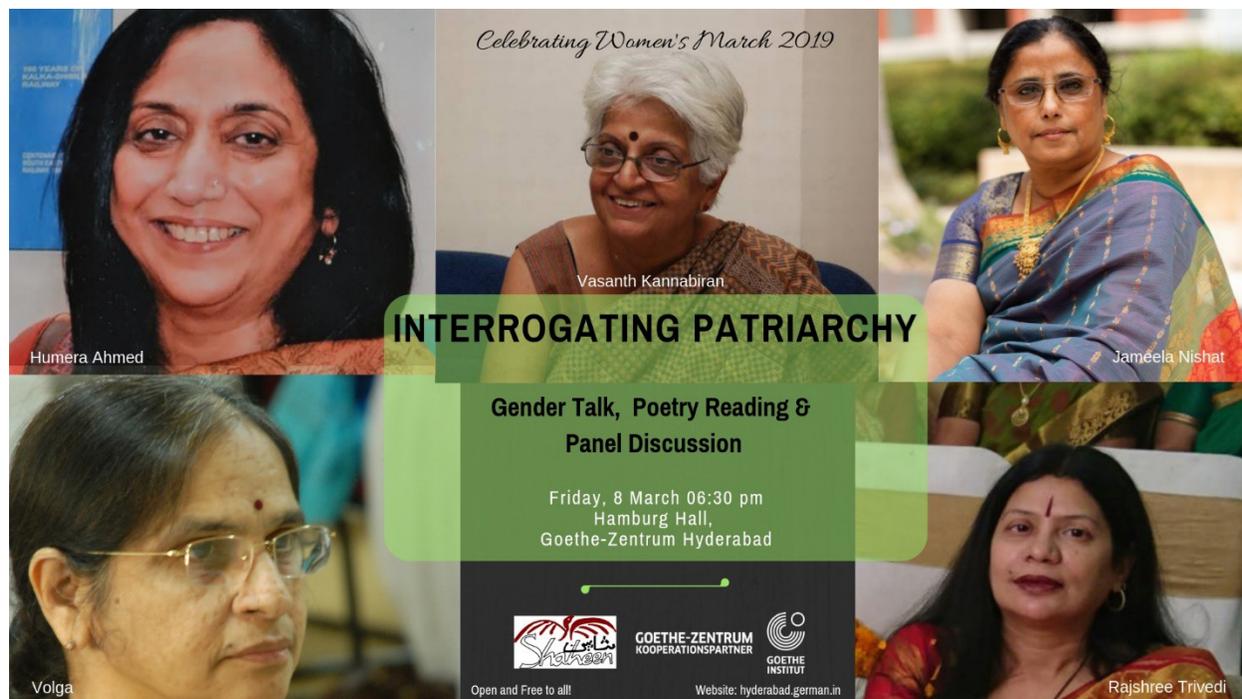


## Celebrating Women's March 2019- A Report



On 8<sup>th</sup> March, Goethe –Zentrum and Shaheen Women 's Resource and Welfare Association, the NGO set up by the Urdu Poet and activist Jamila Nishat organized the book release of ***Interrogating Patriarchy - Essays on Contemporary Women Poets***. The Book containing 11 essays on poets, some lesser known and some whose poetry was read across India, was edited by Rajshree Trivedi and published by Sophia Center for Women's studies and Development, was dedicated to women who write. One of the essays was on Jamila Nishat.

The programme at Hamburg Hall, centered on **Gender Talk, Poetry Reading and Panel Discussion**. The participants were: Jameela Nishat, Humera Ahmed who contributed the essay on Jameela Nishat, Rajshree Trivedi, the Editor of the book, P Lalita Kumari the feminist writer, who writes under the pen name Volga and who has won the Sahitya academy award in 2015 for her collection of short stories titled *Vimukta Kadha* Samputi in Telugu. The programme was presided over by Vasantha Kannabiren, Poet, writer and activist who is well known for her book "We were Making History... Life Stories of Women in the Telangana People's Struggle" and was compered by Amita Desai, the Director of Goethe Zentrum.

Rajshree Trivedi, professor of English and Principal of NM College initiated the discussion by recounting how the book ***Interrogating Patriarchy*** came into being. Humera Ahmed, a retired civil servant, activist writer and Managing Editor of the e-journal *Ehsas* for women spoke on her interest in the feminist movement and narrated how her choice of Jameela Nishat as feminist

poet was based on the unique space which Jameela occupied as being both activist and Poet. What impressed her greatly about Jameela was her exceptional feminist outlook – an outlook completely different from the feminist poets Jameela admired and was influenced by such as Fehmida Riaz and Kishwar Naheed who were born in undivided India and migrated to Pakistan.

To illustrate this aspect of Jameela's poetry – Humera Ahmed read out one of Jameela's poem, *wearing a Burqa*. In the poem Jameela writes that she didn't mind wearing a burqa while studying for a degree .She felt it was an achievement to study in a college, learn computers wearing a burqa .It pleased her parents and she found it empowering – she felt as strong as Alexander. But when stopped from entering the cinema hall by the moral custodian admonishing her, her reaction is in the verse below:

*Hey young girl,*

*Burkhas not allowed entry*

*Black smoke arose from my black mask*

*And off the burkha went.”*

Elaborating on the distinctive feminist outlook of the Poet , Ahmed spoke of how Jameela in order to keep the peace at home didn't insist on studying medicine as there was no medical college for girls only, in Hyderabad. She also got married and settled down with a man her father had chosen. But the arranged marriage didn't inhibit her sexuality. Her poems in which she explores through a sensual imagery are in the vein of Kamala Das .But though a feminist, she didn't limit herself to only feminist issues: she wrote with passion and compassion about hunger ,poverty , wars, the destruction of environment due to man's greed etc.

But it was Jameela's activism which gave the poet a larger dimension than just writing poetry. She is well known in Hyderabad for her valiant efforts in rescuing child brides sold to rich old Arabs under the guise of marriage – and rehabilitating them through her NGO Shaheen.

Vasantha Kannabiren was in a somber mood. According to her the occasion was not of celebration but a reminder of the struggle which women went through and were going to go through for a gender equal world .It also was pertinent , she pointed out, that in the present conditions, women not only had to fight for women's rights but also for freedom of speech which was being compromised in a growing intolerant world

Volga read some of the English translation of her poems (translated by Vasantha from Telugu) and one poem of Vasantha in Telugu, the translation of which was done by Volga from English.

Then , Jameela Nishat read out her latest poems .One of them was a poignant tribute to Asifa , the 8 year old Kashmiri girl whose tragic death made everyone realize the terrible times we were living in – when a child's body is converted into a battle ground to settle scores and take revenge .She also recited another poem which was a lament at the ecological and environmental destruction of the city.

But the poem which resonated most with the audience was her poem  
*Mein Nukta hoon* which had caused quite a stir when she first recited it.

Two verses of it are reproduced below:

*Main Nukta hoon*

*Kainaat ka markaz*

*Tum Dairey, Dairey*

*Ghoom rahe ho*

*Mere andar samarahe ho*

*Kokh se merey*

*Tum Niklay ho*

*Mujh say pooch rahe ho main Kya hoon*

*Main Nukta hoon*

*Kainaat ka markaz*