

Conversations Between South Asian Mothers & Daughters:

**Finding Reconciliation,
Forgiveness, and Empowerment**

by Priyanka Sarkhel



Policy Tracks: Media & Communication; Human Rights | December 13th, 2023



RUTGERS

Institute for Women's Leadership

The Leadership Scholars Certificate Program is a two-year selective, interdisciplinary certificate program that prepares Rutgers undergraduate women to be informed, innovative, and socially responsible leaders.

Leadership Scholars design and implement social action projects to expand their understanding of issues and problems and to develop leadership skills.

This project gives Scholars the opportunity to apply the theoretical knowledge they have gained about leadership, advocacy, and social change with the practical and experiential knowledge they have developed about a particular policy issue or problem through the field site placement. It also further develops leadership skills by giving undergraduates the opportunity to *practice* leadership *through* action.

To find out more please visit the Institute for Women's Leadership's website at <http://iwl.rutgers.edu>.

The Problem



Mother sitting beside daughter (Nimavat)

- Motherhood and marriage are expected from South Asian women at the expense of their agency, self-fulfillment, self actualization
- Culture of silence around South Asian women's experiences
- Mother & Daughter live parallel lives; neither are safe from patriarchy



Intellectual/Conceptual Foundations

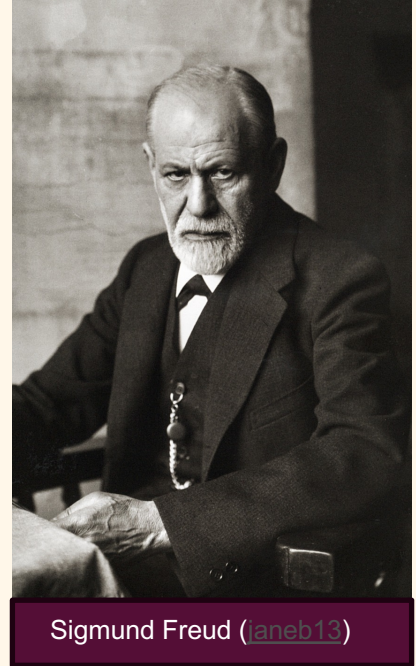
Research & Data



Antimaternalism

Professor Mary Trigg's *Mothering, Time, and Antimaternalism* (2023)

- Idea of motherhood has evolved over time
 - Pre-1920: motherhood is romanticized
 - Post Freud & Gen Psych: mothers blamed for everything
 - Second-wave feminism: choosing to be a mother & not work is bad
- Working class, Irish American, Black mothers were already doing BOTH



Sigmund Freud ([laneb13](#))

Acculturation

2018 study "Understanding Health, Violence, and Acculturation Among South Asian Women in the U.S."

by N.C. Nagaraj, et.al

- Severe lack of data regarding South Asian women's experiences in the U.S.
- **Acculturation:** Assimilation into a dominant culture
- Complaining, resistance, divorce, independence not allowed due to risk of deportation & poverty



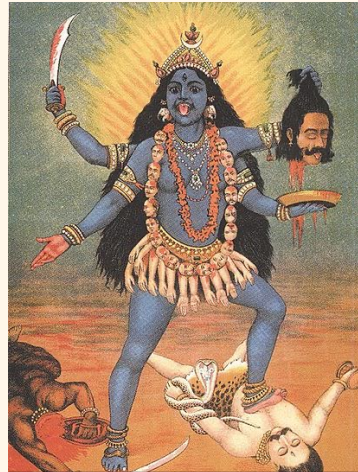
✦ Mothers are Humans, Not Goddesses ✦

“Mothers Born or Produced?”

S. Agarwal and N. Kumar’s 2023 Analysis of *Well Behaved Indian Women*



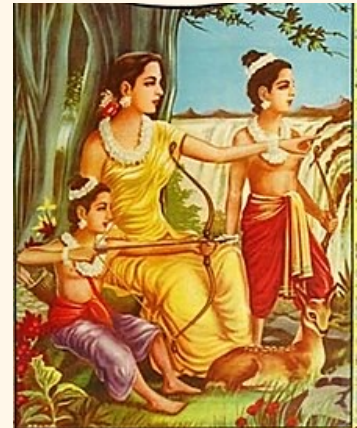
Goddess Radha ([Wikipedia](#))



Goddess Kali ([World History Encyclopedia](#))



Goddess Durga ([TheOtherKey](#))



Goddess Sita w/ sons
([Wikipedia](#))



✦ Mission Statement ✦

1

Elevate South Asian Women's Voices

Let them control their narrative

2

Go Public

Reach global, diverse audiences

3

Defy a Culture of Silence

Talk about taboo topics

4

Foster Reconciliation

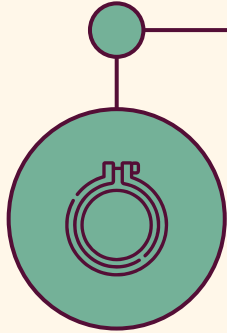
Daughters & Mothers see similarities/differences in each other's lives

The Project



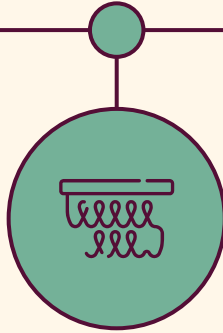
Conversations:
Bengali Mothers & Daughters

Project Timeline



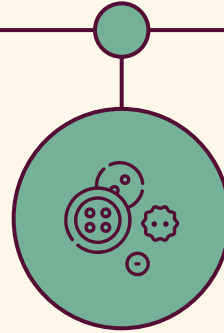
Spring 2023

Project
Conception



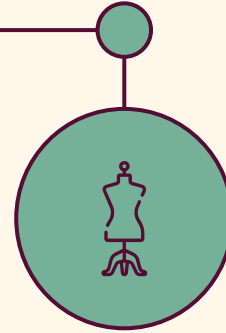
September

Organizing
Materials + Shoot
Dates
Advisor Meeting



October

First Pair Filmed
Event Site
Secured



November

Second Pair Filmed
PR & Outreach
Advisor Meeting
EDITING

✦ Project Timeline - December

Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat Sun

				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28			

● Final Cuts

Uploaded on
YouTube

● 12/6

Screening Event

● 12/13

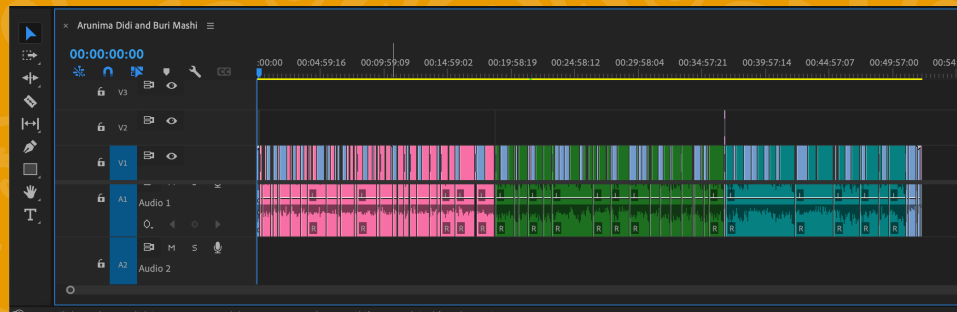
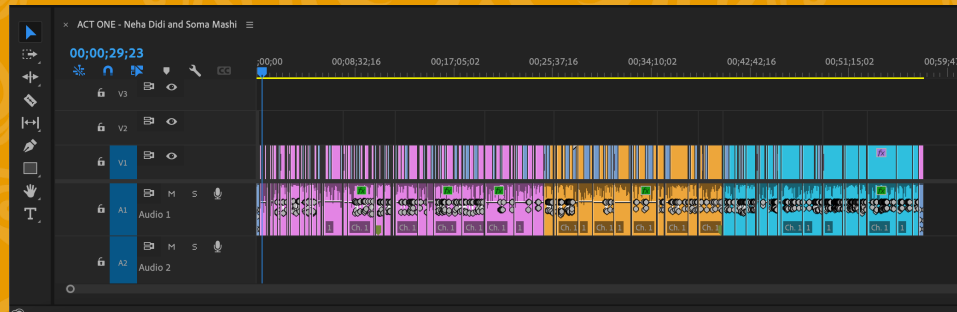
Final
Presentation



The Process



The Process



Cost Breakdown

Leadership Scholars Program
Social Action Project Budget and Expense Tracking

Name: Priyanka Sarkhel
Semester: Fall 2023
Budget: Mid-Semester, Final (please select one for each submission)

Expense Description	Budget for Expense	Supplier	Method of Payment	Date of Payment	Amount
Technology - 1 TB ^{hard} drive	\$500	Amazon	credit	9/28/23	\$78.06
Tech - Lav mics	\$300	Amazon	credit	9/28/23	\$19.99
Tech - SD card SanDisk	\$300	Amazon	credit	9/28/23	\$30.56
Tech-SD card SanDisk	\$300	Target	debit	9/30/23	\$38.48
Food for event	\$400	Kabza Culture	debit	12/6/23	\$400
TOTAL:					
Balance (if any):					

used cashback
- \$9.23
total:
\$74.70

Flyers

CONVERSATIONS

BENGALI MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS



A SCREENING EVENT

WEDNESDAY, 12/6/23

6:30 PM TO 8:30 PM

ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL CENTER

49 JOYCE KILMER AVENUE

PISCATAWAY, NJ 08854

Original Flyer Made on Canva

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Instagram Compatible

CONVERSATIONS

BENGALI MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS



A SCREENING EVENT

INCLUDES FOOD, PROJECT
VIEWING, AND A Q&A WITH THE
CREATOR OF THE SERIES

← RSVP HERE

WEDNESDAY, 12/6/23

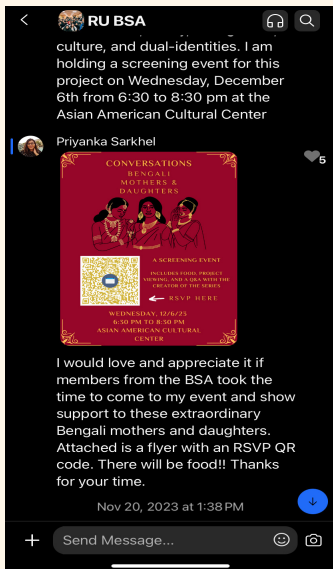
6:30 PM TO 8:30 PM

ASIAN AMERICAN CULTURAL
CENTER

Final Flyer w/ RSVP QR Code

✧ Promotion/PR & Outreach ✧

Rutgers



► Conversations with Bengali Mothers & Daughters

Documentary Screening and Q&A with Priyanka Sarkhel ('24, SAS/HC)

Join Priyanka Sarkhel, a Leadership Scholar at the Institute for Women's Leadership and a member of the Honors College, for a screening of *Conversations with Bengali Mothers & Daughters*. Watch two extraordinary Bengali mother-daughter pairs break the culture of silence surrounding South Asian women's experiences and share insights on love, spirituality, perseverance, family, and culture. Through detailed, emotional dialogues, two generations of Bengali women reconcile and reflect on their relationships with each other, making mothers' and daughters' work, values, resentments, and gratitude visible. This event will have food, music, and a Q&A with Priyanka, creator of this series. [RSVP to the screening.](#)

Date and Time: **Wednesday, December 6th, 6:30pm**

Location: Asian American Cultural Center on Livingston Campus

Extra Credit Opportunity

RUDRANI, NANDINI ATHOTA, MUSTAFA WASTI [26 more](#)
WOMEN WRITERS OF SOUTH ASIA FAF2023
Nov 13, 2023 at 2:44pm

Hello all!

I encourage you all to attend this fantastic event organized by and showcasing the work of one of our own, Priyanka Sarkhel!

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6 @ 6:30 PM: Join Priyanka Sarkhel, IWL Leadership Scholar, for a screening of "Conversations with Bengali Mothers & Daughters." Watch two extraordinary Bengali mother-daughter pairs break the culture of silence surrounding South Asian women's experiences and share insights on love, spirituality, perseverance, family, and culture. Through detailed, emotional dialogues, two generations of Bengali women reconcile and reflect on their relationships with each other, making mothers' and daughters' work, values, resentments, and gratitude visible.

RSVP Here: bit.ly/IWL/Bengali

Attending this event and writing a report on the screening and the film will also get you extra credit.

Warmly,
RG

Upcoming IWL Social Action Project: Wednesday, December 6th: Priyanka's Social Action Project

Join 2nd-year Leadership Scholar, Priyanka Sarkhel, for an exclusive screening of her social action project, "Conversations: Bengali Mothers & Daughters." Her project showcases the remarkable stories of two Bengali mother-daughter pairs who courageously challenge the culture of silence surrounding the experiences of South Asian women. RSVP [today!](#)

This screening event will feature food, music, and a Q&A with Priyanka.

If you have any questions, please email Priyanka at ps1070@scarletmail.rutgers.edu.

re: Film Screening on 12/6 - Bengali Mothers and Daughters

Inbox x

Nina Echeverria
to NB_Cinemastudents@RAMS.RUTGERS.EDU, Mehell

Mon, Nov 13, 8:13 PM

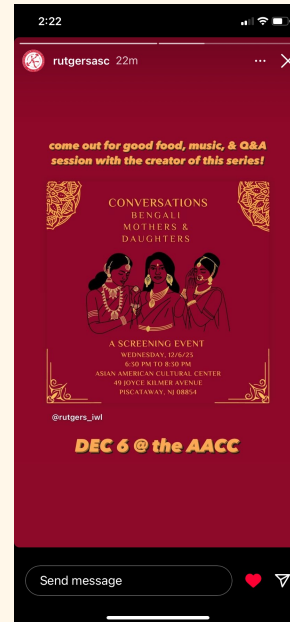
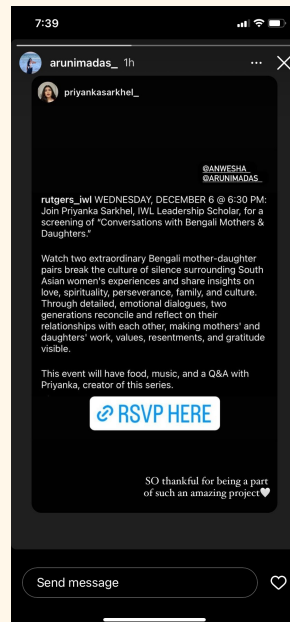
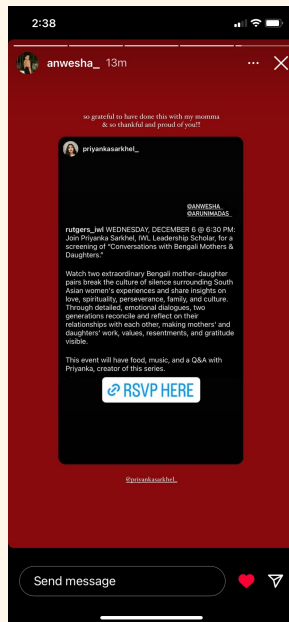
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✦ Promotion/PR & Outreach ✦

Instagram





The Event

— ... —

CONVERSATIONS
BENGALI
MOTHERS &
DAUGHTERS



Aparna Banerjee
& Anwasha Banerjee



Indrani Dasgupta
& Arunima Das












✦ Feminist Leadership ✦

Voice

Open space for both mother and daughters to candidly communicate



Community

Screening event and the videos generated sincere interest across races, majors, etc.; people shared videos with their mothers



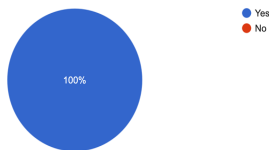
Intersectionality

Conversations surrounded topics of race, colorism, class, gender, politics, and more

✦ Impact & Evaluation ✦

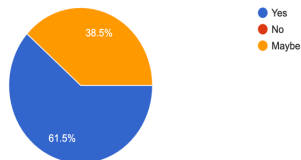
Do you think you might have seen your mother's labor, life experiences, and feelings as invisible during certain parts of your life?

13 responses



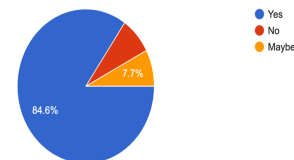
After attending this event, have you changed the way you think about your mother?

13 responses



After attending this event, have you changed the way you think about the women in your life?

13 responses



Learning that our mothers have their own life experiences and are experiencing things for the first time too. I think the biggest takeaway is that learning about "woke" things in society is a learning curve for most generations but they are willing to learn. Explaining these things and talking about our side of it like body shaming is critical to have our parents understand where we are coming from.

There's so much unseen labor that women put in that we would never know about if we didn't put in the time to listen to them.

The humanization of women in all roles (mother, wife, career professional) is not acknowledged often, especially for South Asian women. It was really profound.

The way their experiences were so different yet so similar to my own and my mom's was so striking and I can definitely see how many times moms and daughters protect themselves on each other thinking they're going through the same thing when in reality it may not be that similar.

I think there's something really profound about having visualized a mother-daughter relationship on screen.

The diversity amongst all mother daughter relationships. I loved how the documentary covered all the complexities of the relationship and their lives!

That our mother's trauma is usually hidden and they're willing to share if they have someone to listen.

How different mother/daughter relationships are in different families.

How much our mothers suppress throughout their lives

I believe the most important takeaway I got was that no matter where people come from, you can always find a way to connect and relate to their stories and their own lives. Even though I'm not from the same culture, I found myself resonating and relating to a lot of the stories shared in the video, and it made me realize how similar peoples lives and experiences can be even if they come from completely different backgrounds.



Lessons Learned

- Video Production:

- Before officially starting filming, check if camera is recording audio
- Lighting affects footage
- Start editing immediately
- Patience
- Having a team

- Event Planning:

- List making is super helpful
- Enlist help from wherever you can
- Food is expensive
- Practice flow of events

Acknowledgements

- The Institute for Women's Leadership
 - Professor Mary Trigg
 - Dr. Sasha Taner
 - My supportive cohort
- The Asian American Cultural Center
 - Shaheena Shahid
- Samuel Fenkel – Director of Photography
- Professor Neal Bennett
- Dio Gonzalez – Event Photographer
- Professor Meheli Sen – Advisor
- Aparna and Anwasha Banerjee
- Indrani Dasgupta and Arunima Das
- My beautiful friends
- My mother

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