

Press Release

**XII Annual Sarojini Naidu Memorial Lecture Examined Gendered Dimensions of Colonial Governance and Labour**

The Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, hosted the XII Annual Sarojini Naidu Memorial Lecture on Thursday, February 12, 2026, at Mir Anis Hall (Gate 15), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi at 2:30 pm. The lecture, titled; '***Mera Badan, Mera Arzi: Gender, Labour, Governance in Colonial India***' featured distinguished scholar Professor Geeta Patel from the University of Virginia. The event was coordinated by Dr. Amina Hussain and Dr. Adfer Rashid Shah of SNCWS. The lecture offered groundbreaking insights into the intersection of bodily autonomy, economic agency, and colonial state power through a feminist historical lens.

Dr. Amina Hussain, in her opening remarks, welcomed the distinguished gathering and introduced the speaker, highlighting Professor Patel's significant contributions to feminist historiography and interdisciplinary scholarship. Professor Nishat Zaidi then formally invited the speaker to the podium, emphasizing the timeliness and importance of this year's memorial lecture theme. She noted that Professor Patel's work on colonial petitions exemplifies the kind of rigorous, politically engaged scholarship that honours Sarojini Naidu's legacy as both a freedom fighter and advocate for women's rights. Professor Zaidi underscored how the lecture continues the Centre's commitment to critical conversations about gendered power and challenges us to rethink colonial histories through the lived experiences of marginalized women.

The lecture's evocative title, translating to My Body, My Petition signalled a powerful interrogation of how colonial subjects, particularly women, negotiated their bodies as sites of both exploitation and resistance. Professor Patel examined how petitions (*arzis*) filed by Indian women during the colonial period revealed complex narratives of labour exploitation, sexual violence, and strategic agency within oppressive governance structures.

Professor Patel argued that the *arzi* served as a crucial historical source for understanding women's agency under colonial rule. Colonial petitions filed by women workers, domestic labourers, and survivors of sexual violence offered rare documentary evidence of women's voices from below. These texts demonstrated how women strategically navigated colonial legal systems, asserted property rights, challenged labour exploitation, and articulated bodily autonomy. Women employed official bureaucratic language and frameworks while simultaneously subverting colonial categories to serve their own interests.

The lecture explored how these petitions exposed the colonial state's anxieties about controlling women's mobility, sexuality, and economic participation. Simultaneously, the documents revealed women's sophisticated understanding of bureaucratic power and their strategic deployment of official channels for redress. Professor Patel demonstrated that what colonial administrators dismissed as routine paperwork were in fact profound assertions of personhood by women denied full legal recognition.

Central to the lecture was the argument that bodies were never merely biological entities but were always political sites. The petition texts showed how women's bodies became contested terrain where colonial governance, capitalist labour regimes, and patriarchal control intersected. By bringing together gender, labour, and governance in what Professor Patel termed collusive conundrums, the lecture provided analytical tools that illuminate not only colonial history but contemporary struggles for bodily autonomy and labour rights.

Professor Geeta Patel is a leading scholar whose research brings together gender studies, political economy, and cultural analysis. Her work investigates what she terms collusive conundrums by examining how gender, nation, sexuality, finance, science, media, capital, and aesthetics intersect in unexpected ways. She is particularly known for her innovative methodological approaches that attend to science in unexpected ways to investigate nationalism, sexuality, financialization, and cinema. Her scholarship challenges conventional disciplinary boundaries, offering fresh perspectives on how colonial governance structures shaped and were shaped by gendered bodies and labour regimes.

The event received strong institutional support from the university leadership. Vice Chancellor Professor Mazhar Asif and Registrar Professor Md. Mehtab Alam Rizvi were the chief patron and patron respectively, underscoring the institutional commitment to advancing feminist scholarship and critical historical inquiry.

Professor Nishat Zaidi, Honorary Director of SNCWS, emphasized the significance of the lecture. This memorial lecture honored Sarojini Naidu's legacy as both a freedom fighter and advocate for women's rights by continuing critical conversations about gendered power. Professor Patel's interdisciplinary approach perfectly embodied the kind of scholarship that challenges us to rethink colonial histories through the lived experiences of marginalized women. The annual memorial lecture series honours the multifaceted legacy of Sarojini Naidu poet, independence activist, and the first woman Governor of an Indian state. Naidu herself embodied the complex negotiations between nationalism, gender politics, and social reform that Professor Patel's work examined. This year's lecture proved particularly timely as it resonated with contemporary debates about women's labour rights, bodily autonomy, and the persistent legacies of colonial governance structures in postcolonial India.

The Sarojini Naidu Centre for Women's Studies, celebrating its 25 years of establishment, has established itself as a premier institution for gender studies research and activism in India. The annual memorial lecture series has consistently brought world-renowned scholars to engage with critical issues at the intersection of gender, politics, and social justice.

The lecture ended with a Q&A session and was attended by students, researchers and faculties across the faculties of Jamia Millia Islamia.

The formal vote of thanks was delivered by Dr Adfer Rashid Shah, one of the Coordinators of the memorial lecture.

Prof. Saima Saeed  
Chief Public Relations Officer



جامعہ ملیہ اسلامیہ  
Jamia Millia Islamia  
SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES  
organises  
XII ANNUAL SAROJINI NAIDU MEMORIAL LECTURE  
2026  
"MERA BADAN, MERA ARZI: GENDER, LABOUR AND GOVERNANCE IN COLONIAL INDIA"

Prof. Geeta Patel is a Professor at the University of Virginia. Her research interest lies in understanding the complex dilemmas by bringing gender, class, capital, and aestheticism into conversation. She also tunes into the world in unexpected ways to explore political economy, feminism, sexuality, and globalization, cinema.

Prof. Nishat Zaidi  
Honorary Director, SNCS  
Muzaffer Rashid Shah

Amina Hussain

Geeta Patel

Nishat Zaidi



JAMIA MILLIA AHLE HIND  
SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE  
XII ANNUAL SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE 2024  
MERA BADAN, MERA ARAJ  
GOVERNANCE IN C...

Prof. Geeta Patel  
the University of Virginia  
researcher  
understands  
constitutional  
nationalism  
media, culture  
together  
science in  
investigating  
national  
financial

Speaker  
Prof. Geeta Patel  
University of Virginia

© JNU  
Venue: Mir Anis Hall (G...)  
Date - 12th February 2024  
Time - 02:30 P.M.







**JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA**  
 SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES  
 XII ANNUAL SAROJINI NAIDU MEMORIAL LECTURE  
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**Speaker:**  
 Prof. Geeta Patel  
 University of Virginia

Date: 25th October (Thursday)  
 Venue: Nizamuddin  
 Organizer: NCWS  
 Contact: 011-2619-4111



New Delhi, Delhi, India  
Park Road, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi, Delhi 110025, India  
Lat 28.560169, Long 77.285485  
Thursday, 12/02/2026 03:22 PM GMT+05:30  
Note : Captured by GPS Map Camera





# JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA

SAROJINI NAIDU CENTRE FOR WOMEN'S STUDIES

organises

SAROJINI NAIDU ANNUAL MEMORIAL LECTURE

2026

**“MERA BADAN, MERA ARZI: GENDER, LABOUR,  
GOVERNANCE IN COLONIAL INDIA”**



**Speaker**

**Prof. Geeta Patel**  
**University of Virginia**

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Scan me!

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**Date** - 12th February 2026 (Thursday)

**Time** - 02:30 P.M

Prof. Nishat Zaidi  
Hony. Director , SNCWS

Coordinator(s) - Dr. Amina Hussain & Dr. Adfer Rashid Shah