

Press Release

**JMI's Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies holds online lecture by LSE
Professor Naila Kabeer on '*Renegotiating Patriarchy: Gender, Agency, and the
Bangladesh Paradox*'**

New Delhi, April 6, 2026

As part of the Distinguished Lecture Series, the Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies hosted Prof Naila Kabeer, Professor Emeritus of Gender and Development at the Department of International Development, London School of Economics for a lecture titled *Renegotiating Patriarchy, Gender Agency, and the Bangladesh Paradox*. The session examined how Bangladesh achieved remarkable social progress despite economic challenges, focusing on women's agency in reshaping patriarchal structures rather than dismantling them outright. Prof Kabeer explained that Bangladesh's progress was both pro-poor and gender-equitable, driven by education policies, family planning initiatives, NGO interventions, and opportunities in the garment industry. She highlighted how women's agency manifested in diverse forms, from hidden resistance to open bargaining and how these individual actions collectively scaled up to produce transformative social change.

Preeti Maurya, PhD scholar at the centre opened the session followed by a welcome address and an introduction of the speaker by Prof. Nishat Zaidi, Honorary Director of the Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies. Prof Kabeer discussed Bangladesh's unique model of progress that diverges from Euro-American development patterns, emphasizing women's agency and economic empowerment despite challenges such as labor exploitation in the garment industry. She addressed questions about the impact of Bangladesh's female prime ministers, noting that while they provided important role models and implemented beneficial policies, they ultimately faced similar challenges of power politics. She also reflected on the 1971 war and the experiences of *Biranganas*, explaining how women realized the patriarchal bargain no longer held after men failed to protect them during the conflict. Highlighting the complexities of renegotiating patriarchal structures, she spoke about the "double bind" faced by women in the garment industry, where improved opportunities compared to agriculture or domestic work remained exploitative. She also addressed issues of domestic violence, the recognition of unpaid care work in GDP, and the impact of religious education on attitudes towards women's roles and leadership.

Prof Kabeer presented her three-dimensional model of empowerment which is agency, resources, and achievements, explaining how education can transform individuals by increasing confidence and enabling independent decision-making. The discussion also touched on challenges posed by radical organizations with Prof Kabeer noting their attempts to appear more moderate for political gains. She compared Bangladesh's *Grameen* Bank credit-based model with India's self-help group model, noting that Grameen focused on poverty alleviation rather than social education.

The lecture was followed by a compelling Q/A sessions extending the discussion further from scholars and faculties alike. The lecture was well-attended by faculty and students from across India, reflecting Prof Kabeer's popularity and the significance of the lecture series. Prof Kabeer concluded by noting that while Bangladesh continues to experience economic growth, challenges of inequality and governance persist. She expressed optimism about the potential for more inclusive policies under the new BNP leadership.

The lecture concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Dr. Amina Hussain, Co-ordinator, Distinguished Lecture Series on behalf of the Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies. The Distinguished Lecture Series continues to serve as a vital platform for scholarly exchange, fostering interdisciplinary dialogue and advancing critical perspectives in feminist research.

Prof. Saima Saeed
Chief Public Relations Officer





Naila Kabeer

This meeting is being recorded.

Renegotiating patriarchy: Gender, agency and the Bangladesh paradox

- Professor Emeritus Naila Kabeer, Department of International Development & Faculty of International Inequalities Institute. London School of Economic and Political Science

A vertical stack of three video thumbnails. The top thumbnail shows a woman in a pink headscarf with a blue banner that reads 'Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies'. The middle thumbnail shows a woman with glasses and a red sari, labeled 'Nishat Zaidi'. The bottom thumbnail shows an older woman with grey hair, labeled 'Naila Kabeer'.

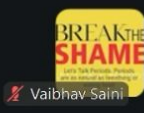
Zoom meeting participant thumbnails:

- Vaibhav Saini (Thumbnail: BREAK THE SHAME)
- Naila Kabeer
- Alfisha Khan
- Nishat Zaidi
- Sarojini Naidu Centre for ...
- S Basu's iPhone

Renegotiating norms in the face of structural change....

Family planning is sinful but not to practice also sinful, because a woman is ultimately responsible for her family's welfare.	You carry your purdah with you, the purdah of the mind	If taking a loan is a sin, then it is my husband who is the sinner	I'll tell you this: none of those people who are so concerned about purdah now will rush forward to feed me
The woman who understands won't show her power. The one who doesn't will.	We follow <i>shariat</i> but we follow <i>marfat</i> too.	How can they ask for dowry to marry us? We are the dowry	'I didn't get rights earlier and I cannot say that I get them all even now. But at least I now know what they are and I can teach my children.
Fate will determine what kind of life my daughters have, but a mother can influence fate			

Zoom meeting controls: Audio, Video, Participants (65), Chat, React, Share, Host tools, More, End



The epilogue: Is the Bangladesh paradox sustainable?

Our rising rates of growth and declining levels of poverty have been considered remarkable (though statistics on growth now regarded as less reliable) but we have also seen a steady rise in inequality with wealth concentrated at the top and a consistent failure to tax the wealthy. Bangladesh has one of the lowest ratios of tax to GDP in the world. This means very little of benefits of growth trickles down and poverty levels remain unacceptably high (around 20%). The result is a job-poor pattern of growth: migration abroad with all its risks and opportunities and much of employment is informal, for men as well as women. But aspirations have risen with rising education, and frustration has set in.

Our track record on governance has remained poor and worsened – as evident from the July revolution.

Yet the OSF Barometer 2023 (30 countries) found 91% of Bangladeshis wanted to be democratically governed, 88% believed that human rights had been a force for good in the world (more than any other country) and 83% believed that human rights reflected their own values. Interestingly, Bangladeshis were more likely than any other country to believe civil and political rights to be the most important, more so than economic rights (36% compared to 28%).

Bangladesh has inherited a more tolerant version of Islam than many other Muslim-majority countries, for instance, towards its minorities according to a Pew Centre survey – could be far, far better, of course, and the rise of intolerant versions of Islam is affecting this.

But the country is now in a state of flux. We are full of hope as well as trepidation – will it be business as usual but with a different party in power? And what about the rights of women and minorities? Not all political forces are equally committed to these. We have seen the ugly displays of misogyny and violence by Taliban-type Islamist groups in response to the Women's Affairs Reform Commission. Recent surveys show a marked gender divergence in views about the current regime, less favourable and more pessimistic about the future.

Will my book be seen as the closing chapter of a story of quite remarkable progress on gender equality and human rights or does it mark the beginning of a new and more democratic story?

**SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES
JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA**

**DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES
“RENEGOTIATING PATRIARCHY: GENDER,
AGENCY AND STORIES OF CHANGE FROM
BANGLADESH”**



SPEAKER

Prof. Naila Kabeer

*Emeritus Professor of Gender and Development
London School of Economics and Political Science*

Prof. Naila Kabeer is the Professor of Gender and Development at the Department of International Development. She is also a Faculty Associate at LSE's International Inequalities Institute and is also on the governing board of the Atlantic Fellowship for Social and Economic Equity. Her expertise lies in gender, poverty, social exclusion, livelihoods, social protection and citizenship. Other than academics, she had been engaged in extensive advisory work with international agencies.



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pwd=l75Rbi9tN14R8ro7fraJPYBiDPkISs.1](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/5703752772?pwd=l75Rbi9tN14R8ro7fraJPYBiDPkISs.1)

Coordinator

**Dr. Amina Hussain
SNCWS**

Platform - Zoom

Date - 02nd April 2026

Time - 05:00 P.M (IST)

11:30 A.M (GMT)

Chair

**Prof. Nishat Zaidi
Hony. Director, SNCWS
Jamia Millia Islamia**