

# KESHAV MAHAVIDYALAYA

## Women Development Cell

### *Report*

Webinar, 25.08.2020, 11am

### *Contours of Women Empowerment: Mapping Feminine Lives in Masculine Spaces*

On 25 August 2020, The Women Development Cell of Keshav Mahavidyalaya organised an enriching webinar on "*Mapping Feminine Lives in Masculine Spaces*". This webinar marked the commencement of the Lecture Series "Contours of Women Empowerment" initiated by The Women Development Cell. Architect Anjali Shukla, Co-founder, *Studio 9491* was the speaker for the day. The Webinar saw an unprecedented attendance of more than 300 participants including the students and faculty of the college, as well as faculties from other colleges. Some distinguished architects and invitees also attended the event. Principal Prof. Madhu Pruthi graced the occasion and congratulated the team of WDC for organizing a webinar on such a relevant topic. She iterated that in her role as a woman and a head of an institution she manoeuvres the gendered terrains of power. She emphasized the importance of education in empowering women to the fullest and emphasized that the quality of excellence overcomes prejudices of any kind. Vice Principal Dr. Vijay Kumar Verma also encouraged the organizers with his kind words and welcomed the speaker.

The inception of the event was marked by a hearty welcome extended to the esteemed guests with the presentation of virtual saplings as a token of gratitude. Dr. Manjari Singh, Convener, Women Development Cell, introduced the speaker architect Anjali Shukla and elaborated on her educational and professional journey. Ar. Anjali Shukla he is a CEPT University, Ahmedabad pass out and a socially and environmentally responsible Architect. After finishing her education, she trained at Stein Doshi Bhalla, a firm established in the 60's and counted among the first generation of architectural practices in Delhi. Subsequently she earned a scholarship to ETH University in Zurich, Switzerland. On her return she continued to work with well-known firms in Delhi like Ranjit Sabikhi & Associates, and Arvind Gupta & Associates.

Along with her husband Ar. Raman Shukla she co-founded her firm *Studio 9491*, a very well established name in the industry. She does a lot of community outreach work also and has organised several community functions that have engaged children on themes like ecology, environment, history and cultural heritage.

Ar. Anjali elaborated on an array of interesting themes relevant in understanding the intricacies of gender distinctions and the women's journey through time. Before giving the participants an insight into this novel architectural perspective to look at gender, she initiated them onto this journey by tracing the evolution of the idea of equality as we now know it to be. With the help of a Power Point Presentation she dazzled the participants with vibrant pictorial depictions of built spaces as a reflection of gendered notions at play. With the help of prominent narratives throughout the history of India, she established the contrasting high status and dignity received by women through early ages against the vulnerabilities that they were exposed to during war and conflict that unfolded later.

The subsequent segment of the webinar consisted of vivid glimpses from the routine existence and social realities of men and women in ordinary neighborhoods of Jodhpur and Ahmedabad, both very close to her. The presentation highlighted the social differences in both these cities that were evident from the distinctive sharing of spaces between men and women, both within and beyond the bounds of the walls of a house. Using outlines of old houses in both the cities, she explained the subtle expression of gender norms for men and women and their place in the society, as reflected in the spaces they built for themselves. It was fascinating to see how seemingly lifeless courtyards, terraces and staircases said so much about those who inhabited these structures. This was followed by an enthralling discussion of the architectural features of one of the most beautiful monuments of India, the Hawa Mahal in Jaipur, Rajasthan. In an interesting analysis, she elaborated on what simple structures like the central fountain, open terraces, magnificent windows and unique ramps said about the prevalent notions about women then.

The focus of the attendees was then shifted to modernism in architectural practices that bore the responsibility to break through the chaos and struggle of balancing and merging the Ancient with the Modern. Ar. Anjali Shukla then gave her audience an insight into her own life and the personal value that she attaches to the nuances of design in her projects, while also

prioritizing her family life at all times. For a broader picture, she also talked about many pioneer women like her, who had made their place in the largely male-dominated profession of architecture.

To conclude this truly worthwhile experience, she left the attendees with thoughtful perspectives on how to approach traits associated with both genders as necessary and complementary. This is especially of relevance in the context of the unprecedented crisis that faces humanity today. After sharing such insightful views with the participants, she opened the floor for questions they might have invoked in the minds of the participants and skillfully explained her responses to each of them, be it about her journey as an architect or that of a woman. Encouraged and moved by the overwhelming response and feedback from the participants, the convener Women Development Cell Dr. Manjari Singh proposed the vote of thanks with assurance to be back with equally relevant and enlightening discussions to take the Cell to unprecedented heights.