Prof. Paromita Chakravarti
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Three Lectures on Society and Culture in Colonial and Post-colonial India

Living on the Edge: Mapping Homeless Women’s Mobilisation in Kolkata
Lunedì 13 maggio, ore 17.00-19.00

Translating Cultures: Italian Dramatists on the Bengali Stage
Martedì 14 maggio, ore 17.00-19.00

From Mother India to India’s Daughter: Indian Women’s Struggles for Autonomous Citizenship
Venerdì 17 maggio, ore 11.00-13.00

Dipartimento ISO – Circonvallazione Tiburtina 4
Sala Riunioni 1 (III piano)

Dr. Paromita Chakravarti is Professor, Department of English, Jadavpur University and has been Director, School of Women’s Studies, Jadavpur University and a convenor of the Cell Against Sexual Harassment, JU. She completed her doctoral studies on early modern discourses of madness from the University of Oxford. She teaches drama, women's writing, queer and film studies and has worked on gender representation in school textbooks, sexuality education, women's higher education, women and HIV and AIDS. She has coedited Women Contesting Culture (2012), Materiality and Cultural Life in Early Modern Europe (2016) and Shakespeare and Indian Cinemas: Local Habitations (2018).
Indian women’s relationship to the nation and the state has been and continues to be defined through a symbolic and representative status conferred on them by colonial, nationalist and postcolonial patriarchies. They are framed through the familial and domestic roles of wife, mother or daughter and identified with the Indian nation, whether as markers of its civilisational status or as icons of national pride. This iconicity helps to obliterate the reality of Indian women’s social condition and constructs them as emblems rather than as autonomous and equal citizens. My presentation will examine the Indian women’s movement as marking a struggle to claim gender justice and autonomous citizenship by challenging and resisting the symbolism of being “Mother India” or later, “India’s Daughter”. It will do so by focusing on two key moments in India’s colonial and post-colonial history when women’s voices against attempts to mythify them gather a particular intensity. These are the moments of the publication of Katherine Mayo’s book *Mother India* in 1927 and the screening of Leslee Udwin’s documentary, “India’s Daughter” in 2015, both of which provoked controversy and generated public debates about the nationalist claiming and appropriation of Indian women as icons and ‘western’ feminist interventions seeking to visibilise their realities. An analysis of these moments will provide a means to understand the fraught nature of Indian women’s relationship to the nation and the state and the gendered nature of their citizenship.

### Translating Cultures: Italian Dramatists on The Bengali Stage

**Martedì 14 maggio, ore 17.00-19.00, Sala Riunioni 1**

Although there has been a tradition of indigenous folk performances in Bengal, India, from its very inception in nineteenth century colonial Kolkata, modern Bengali theatre has consistently drawn inspiration from, translated and adapted western drama, particularly English, including plays by Shakespeare, Congreve, Sheridan, Moliere and others. In the 1940’s, anti-fascist progressive writers, dramatists and artists started a politically conscious, Left sympathizing people’s theatre movement (also known as group theatre) which deployed Bengali adaptations of the plays of international dramatists to convey their political message. Among them Italian playwrights like Luigi Pirandello (1867-1936), Ugo Betti (1892-1953), Dario Fo (1926-2016) and Franca Rame (1929-2013) were particularly popular. This talk will focus on how Bengali group theatre has been influenced by twentieth century Italian drama, drawing inspiration from its formal experimentation, innovative production and its often radical politics. In doing so it will examine how the process of translation sets up a dialogue between Italian and Bengali cultures helping us to understand both their specificities as well as their commonalities.

### Living on the Edge: Mapping Homeless Women’s Mobilisation in Kolkata

**Venerdì 17 maggio, ore 11.00-13.00, Sala Riunioni 1**

Urban homelessness in India has grown following the 1990’s economic reforms, development induced displacements and migration to cities. Deprived of shelter, brutalized by police evictions and criminalized by the state, the urban homeless are mobilizing to claim basic human rights in a struggle characterized as one of the foremost new social movements in contemporary India. In these mobilisations women pavement-dwellers are emerging as a visible and vocal majority with gender specific demands concerning livelihood, sexual and reproductive health, child care, privacy, security and rehabilitation. Focusing on women’s voices the presentation will argue for the need to gender discourses of urban poverty and homelessness and for creating a gender sensitive urban development paradigm. Homeless women’s gendered access to urban spaces, livelihoods and services reconfigures theorizations of the civil and political society, civic economy and rights to the city and citizenship. Further, the ideologies of home and domesticity and the politics of the public and private construct the ‘street woman’ as sexually available against the good ‘house-wife’. Thus there is a need to strengthen the homeless women’s movement through alliances with other street-based urban women’s mobilizations like that of roadside vendors, sex-workers or movements demanding women’s safety in public spaces like ‘Take back the Night’ which are gathering strength in Indian cities following the Delhi gang rape.