

PARCHAM COLLECTIVE: Reclaiming Public Spaces for Girls and Women

The first Fatima Bi –Savitri Bai Foot ball Tournament for Girls took place in Mumbra on 8th March , International Women’s Day .It was organised by Thana Municipal Corporation and Parcham Collective .The tournament is named after two pioneering women in the field of education ,who together despite all odds followed their conviction to educate those to whom education was denied .

Parcham Collective is a registered Trust formed by a group of girls from in and around Mumbra , a Muslim majority locality of Thana district in the State of Maharashtra with the objective to reclaim public space for girls and women through sports and other public and economic activities for their benefit and that of society in general . The name Parcham which means flag was inspired by a famous poem of Majaz in which he exhorts women through the verse:

Tree maathe pe ye aanchal

Bahut hi khub hai lekin,

Tu is aanchak ka ek parcham

Bana leti to accha tha

(The veil that covers your forehead is praise worthy but if you could convert it into a flag, it would be so much better)

Though through the ages women have been denied their right to knowledge , to public space , and economic participation, women have started gradually making their presence felt .However in many societies sports still remains one important arena of denial .Parcham considered participation in a game such as football (a male prerogative) to be the most effective way of occupying public space and also of breaking the stereotyping of Muslim girls.

But organising a girl’s football match was not an easy matter. There was criticism and opposition to this un conventional idea from their families and most important they had no play ground. But they did not give up hope .It took nearly three years from 2012 when they initiated action, to enlist support and to acquire a playing ground for this unconventional activity . But their efforts bore fruit on both the issues and their team won in the state level football match.

In the meantime they started research on inspiring women from the Muslim community and they across the pioneering role of many Muslim woman in the freedom struggle and in the field of education .They decided to highlight their role in a the 2016 Organiser and Diary and also raise funds through its sale . They decided to name the all girls football tournament after one of the pioneering but hitherto lesser known Fatima Sheikh whose contribution towards the education of the marginalised sections of society seems to have

gone unnoticed .It is quite



Cover page of the Diary 2016, and write up with sketch of Fatima Sheikh

It is astonishing that while Savitri Bai Phule is extolled, there is so little information on Fatima Sheikh, who had trained as a teacher with Savitri Bai in the same Institute from which both passed out in 1847. When the Phule's were ostracised for educating girls Fatima and her brother Usman Sheikh gave them shelter and assistance to start the school where Fatima worked as a teacher. What could be the reason for this lack of information on her contribution? Gauri Shrivastava in her book *The Legend makers- Some Eminent Muslim Women of India* does not include her name. But then the 40 profiles in her book are from the aristocracy or privileged sections of society. Fatima Bi didn't clearly belong to this section. Parcham therefore decided to commemorate her and the joint contribution and camaraderie of Savitri bai and Fatima Bi by naming the tournament Fatima Bi -Savitribai Football tournament so that the names of both the women could be taken in the same breath.

The members of Collective spent considerable time in training the girls and also arranged for a professional coach. The tournament in which 49 girls across 13 girls schools of Thane Municipal Corporation in the age group of 13 -15 participated, was flagged off by the Mayor of Thane Sanjay More and the Additional Municipal Commissioner of Thane Mr Sunil Chavan. The local MLA MR Jitendra Awhat was present to cheer the girls.

The format of the match was on the lines of community football, with 7 a sides teams playing each other for 14 minutes. There were total of 10 matches. The names of the teams reflected the names of international football teams: Mumbra United, Mumbra Avengers, 7Stars FC, Golden Stars, 7 Strikers, Mumbra Rockers and Champions. Mumbra United won against the Champions who were the runners up. There was also a Fair play trophy which recognised the spirit of ethical spirit which went to Golden Stars.



The teams and the trophies of the Fatima Bi-Savitri Bai football tournament

But the greatest success and joy to the Collective Team in the Co-Founder Sabah Khan 's words was the enthusiastic cheering and participation of the crowds assembled comprising the families and friends of the players and the local residents .It indicated clearly that girls participating in sports was now accepted by them .

Parham Collective has taken several initiatives since its formation in reclaiming public spaces (cycle rally of girls ,claiming public gardens and play grounds, introducing sports in Municipal schools etc and)would now like to build spaces for women to meet , bond and collectivize as well as read , write and study .They also plan to bring about a Diary annually to celebrate women and next year they plan one on Muslim women achievers in Sports across the world .They also intend to explore the lives of women whose contribution to society we are unaware of and whose work was ahead of their time and publicise their contribution .

Ehsas for Women congratulates them on their remarkable achievement and wishes them all the best in their future plans and ventures.