

Special mention were made of **Sriram Sivasankaran** for the pictures taken at the event and stall holders **Raishma Islam** of Raishma Ready to Wear, **Preema Verma** of Reesa Rocks, **Parita** of Uniflora and **Sukhi Bhogal** a Nikken Wellness Consultant.

Mona Remtulla, co-founder of Women Empowered, closed the evening proceedings by adding, "We hope that today will inspire you to harness your own inner media centre and through the journeys, advice and wisdom of Rupa, Farzana and Sunny, navigate your own way through the world wide web to make your own mark and have a voice that can be heard whether it is for a cause or your business."

She went on to say that Women Empowered has seen the power of social media in highlighting causes and how one person really can have a voice that can be heard.

Lord Loomba calls on DFID to work closely with UN women to include the plight of widows

Lord Loomba spoke in a debate on International Development, which was included in Her Majesty's gracious speech on the opening of the session at the Westminster Palace. He praised the Department for International Development (DFID) for giving aid to India and many other developing countries to promote gender, equality and empower women. However, he informed the noble Lords that one group of women

in particular widows, who face economic and other challenges in their lives, is ignored. He added that there are 245 million widows and 500 million children around the world, who are discriminated against. Many of them suffer physical, physiological and sexual abuse. He stressed that Department for International Development should try to end these practices.

Lord Loomba closed his speech by asking the Department for



International Development to work closely with UN Women to include the plight of widows in the post Millennium Development Goals framework.

The Indian General Elections and After

Shefali Saxena

The newly appointed central government has not even completed a month, yet Prime Minister **Narendra Modi** remains a pivotal point of global debate.

SOAS, University of London, held a roundtable discussion on 'The Indian General Elections and After' at Russell Square last week. Organised by **Prof. Gurharpal Singh** and **Heewon Kim**, the debate revolved around the 16th Lok Sabha elections which were held against the backdrop of major political and economic challenges being faced by Indian democracy.

This workshop brought together some of the leading political scientists and commentators working on India like **Prof. James Manor**, ICS, **Prof. Sandeep Shastri**, National Coordinator of Lokniti Network, Jain University Bangalore, **Subir Sinha** from SOAS, **Prof. Christopher Jaffreot**, CNRS and King's College, **Rahul Roy Chaudhary**, ISS, **Uday Mehta**, CUNY, New York and other research scientists from SOAS. They reviewed the key issues that dominated the campaign, and examined in detail the electoral performance of the nation-

al and regional parties in shaping the 16th Lok Sabha. The dramatic transformation in the behaviour of the voters especially after AAP's success in Delhi state elections and Nitish Kumar's power in Bihar was a much contested argument. Explaining the cause of this unprecedented change in the mandate, Prof. Shastri highlighted and said, "Voters in India are making a clear distinction between state and national level vote."

Prof. James Manor discussed how the collective negative rating of Trinamool, AIDMK and Biju Janata Dal (BJD) was lesser than the negative rating of Congress according to the Lokniti polling. But he also mentioned that the UPA had achieved inclusive growth and it reached the poorest in the country. "This government did it," he said. While some speakers critiqued the BJP's expenditure during the elections which is believed to be around 1 Billion USD, they couldn't deny that the engagement of Congress in systematic self-harm proved to be a catalyst for BJP's victory.

Analysing the 2014 elections state wise, Prof. Gurharpal Singh said, "It's not the parties that win elections. It's the govern-

Correction

In the 12th June issue of Asian Voice coverage "Asian Community kickstarts summer with fantastic Anand Mela" Indiabulls and Miss Manasi Nayyar was misspelt. We apologies for the inconvenience caused.

ments that lose elections." During the debate, panelists also critiqued, how 'development' as a term was ambiguously used in Modi's speeches, Subir Sinha from SOAS said, "He puts the model as if it's his initiative and win."

Sharing his views about Modi's foreign policy, Rahul Roy Chaudhury from IISS appreciated the fact that Narendra Modi has led the SAARC initiative in his swearing ceremony. He believed that Modi's priority is to have a stable neighbourhood and domesticate the economy.

The round table discussion imperatively highlighted that there was a need to recognise Modi as the Prime Minister, and not as the former Chief Minister of Gujarat. While on one hand he was rigorously compared to Nehru and Indira Gandhi due to the centralisation of power, on the other hand, the panelists agreed that there is a dire need to have efficacy in the management of the country.

Lahiri: Joining Generations

Sunetra Senior

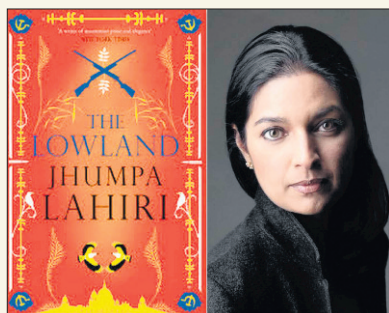
Few writers can simply communicate the profound. American-Bengali writer Jhumpa Lahiri is one such person. Her fiction grapples with the nebulous topic of post-colonialism to produce an honest account of the immigrant experience. Making the Man Booker shortlist for 2013 'The Lowland' is her latest feat.

In the book, two brothers Udayan and Subhash, are forever impacted by the Naxalbari movement that shook West Bengal in the seventies. As disillusioned students they are caught up in the insurgent activity exploding across their prestigious Presidency campus in Kolkata. Those at the college were rebelling against social inequality and what they perceived to be a perpetuated imperial hierarchy even after British rule. In

'The Lowland' then aggressive nationalisms are what drive family tensions.

The crux of the story lies with first brother Udayan becoming a violent Naxalite; this devastates Subhash and all their loved ones for years to come. This is not a chastisement of patriotism but rather the extremist means through which it tends to be realised. In killing a civil servant Udayan undermines any noble intention and becomes as underhanded as the state. There is great pathos when he is tracked down by the police, illegally marched behind his home and shot in the back: "that was the impetus for the novel," Lahiri told us. "Hearing about an anonymous brother who was executed at Tollygunge."

Accomplishing nothing politically, Udayan only intensifies the pain of an already tumultuous homeland for those closest to him. Fearful before, his parents become empty vessels. Brother Subhash



goes from feeling cowardly to being racked by guilt and Udayan's widow Gauri, a pawn in his brutal plot while pregnant with their daughter Bela, turns from tentative to cold.

Thus the government is given a face through a civilian and its tyranny is depicted a contagious mental epidemic. Whether

it is crooked capitalism or fevered communism, militant ideology strains the family unit as a microcosm of the nation and disturbs the very people it claims to protect.

Lahiri's position as a mother reflects on the development of this concept. Subhash taking responsibility for his abandoned niece represents an end to imperialism for future generations. Pursuing a deeper personal interest in Natural Science, he distances himself from the senseless power-politics in India and helps Bela to release her full potential. Joining a commune she is a trailblazer like her birth-father Udayan but channels that virtue in a way that is wholesome; preserving the environment.

As long as it is about values that enrich our lives

and not the dogmatism that keeps us separated Lahiri is supportive of cultural identity. A cosmopolitan feeling underscores the final step in the family's emotional liberation. In discovering her biological paternity Bela realises how much her adoptive father has done. Consequently the intimacy issue left from Gauri as an absent mother figure is completely expunged and Bela can finally feel close to her American partner Drew.

Because Gauri's aloofness stems from the trauma of Udayan, it is really his jingoism and the social homogeneity it could have bred that is excoriated here. In the modern-increasingly nomadic-world it is reasonable that Bela should bond with internationals. Culture exists to equip us emotionally e.g. morals, rites of pas-

sage and facilitates our personal needs. To search painstakingly for someone native becomes impractical and unsociable and subverts its very essence. Luckily Subhash does practise open-mindedness, and equanimity prevails over the malaise of ethnic exclusivity.

Must-Read 2014

And so, providing a contemporary reflection on global politics, 'The Lowland' is riveting journalism that will compel young adults and older readers alike. Rather than blaming any individual state all are encouraged to foster a benign sense of community that stretches across nations: "I've never understood the category of immigrant literature," Lahiri concluded at the lecture, "we are all immigrants in some way."