

Seven films from across the world on 'why women count'

Struggle, failure, jubilation and ample degree of courage - stories centering on these themes from across the world, bound together by women protagonists and told through the medium of short films showed audiences here just 'why women count'.

The seven five-minute films, part of a TV series called 'Why Women Count' by the Broadcasting for Change Network, were screened in the British Council auditorium for an audience of over 200 people Tuesday evening.

Although 41 films, from as many countries, were produced for the series by the network, only seven were selected for the launch in India. The countries whose films were screened were Pakistan, Nepal, Lebanon, Kosovo, Siera Leone, Bolivia and India.

The Broadcasting for Change Network is a group of international broadcasters and producers brought together by Television for the Environment (TVE) in Britain.

A film by independent filmmaker Poojita Chowdhury, daughter of Women and Child Development Minister Renuka Chowdhury, was part of the series. She said these films gave a powerful message to the world that women, if given a chance, are capable of doing anything.

'All these films tell the tale of women who through the problems and enormous challenges have stayed put and fought valiantly to get what they want. My film, 'Queens of the Grassroots', for instance, is about women panchayat leaders in Punjab and the changes they are bringing about.

'Why I chose Punjab for my film was because this state has one of the highest rate of female foeticide. Yet these women leaders have managed to fight discrimination and bring about positive changes in their villages,' Chowdhury told IANS.

Pakistani filmmaker Beena Sarwar's film 'Mukhtar Mai: The Struggle for Justice' was on a woman who was gang-raped and had to fight for justice in the highly patriarchal society of Pakistan. Amid all the negativity, she not only speaks up for her rights but also starts a school in her village in the hope that education just might change things around her.

The film from Lebanon was about Fadia Bazzeh, a woman journalist and single mother, who risked her life by volunteering to report from the frontline in southern Lebanon after it was bombed by Israeli warplanes in 2006.

'It's not easy to carry this responsibility as a woman on her own. I need to work around the constraints of the society so I can stand on my two feet and live my life as a journalist and a mother,' Bazzeh said in the film called 'In the Eye of the Storm'.

Panchayati Raj Minister Mani Shankar Aiyer, who was the chief guest of the launch, in a light moment said he felt like a minority in the gathering dominated by women.

'I have to muster courage to speak since I feel like a minority here!' Aiyer said amid laughter from the audience.

'But on a more serious front, I believe that women are taking sturdy steps forward across India today. If you talk about the Panchayati Raj, of the 3.2 million elected representatives, 1.2 million are women,' he noted.

'A study that will evaluate whether the 33 percent reservation for women in the panchayat has actually benefited them and their general condition will be launched on the Panchayati Raj Divas on April 24,' Aiyer said.

Renuka Chowdhury was seated among the audience, but away from the front row reserved for dignitaries. She said she was thrilled that her daughter was making films on such issues.

'It's her third film and the two before this were also on issues concerning women. I am happy for her,' Chowdhury said.

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