

Participatory Action Research - Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers

Episode 8 Host **Patricia Maguire** Tribute to Martha Farrell: Bringing gender justice to Participatory Research in Asia with Guests Nandita Bhatt and Rajesh Tandon (February 28, 2023)

[00:00:00] **Patricia Maguire:** Hi folks. This is the Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers podcast. I'm your host, Patricia Maguire. Our podcast amplifies the contributions of feminist trailblazers to participatory and action research. We discuss trailblazer's successes and struggles, bringing feminist perspectives and ways of being to participatory research.

[00:00:36] Today's episode is a tribute to Dr. Martha Farrell's work, bringing gender justice and feminism to the society for Participatory Research in Asia known as PRIA and to Indian Civil Society organizations. The pioneering work of PRIA, established in 1982 under the directorship of Rajesh Tandon, has been central to the development and global spread of participatory action research as a radical transformative approach to knowledge creation.

[00:01:09] Dr. Martha Farrell was the director of PRIA's International Academy of Lifelong Learning, and it was Martha who initiated PRIA's Committee on Gender Awareness and Mainstreaming in the 1990s. Overall, Martha Farrell was a fierce women's rights campaigner, particularly working to end gender violence and gender harassment in the Indian workplace.

[00:01:33] Dr. Farrell is renowned and respected worldwide for her work on women's rights and gender equality. She was a mother, beloved wife, and she's often been called the conscience of PRIA. This is our first episode in which we pay tribute to a feminist trailblazer who's no longer with us.

It's really quite painful to recall that in 2015, Martha Farrell was killed alongside with 13

[00:02:00] others in a Taliban attack on a guest house restaurant while she was working in Kabul, Afghanistan. She was in Kabul providing gender equity training for the Aga Khan Trust. So while we mourn her passing, today we're going to lift up her life and legacy.

To discuss Martha's legacy, I'm talking with Nandita Bhatt, the first and current director of the Martha Farrell Foundation. And in the second half of the program, I'll be talking with Rajesh Tandon, the founder and president of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. So let me introduce Nandita.

Nandita Bhatt is a well-known Indian civil society practitioner and feminist in her own right. For over 25 years, Nandita has worked in the space of gender inclusion and prevention of sexual harassment and sexual violence against women.

And as the Director of the Martha Farrell Foundation, Nandita, I'm so glad you could be with [00:03:00] us today because I know you've been busy managing the recent seventh anniversary celebrations of the foundation. At PRIA, Nandita is a gender program lead, and she's on PRIA's Committee on Gender Awareness and Mainstreaming. And finally, Nandita Bhatt has been recognized as one of Your Stories 100 Emerging Voices of India. Nandita, welcome.

[00:03:22] **Nandita Bhatt:** Thank you, Patricia. Thank you for having me. Thank you for covering the story and telling Martha's story like the way it should be.

[00:03:30] **Patricia Maguire:** Before coming to PRIA, Martha had been working in women's literacy, empowerment and participatory learning. And when she started officially working at PRIA in the late 1990s, PRIA already had an established global reputation in participatory research, though perhaps they needed more attention to gender equity. So tell us some of Martha's initiatives, bringing gender justice and feminist perspectives to PRIA.

[00:04:00] **Nandita Bhatt:** Martha joined PRIA in 1996, and before that she worked on adult education issues and learning issues, producing wonderful creative material for learning for change for young people and for development practitioners. She brought that knowledge with her when she came to PRIA. But just at the time that she joined PRIA, she began asking questions in the characteristic Martha way to say, uh, well, something is missing here.

So she began asking questions, particularly around the question of gender. And, like the person that she was, you know, she always began internally. So she says that, you know, while we need to look at gender in our programs, it's important to start looking at gender within the institution. So that one of the first things that she did was begin looking at gender within the institution of [00:05:00] PRIA within the institutional mechanisms, policies, structures, you know, how we were formed, how we were working.

And PRIA at that point, were working with a large number of partner organizations. So she extended that support to those organizations as well. And, around the same time in India, the Vishaka Guidelines were being passed by the Supreme Court of India, a set of first guidelines that we had in our country, which really looked at sexual harassment of women at workplace.

[00:05:35] Give it a definition, talked about institutional mechanisms, so it kind of fit very well with what we were already doing in PRIA and what she had already begun. So around '97 she opened up PRIA for an external gender audit. So we had an external person come in and do a gender audit of PRIA.

And after [00:06:00] that, in ninety, '98, PRIA formed one of the first organizations to actually form an internal committee that would look at sexual harassment at work. With, that was the early work, of Martha when she joined PRIA.

[00:06:16] **Patricia Maguire:** Now, she was known for developing a work culture at PRIA that valued the knowledge of every staff person and the dignity of every person's work, regardless of their role or their job title. What was your experience like as a young professional woman joining PRIA and working with Martha as your supervisor?

[00:06:36] **Nandita Bhatt:** I was not only a young professional, but I was also a young mother at that time. So those formative years that I spent with Martha, because she understood, she understood exactly where I was coming from, what I was going through, and, and she insisted that while why it is important to be available for [00:07:00] the family, be available for the children, but it is important to be available for myself as well, you know? So, I learned through her and with her was how do you prioritize yourself as well?

[00:07:16] And at that point of time, our team that Martha was heading, was an all-women's team. And interestingly, even today, the Martha Farrell Foundation is an all-women's team. At that point of time, we were all women, and we were all working on flexible times. We were all mothers of growing children, and we were encouraged to just put in as many hours of work that we were comfortable with. But those hours of work were important for us, for our development, for us, you know, mental state of mind that we were in at that point of time. And every step of the way was, was a learning experience. From the beginning we learned to not accept anything but the best, [00:08:00] to always ask the difficult questions. I think we carry that forward in our work in the foundation, even today.

[00:08:07] **Patricia Maguire:** There's a statement on PRIA's website that gender is still on PRIA's agenda and that there's a need to unlearn patriarchy. One of Martha's convictions I understand, was that the attitudes and behaviors of men and boys had to change if gender equity was ever going to be achieved in the long run.

[00:08:29] So that gender equity wasn't just for women, but we also had to bring men and boys along. And we know that the work to unlearn patriarchy is never without pushback. It's never without challengers. So what are some of the resistances that you might have seen or experienced to Martha's gender equity initiatives at PRIA and the civil society organizations that PRIA partnered with.

[00:08:57] **Nandita Bhatt:** Definitely there was resistance. So the perspective was about attitude changing and behavior changing. It was about questioning yourself. And those are things that we've learned and doing, several years nobody's ever questioned. And here,

there was somebody who was coming and questioning something simple as, do you know what's in your lunchbox today?

[00:09:20] Who knows what's in your lunchbox today? You know, conversation like that. And why don't you know what's in your lunchbox today? So it began from there. So definitely, there were questions and there was resistance, but she persisted. But she always felt that, if the external needs to change, if you're asking them to change, it is important for us to change as well.

[00:09:44] It is important for those who are implementing programs to be sensitive themselves, because then organically your programs are going to be sensitive. Organically, your programs are going to carry forward all of those, those things that comes naturally to you around gender.

[00:10:01] So gender training became mandatory at PRIA. Everybody was made to go through at least two days or three days of gender training every year.

But fun processes were also put in place by her. Something that we still do today, called the participatory lunch. It's everybody just cooks and eats together. So it was a revelation for men to actually chop onions or to make the masala, you know, to begin with.

[00:10:33] They're saying, we are not going to do this. We've never done it. But she was, if you want to eat, you've got to do it. So began from there; then now it's become a really fun thing that everybody looks forward to.

And, so when the committees were put in first to address sexual harassment at workplace, there was initial resistance and fear because, you know, there was a kind of a divide that came about between employees, the men and the women.

[00:11:02] And so then, what happened was then the name of the committee was changed. You, you just talked about it, gender main streaming in PRIA. So that became the committee, which looked at, to say that the root really is looking at how do we address gender discrimination? Root of violence? Root of sexual harassment is gender discrimination, so we need to address it.

[00:11:26] So the name of the committee changed and the policies changed and became very inclusive. So it was not just sexual harassment of women, it was anybody who's experiencing sexual harassment, anybody has agreements on gender. She would always listen to what people were saying, take feedback and do it in a manner that everybody accepts it. Everybody is impacted by what is happening.

[00:11:50] **Patricia Maguire:** Now you're the first director of the Martha Farrell Foundation, and as I mentioned, you've just been celebrating the seventh anniversary. What's the focus of the Martha Farrell Foundation?

[00:12:03] **Nandita Bhatt:** Martha had a vision that every space that women and girls are in, where they're studying, where they're working, are safe.

[00:12:11] And every committee that is formed, that is responsible for their safety, is sensitive, it's trained, and they are delivering justice the way that it's supposed to do. One of the things that the foundation does is making workplaces safe. That's a very large part of our work where we work in both the formal and the informal workplaces.

[00:12:33] We work with institutions, unions; we support governments, state and central. We work with universities, spaces, students, workers on creating awareness and setting up systems and ensuring that, yes, those committees are formed and those committees are set up, but it's easier said and done because Martha said change attitudes.

[00:12:58] So our work is on prevention. It's not just setting it up, but the prevention of the violence, prevention of the harassment, which is about changing attitudes.

And the other thing that we do is we work with young people extensively because that was something that we had begun with her in PRIA, which we are doing now in the foundation.

[00:13:18] It is called "*Kadam Badhate Chalo*". Every Footstep Forward or Taking Footsteps Forward is an adolescent led, youth led program on addressing gender violence and gender discrimination within homes, schools, and public spaces. But with the focus on personal change. We work very, very closely with academic institutions because there is so much of silence around sexual harassment at workplaces.

[00:13:47] Not enough being said about it. Not enough people talking about it because of the challenges of work. So therefore, we work with institutions to support them. We work with association with Commonwealth Universities, and we support three faculty members from three Commonwealth universities across the world to set up mechanisms to address gender-based violence within university spaces.

[00:14:13] We also support young students of social work to conduct, to facilitate, to work on areas of sexual harassment for a year and along with their education. So that's largely around what we do. The focus is on addressing prevention of gender-based violence and looking at gender discrimination, personal change, personal responsibility, change, institutional accountability.

[00:14:41] **Patricia Maguire:** Tell us a, a specific story about, say the project with young people that you were talking about around preventing sexual violence.

[00:14:50] **Nandita Bhatt:** I'll tell you a little bit about the genesis of it and what we do. Several years ago, we had a very unfortunate incident in our country where the young girl was gang raped in a moving bus in the capital city.

[00:15:04] There was young people in our country, began a movement asking for change in laws. But around the same time, we also had conversations with young people, adolescences and young people, places that we were working in, you know, in cities and villages and schools and colleges to say, what is it that young people want to do?

[00:15:26] How are we viewing this and how would we like to engage? And, we would hear more and more of them saying that we would want, want to engage, but we don't have space to engage. Nobody listens to us. We cannot express ourselves in the manner that you would want us to express. We express ourselves differently.

[00:15:46] But there was one particular group of young girls that we met doing embroidery on fabric that is made into *sarees* and *kurtas*. And, they are pulled out of school once they reach puberty and they sit at home and all they do is embroider from morning to evening. And it's a conversation with these young girls.

[00:16:06] When we were speaking to them, they said, you know, we want to do a campaign. So we asked them, but why campaign? Campaigns are very short-lived. And they said, no, our campaign is going to be important. Our campaign is important because it's not about anything else. It's about changing attitudes. It is so interesting when these, these young girls said that our campaign is going to be about changing attitudes because everybody knows you are not supposed to.

[00:16:35] It's unlawful to burn your spouse. It's unlawful to beat your spouse. You cannot visit, but it's happening in spite of people knowing about it. It's happening. Why is it happening? This young girl says, I'm not allowed to eat the cream of the milk. I love it. I'm not allowed to eat it because I'm told that my breasts will grow. [00:16:57] If my breasts grow, who will look at me? She says, this is violence. Everybody knows you can't do it, but it's happening. And I wanted to change in my home. I want it to change outside. The only way it'll change is when attitudes change. So our campaign is going to be about changing attitudes. It just fit. So we said, fine, we do it.

[00:17:20] We'll give you a space, we'll give you a platform. What are you going to do? And then that's how this program that we are doing with the young people, that's how it was born. It began as a campaign, but now it's a program where young people design, they implement the entire program in some areas.

For example, we have young people in a small urban settlement in Delhi are engaging with the councilor. [00:17:49] They have used participatory research methodologies to map their entire community, do a spatial analysis of the safe and unsafe spaces.

[00:18:00] They've done a photo voice of their entire community. They've done participatory videos of it. They are using street plays to raise awareness, but they've taken their research to the counselor and they're engaging with the counselor almost on a, you know, twice a month, following up with him and saying, this is how we live.

[00:18:24] We are not safe. If you can look at our map, there is not one safe space. How can we go to school? How can we go to college? How can we go to the market? How can we use the public toilets? Because everybody uses public toilets. I witnessed one, one meeting the other day when they were telling the counselor, you lock up the women's toilets from 11 o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the evening, the women's toilets, community toilets are locked. Where do you think women are going to relieve themselves? They're having to go to the railway tracks, and this is what is happening at the railway tracks, and the counselors are listening.

[00:19:06] It's a new experience for them. They have never engaged with young people before. They've never seen maps like that before. So now they have changed that entire system of the toilets are always available for the women. The doors have been fixed, lights have been fixed. There is someone always there to ensure that the, you know, the men's washroom and the women's washroom are next to each other, but there is no violence happening there.

[00:19:34] Roads have been smoothened, you know; connecting gates have been opened so that there is access. But the girls and boys who are doing this program, having this conversation are very clear. When they speak to the counselor, they said these are all structural things that you're putting in place. Be sure that this is not going to end violence. You know, attitudes need to change. So this is what [00:20:00] happens when we give the platform to young people to define. There is no definition of violence that is given to them. No definition of gender that is given to them. We call it *understanding gender my way*.

[00:20:12] **Patricia Maguire:** That's a very powerful example of bringing Martha's focus on participatory learning, on participatory approaches to gender mainstreaming at PRIA, her focus on teens, girls and boys, and bringing all that forward into the work of the Martha Farrell Foundation with young people in their communities.

[00:20:39] That's, that's a powerful example of the legacy and the work of the foundation. From your perspective then, as a former colleague of Dr. Farrell at PRIA, and now being the director of the Martha Farrell Foundation, what else do you see as some of

the lasting impacts of her feminist's perspective within PRIA and within organizations that PRIA partners with?

[00:21:06] **Nandita Bhatt:** For one, the conversation on inward looking before asking questions outside continues. All of the processes that she set up continues. Gender is inbuilt in every program that exists; the questions of gender are always there. So whether while implementing a program, whether it is required of the program, whether it is or is not by a partner organization or donor organization,

[00:21:37] it is understood that when PRIA reports, they are going to report on gender. When they implement, they are going to implement with that framework in mind. That continues even today, the sensitivity. And it's not only about women's safety, safety but about everybody's. That continues even today in PRIA. And one of, one of the issues that is there everywhere is that no, now we have a law, you know, and it is everybody's right to a safe place, but the word, right?

[00:22:08] So how many organizations really tell an employee who's joining, who has just joined, these are your rights. They would rather tell them, oh, you know, this is what it is and if you have a problem.

But here in PRIA and then in Martha Farrell Foundation, we say that this is your right. It is your right to ask questions. [00:22:30] It is your right to be given the answers. It is your right to know these things. So that is very, very important. And that continues, because she never shied away from talking about these things. Everything was transparent, was open, was up for discussion, and that continues even today. And in Martha Farrell Foundation, I feel that she's there in the spirit of the work that everybody does; how we [00:23:00] do it, how we work. I just feel that she's always there with us.

[00:23:05] Martha was like a magnet, you know, people just loved her. And people see that the foundation also is safe space, which is very, very important for us. And people remain connected. So for example, as I was telling you, we just celebrated our seventh year and we had friends and partners coming in from across the country, from across the country, just to celebrate Martha Farrell Foundation's seventh year.

[00:23:39] It was wonderful, wonderful to have everybody, and the conversation was a celebration of each other's work. It was not only celebration of the Martha Farrell Foundation, it was celebration of the progress that we've all made on the issue of preventing gender-based violence and what is it that we need to do going forward.

[00:24:01] **Patricia Maguire:** What I love about your telling of Martha Farrell's life and legacy, is that many people worldwide know about the work of PRIA. They know about the groundbreaking work of the Participatory Research in Asia Society, but fewer people know

that it was Martha and her team, people like yourself, who created the space and awareness within PRIA, kept pushing for gender justice.

[00:24:32] And I think that to celebrate PRIA's work, one has to look at then Martha's initiatives and her team on the gender mainstreaming team, to a sense, bring feminism to PRIA. Because otherwise then how can participatory research be this transformative approach to knowledge creation if we aren't transforming the world in which women and men, girls and boys live.

[00:24:59] So I, I really appreciate your telling of that and the work of the Martha Farrell Foundation to continue the gender justice work she brought to PRIA.

Is there anything else you want to tell us about Martha Farrell's work on gender justice that you were sort of thinking about as you were preparing today? Anything else you want to want us to know about her gender justice work?

[00:25:28] **Nandita Bhatt:** I think the work that she did on women's political empowerment and leadership was very, very important. At the time that she joined and when she was looking at PRIA's institutional gender mainstreaming, at that point of time, PRIA was doing a lot of work on, with elected representatives in the local, self-governance systems with elected representatives.

[00:25:53] And that was the time she raised the question to say, what about the women elected representatives? Because there were a lot of instances and, and there still is, but at that point it was a huge percentage of representation. Women were just there, but someone else would, was actually, you know, in their position, playing the role.

[00:26:17] But how are these women feeling? Why are they not able to exercise their, their rights? And do they, did they really want to be there? Those are questions that she asked. And she said, should we not work with them as well?

So she began with the gender audits of these institutions, the local self-governance institutions, where we had extensive discussions with women elected representatives to ask, do you know what your rights are?

[00:26:45] Do you know what you're supposed to do? Do you know what your responsibilities are? Are you able to access it? Are you not able? What are the challenges? Who are you as an individual, because you're lost, right, in all of this. Who are you? What is it [00:27:00] that you want? Does this make even make sense to you? We are talking about participation 33%, 50%. Does it make sense to you? And when you talk about participation, are you able to participate? What does participation look like to you?

So she began that particular area of work in PRIA, which looked at gender in governance. And that gender audit was, was phenomenal, pathbreaking because it really brought out two, three really important learnings.

[00:27:32] One was not all women want to stand for elections, and not all women want to be elected representatives. You know, so when we are asking women to go and stand, so there was a whole push for women to go and stand for elections and you know, take up these positions. But not all women want to do that. You know, so what is it that you want?

[00:27:54] They're just happy to support. So then, then she began this program where collectives of women were formed who will support women who are standing for elections; who will support women when they go for campaigning, they will just be with them. They will create safe political spaces for women, because women or leaders were also talking about violence that they were facing in public space and in their homes.

[00:28:25] So these collectors of women were supporting these women to exercise their rights and responsibilities in the way that they wanted to. And another very important thing that the question that she raised and that a methodology that was they now is a part of all of PRIA's and Martha Foundation's work, is women, you know, the double burden [00:28:50] of women's lives, you know. So it's easy to say, participate. It's easy to say, go and speak, but are you creating an enabling environment for her to do so? Isn't it important to look at that? Who is easing the burden of her work at home? You're adding to her to go out and be the best, be the best elected representative, be the best mother.

[00:29:18] What are we doing to support her to be the best in the way that she wants to do? So whatever she does is the best. So, so who's setting these indicators? But also then the whole thing about the trainings and capacity building, because then there was a whole narrative about women need to be capacitated.

[00:29:39] So they will come for two days and three days of training and one week of training. Take them away, train them. Then she again, she asked a question again, you're going to do that. Who's going to do that work for her at home? She's having to come back after three days and do all that was not done in those three days.

[00:29:58] So trainings then, in the program that she was running, were designed. Capacity building meetings were designed with women to ask, when would you like to engage? What time is best for you? And they said, afternoons for two hours. So that's all that was done. One hour, nothing more than that in the afternoon at a time, which was a choice that was given by women.

[00:30:28] So while you're saying that we need to have this, you need to progress in a way, we forget about that, that one individual, how is she going to fit into that? So, I think we

continue. So even today when we work with informal women workers, we uh, so that whole program was designed, when we designed the program, we sat with them.

[00:30:47] We did a daily work analysis to say, when are you free? When is it that you want to engage? We used to go at night. We went at night. When they came back home, when they were cooking dinner, we sat around there in their kitchen while they cooked dinner, talked to them. And now eventually it is moved to afternoon at two to three.

[00:31:07] We do not do a day long. We still do not do day long in Martha Farrell Foundation. It is when they are free and we go to them where they are, you know, that continues. And that was very, very important. It's about women's lived realities. Also creating an enabling environment for them to exercise their leadership

[00:31:24] because the backlash and the resistance that the women are going through when they're exercising their leadership, the impacts can be very, very long lasting and negative. So how do we also support women to, you know, go through all of that?

[00:31:43] **Patricia Maguire:** Well, thank you so much Nandita, for sharing with our listeners about Martha Farrell's trailblazing work in the world of participatory research through her impact on PRIA and on her continued legacy through the initiatives of the Martha Farrell Foundation.

[00:32:01] **Nandita Bhatt:** Thank you, Patricia. Thank you so much.

[00:32:05] **Patricia Maguire:** Listeners, we hope you'll stay with us as we move into the second part of the program where we'll be talking with Rajesh Tandon, the founder and president of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. Rajesh was introduced to participatory research in 1977 doing his doctoral research in a, a very rural farming community in India.

[00:32:29] And through that experience, he began to understand the importance of listening to and learning from the lived experiences of marginalized people who, as we all know are usually excluded from any research process. And then by 1987, Dr. Tandon found the Society for Participatory Research in Asia. And 40 years later, he continues as the Chief Functionary.

[00:32:55] Rajesh is internationally known for participatory research with marginalized [00:33:00] communities, for higher education, community-based research partnerships, and building democratic capacity in civil society. I first met Rajesh in 1987 while I was at the Center for International Education. Rajesh had an impact on my trajectory in participatory research.

[00:33:19] And 30 years later, in 2015, I had the privilege of meeting Martha. We're going to discuss her legacy to gender justice within PRIA and her work to end gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace in India. So Rajesh, thank you for joining me to discuss the work of Martha Farrell, who was also your wife.

[00:33:42] **Rajesh Tandon** - Thank you Patricia.

Patricia Maguire - So I have some questions to get us going that will help us reflect on Martha's contributions. In 1983, Martha was a joint director of Encore, an NGO working for women's literacy and empowerment, [00:34:00] and she started in participatory learning methodologies in adult education as opposed to participatory research per se.

[00:34:09] I understand she was a trainee at one of PRIA's first training of trainers about participatory methodologies. And, as Martha would, she asked, well, how can gender issues be incorporated in participatory learning methodologies in your PRIA training?

So it sounds to me like Martha kind of threw down a challenge to you to incorporate gender equality issues in PRIA' training of trainers. [00:34:36] Tell us a little bit about that.

[00:34:39] **Rajesh Tandon:** When PRIA was set up in 1982, just a year before that through some common friends, I was invited to look at the program that Martha was working on in Delhi with Muslim minority women on their literacy issues. And she was essentially an educator.

So when in, [00:35:00] July, 1984, we began the first round of participatory training methodology, and towards the preparation for second phase, we invited some feedback from the participants. And Martha made some comments about how do you look at this methodology from the point of view of women's experience?

[00:35:23] And she was initially referring to the Muslim women she was working with. And so my co-train and late Dr. Om and I began to think about it and went to second phase of training in early December. And we then sat down with her a little bit and couple of other women in the group. And one of the things she mentioned was that, you know, how we live together in a residential program.

[00:35:53] Men hang their underwears wherever they like and walk around in these residential [00:36:00] facilities with just a towel around their waist. Imagine what would've happened if we women did the same and threw our bras all around the place. So who's going to sensitize these fellows? So we said, well, that's an important point.

[00:36:16] So we had a little bit of discussion in second phase with everybody, so at least dress behavior changed from then on in training programs. And then, we invited her to have

a chat in designing phase three. And, so that's when she first walked into my house in Delhi. She was also in Delhi, and my co-trainer came and we spent half a day thinking about it.

[00:36:42] What essentially she was saying is that generalized learning methodology, even if it is highly participatory, tends to not make any differentiation in the lived experiences of men and women. And so she was arguing for making that explicit and exploring its implication, which we did that in phase three.

[00:37:09] And I must say that from then on, our participatory training methodology became enriched, more gender sensitive. We, the two, two men, both of us, we started more explicitly including a gender balance facilitator team. And that made a lot of difference.

[00:37:28] **Patricia Maguire:** Now, you've written that Martha had made a lot of informal contributions to PRIA over the years before she began her formal employment.

[00:37:38] So let's dive into some of her formal work with PRIA. I think around 1998, somewhere in that period, the Indian Supreme Court had formulated guidelines for the prevention of workplace gender harassment. And at her initiative, PRIA began one of the first civil society organizations in India to set up a board-mandated committee against sexual harassment. And I think she wrote the guide in Gendering the Workplace. So talk about the impact of that initiative of hers on gender equity within PRIA.

[00:38:15] **Rajesh Tandon:** Martha being Martha, she first talked to colleagues in PRIA when she came, and they began to tell stories about their discomfort many a times working in the field with colleagues, discomfort when, you know, middle class educated women go to remote, rural and tribal areas.

[00:38:41] And, discomfort, not necessarily, physical, misbehavior, but other forms of cultural discomfort. You know, that example of throwing bra off the kind of discomfort. And from that, she then began to look at ways in which we can start sensitizing colleagues and making this a part of PRIA's everyday life.

[00:39:09] First what she did was she organized our half day kind of workshops among PRIA team. We had just begun to have field officers at that time in other parts of the country. So, you know, we used to have an annual retreat of all staff. She started introducing, looking at everyday behavior between men and women, and also looking at it from a holistic view, not just at workplace, but what's happening at home.

[00:39:42] And then she used the Vishaka guidelines, the Supreme Court mandated guidelines and prepared a note, which I asked her to come and attend the board meeting and present it.

Now, the first question that everybody in the board, particularly [00:40:00] older men in the board, would say, are you having a problem? Has somebody been raped by PRIA, or something like that?

And she said, no, no, no. We are not having a problem at the moment. But we want to prevent problems. We want to sensitize our people. We want to have a culture where these issues don't crop up. So that's how this committee started.

And the first thing Martha did was then to start educating everyone, conducting workshops on what is the meaning of sexual harassment, [00:40:32] because generally the notion in India then and even now is, oh, I haven't raped anybody, or I haven't even touched them in funny ways. But you may have looked at them in some ways. You may have said sexist jokes. So these are the first things that she got us to do. And around the turn of the millennium, PRIA was getting bigger and we were including a large number of partners.

[00:41:00] So before she joined PRIA, formerly, there was a program that PRIA had initiative in 1995-96 called Mind Fellowship. And the idea of the program was to catalyze new civil society initiatives in poorer and excluded districts of the country. So Martha was willing to play a sort of a backend, part-time role, in looking at those applications and those reports.

[00:41:30] And then she attended a couple of workshops for those fellows. And there she began to experiment with this learning methodology where men though threatened a bit but are willing to accept and understand. She was always interested in making people understand and learn and not be shamed or castigated or, you know, dismissed for.

[00:42:00] So when she joined and when this committee was in full swing, then she proposed to gender audit of PRIA, you know. We in general, we know financial audit and we are all mortified and afraid of being found out for some mistake, some silly thing somebody may have done, not fill the form properly or something.

[00:42:24] What is this gender audit? And so we agreed at that time there were a number of field officers, half a dozen out of Delhi, and then the team, and we, we went through this process. For the first time, we systematically examined in all ways that PRIA is structured and functioning from a critical gender lens.

[00:42:49] We realized that even though we were doing so much work for women's empowerment, many of our languages were incompetent or incoherent. They did not reflect the sense of, you know, that in our statements of vision and mission, in our sort of propaganda material, we didn't take a gender view and we would tend to say women's empowerment

[00:43:14] and as if men can be left alone. So the audit really helped us to understand that this is a part of building a culture. But we did introduce a number of practices inside the system. You know, like recruitment practices, HR practices, leave practices when field travel with young infant kids. And there was a big debate why women should be given a consideration more than men were available.

[00:43:50] And the large point that I think she made and made us convince is that, going into field, in difficult areas alone, women face greater potential for harassment. And people will argue that, well, she joined to work in this kind of work, so why are we making extra effort?

And she said no, they joined, [00:44:15] but the moment a staff goes on field trip, she's on work. He's on work. And once you are on work, it's institution's responsibility to make sure that they're safe, and safety has physical aspect, emotional aspect. There are many aspects of safety. And the families of these colleagues have to be also assured that they're safe. [00:44:40] So that's how we began.

[00:44:43] **Patricia Maguire:** It sounds like Martha was really the driving force bringing gender justice to all aspects of PRIA. And of course, although PRIA is known for its 40-year commitment to the empowerment of excluded people, I mean, no matter the setting gender justice work always faces challenges and some resistance.

[00:45:04] So were there some barriers or resistance that Martha faced within PRIA around gender justice work?

[00:45:12] **Rajesh Tandon:** Oh, yeah. First of all, one of the things that we made was a better representation of, about gendered balance representation, not just in numbers but in higher leadership positions, governance positions, et cetera.

[00:45:29] And as a result, there was encouragement to younger, early career women colleagues to get more opportunities to get trained. You know, if, if they are to play a leadership role, go out, get exposure, you know, attend international programs. And we used to privilege that. Now this obviously for other colleagues or the men who were senior in age or experience or status, was not acceptable.

[00:46:01] And basically a number of them would come to me and say that we are molycoddling these young women. And one of them, in fact, even implied once, which I got very irritated and angry as if I was having a personal interest in that young woman's progression in the institution. So anyway, I spoke to Martha and then, my sort of initial reaction was, I'll fire this fellow, you know. She said, don't worry, let me deal with it because how many you'll fire? And then you will have to hire again, [00:46:39] and what's the guarantee that new hire-ees will behave differently?

So she spent time with them. She sort of went to field visits with them and, you know, education, helping them learn and overcome some of the fears that they had in taking it forward.

[00:47:02] The second place where resistance came and that was even more severe, is when we, you know, we used to do a management audit of all our partners. Partner meaning those where there is some sharing of resources. And, you know, our finance people and one or two sort of expert legal consultants were part of our team.

[00:47:25] They would go and these partners are all over the country, and so they would go around and sort of look at their financial and basically governance systems and gave us a report and we will advise them, we will help them strengthen that. And our argument was that if you are a partner of PRIA, how you behave affects credibility and reputation of PRIA as well. So we want you to strengthen these systems. So that's how we used to do it.

Now Martha, I think in 2002 or some time, said, well, we should [00:48:00] make gender audit part of this. When this was introduced as a requirement for formal partnership, lots of other NGOs and even some of the development, funders were, how can you make it mandatory?

[00:48:19] And the point that Martha herself led the team first two, three, our longstanding partners, and, and they benefited from this. They never looked at these issues. And so the word gradually went around that this is okay. And this helps you align what you say with what you do in everyday life.

[00:48:40] It's not gender equality out there in the community, but it's also in here in our everyday life. I must say on hindsight, her way of dealing with resistance was more educational.

[00:48:54] **Patricia Maguire:** Well, it sounds like the participatory gender audits then with your partners really had a lot of impact, ripple effect of helping these other organizations look at themselves differently.

[00:49:08] **Rajesh Tandon:** Yeah, and you know, some of them were and are very large development organizations and they have their own smaller partners, so the ripple effect spread there as well.

[00:49:18] **Patricia Maguire:** Now, you are sort of *the* internationally acclaimed, highly regarded founder of PRIA, you're a luminary of luminaries in the participatory world.

[00:49:30] And I'll remind our listeners that you are also Martha's husband. So she's been described as a pragmatic feminist. She said something to the effect that for gender equity to be achieved, it had to be observed and practiced in everyday life. And that men and boys

had to change as well. So tell us, how did you grow and change through Martha's feminism in your everyday life?

[00:49:58] **Rajesh Tandon:** Well, we met in one of that training program that we talked about in 1984. We decided to, some year, two years later, to get married, recognizing that we are from two different religions. Martha was a Catholic, and I'm a Hindu, born Hindu. Correct. And so we realized that there will be family resistance even if people feel awkward and you know, they haven't dealt with a Catholic woman in the house and you know, likewise, a Hindu man walking around Christmas table or whatever.

[00:50:34] So while we were aware of it, we didn't necessarily plan too much for it, but Martha, Martha began to suggest that I should continue to demonstrate in my home, own home how we conduct ourselves. Our son was born within a, at the end of the first year of our marriage.

[00:51:00] So I began to do much more work in family. I used to, you know, do some shopping and I used to do some odd job cooking, but cleaning, swapping, and washing dishes was not necessarily my cup of tea. And I used to have domestic help and all that.

So I remember that after a couple of years of our marriage, we hosted a family Christmas lunch. Now, because we married across religion at that time, Martha's family never celebrated festivals like Diwali or Holi. Diwali is the Light Festival and Holi is the Color Festival.

[00:51:44] And, my family never celebrated Christmas. So we discovered that Hindu family didn't know what to do on 25th of December. So we started hosting parties at our place for predominantly for Hindu family members and friends. And then we also started hosting parties predominantly for Catholic family and friends for Diwali and Holi.

[00:52:17] And so they noticed that I'm doing cooking, cleaning, preparing the milk bottle. So my aunt commented, what is all this Rajesh that you're doing? Martha doesn't do all this? Well, gosh, you know, it was her thought that Martha Martha's job, woman's job. I said, no, no, no. I'm enjoying doing this.

[00:52:44] And, but this were difficult conversation. And of course, you know, they would say sort of domesticating man, you know, this imagery of a wild bull being domesticated by a woman coming from another religion, you know, an educated woman trying to do this to this handsome man, kind of. But I think that that experience was good.

[00:53:08] I enjoyed being a father and I enjoyed spending time at home. We had difficult moments, particularly around my travels. And, there were occasions we didn't have any

proper domestic support. My mother had died before we got married. My father died after a couple of years of our first son was born.

[00:53:36] So I didn't have any member of the family or to be around. And Martha was working too. So we ended up having a couple of very difficult moments about this. But after the first child was born, I had, you know, to help with any more children and this and that, you know, I said, but you know, if it's going to come in the way of our professional work. Martha didn't travel for her own work.

[00:54:04] At that time it was not, she was not in PRIA work was in Greater Delhi area. You know, once a year they would go on a camp or something with adolescent women. But other than that, she, you know, so, so, so it became a bit of a very difficult time. But, if you believe in learning, it does happen over time. We now have a beautiful daughter as well.

[00:54:32] **Patricia Maguire:** Well, it sounds like you certainly grew and expanded your repertoire of behaviors and, and that together you, you two worked your way through how to expand your sort of beyond the stereotypical gender roles.

I know that you and your children and others have established the Martha Farrell Foundation, and what do you think that Martha would be especially pleased about regarding the foundation's work?

[00:55:02] **Rajesh Tandon:** Martha had begun around 2008 or so to work more extensively with boys and men. And those were early days, other people didn't, think it was necessary or it was important. There is a point of view which says that, uh, you know, adolescent girls and women are more excluded and violated against, so let's work only with them.

[00:55:28] And Martha began to say that, you know, ultimately boys have to learn to change as well and learn to change before they become adults. So she had begun to work with boys and girls in some of the very prejudiced areas outside of Delhi in, in, in provinces where, you know, female femicide rates are so high that you have a gender ratio of 730 girls to thousand boys.

[00:56:06] And, she had launched a campaign on female femicide in those regions around 2005-06. And that basically convinced her that mothers were not willing to abort the fetus. The pressure was from the family, and particularly from in-laws and and husband. So I think that's where she began to say that what is the point if we don't work with them? These women will keep doing this under family pressure and emotional exploitation, financial fears, et cetera.

[00:56:48] So I think the work that Martha Farrell Foundation has done with boys and men, and more recently, last couple of years, what they call the *Guy Talk*. You know, so we now

have facilitators, men, boys, and teenager boys as facilitators to go around in their neighborhoods, chit chat with boys and talk about these so-called dirty jokes and, and ways of looking at girls and using foul languages and gestures and all. And, and I think that part of our work is what Martha would be very proud.

[00:57:27] **Patricia Maguire:** And is that also work that PRIA is continuing in your project of working with boys and men?

[00:57:34] **Rajesh Tandon:** Oh, yes. All our work now is bringing together boys and men with women and girls. So in, for example, our work in urban, informal settlements. We build local settlement committees.

[00:57:53] We sort of mobilize people to become a local group, sort of a leadership group. And, we particularly bring young women and young boys in that because they have a greater potential for unlearning as well as being able to work together.

[00:58:15] **Patricia Maguire:** Now in, in this podcast, we particularly focus on participatory action research and feminisms. So is there anything else you want to highlight about Martha's impact on the participatory research world?

[00:58:31] **Rajesh Tandon:** Martha, being an educator, a facilitator, an enabler for learning, started with learning literacy by minority women, gradually learning of adolescences and basically learning about gender roles and stereotypes.

[00:58:51] In 2011-12, she began to feel the need to systematize all this work in and enrolled for a PhD program. And, she began to attend classes. When it came to two topics, one gender and another research methodology. So in gender, of course, her course instructor invited her to conduct classes because she said, my knowledge is limited to books, and you have a, so you take this.

[00:59:32] So she took couple of classes. When research methodology came, and they started with the usual statistical manipulation of numbers and all that. So she came home one day and, and she said, isn't there another way of doing research? You know, I've not paid attention to this because I'm mostly doing participating learning and training and education.

But [01:00:00] what about research methodology? Don't you use the same tools that I use? I also do role play. You also do role play. What is the knowledge component? That's how the conversation started. And I must say that she went on to take a session in her doctoral student class several weeks down the line on illustrating what participatory research methods implied.

[01:00:28] What really got her to understand the link between learning and knowledge was the lived experience. You know, she was a devotee of starting from lived experience and in participatory research, we say, you know, people's knowledge and valuing people's knowledge. And she said, well, that's what we do.

[01:00:51] We always start by asking people what is going on in their life. And then we systematized. And so I said that's precisely the history of participatory research as I have practiced it, or PRIA has practiced. It's closely linked to the adult education, lifelong learning perspective, and philosophy. And you, you have practiced it and studied it as well.

[01:01:18] So she ended up doing a number of research papers at that time, one with me, but even her thesis contains a whole argument about participatory research. And the point that she ended up making and then she spoke about it in the couple of occasions, particularly when her book was launched in September 2014 and she talked about why the knowledge of women and the lived experience is so critical. And she said issues like workplace sexual harassment or even, family based, gender violence at home. Why such issues cannot be understood if the researcher does not demolish the walls between the researcher and the research.

[01:02:14] So intersubjectivity is essential an element of understanding such phenomena. And if we don't understand, how can we work to change them? So that was the argument that she made, and she ended up doing a lot more in that field. And I think you met her in February or March that year in 15, 2015. And, she was fresh out of this three year, four year journey.

[01:03:13] **Patricia Maguire:** Well, I think it's important for listeners to understand that whenever we get attuned to understanding the importance of people having a say in their life and the decisions that impact them, and having a right to create knowledge that impacts their lives. That once you're attuned to participation, whether it's the value of participation in education or in organizations or in governance, that the participation in research it, it sort of comes naturally. Those things come together. And yet even if you never do participatory research, you certainly can take that ethos and those values and apply them in other places of your life.

[01:04:00] And I think Martha really showed with her participatory gender audits and participatory learning methodologies in the adult education that she was involved in, that she had that value and understanding of the importance of people having a say in the decisions that impacted their lives.

[01:04:20] Anything else that you came ready to say about, you know, Martha's life and legacy that I haven't asked about?

[01:04:27] **Rajesh Tandon:** I began to understand Martha in a more holistic way after she left, and that happened in my interactions with my children. I learned about Martha from my relatives, the way they hold her in respect.

[01:04:48] Same aunt every year remembers her birthday, the day she was killed. And every time I meet her, she, she gets tears on her eyes. I began to receive some messages and occasional letters from Martha's friends I didn't know about, and I began to understand what I would call the spiritual dimension of Martha.

[01:05:24] She was deeply spiritual. She didn't practice rituals of religion. I wanted our children to be baptized. She refused, because I said, well, you know, Catholic schools are very good schools and I never went to one, and I want my kids to attend. And she said, no, no, they're not going to get baptized. They will grow up as our children.

[01:05:47] So we, we go to church, we go to temple, we go to mosque, we go everywhere, whatever we do. But involved in the ritualistic sense, she was deeply spiritual, and she saw a connection between her calling and her being. There are so many people who would tell me afterwards about Martha's generosity, with time, with emotions, with resources, with help.

[01:06:20] She had AB negative blood group, a very rare blood group, and she refused to attend important family functions if her blood was needed by some unknown recipient. And so her generosity and her spiritualism, I think made her a very unique person and I'm still finding out about her.

[01:06:54] **Patricia Maguire:** Well, thank you Rajesh for your generosity today in sharing your insights and remembrances of Martha and helping us to further elevate and amplify her contributions.

[01:07:10] **Rajesh Tandon** - Thank you, Patricia. Thank you.

Patricia Maguire –

Thank you listeners for being with us today. Please help us expand our listenership by sending the link to this episode to your colleagues and networks. Give us a boost on your social media.

A transcript of today's podcast, citations, and additional info about Martha Farrell, Nandita Bhatt, and Rajesh Tandon are posted on our companion website

- <http://www.parfemtrailblazers.net> If you missed earlier podcasts, you'll find them there as well.

That's it for episode eight of Participatory Action Research Feminist Trailblazers and Good Troublemakers. Come back April 1st for Episode 9 with Maree Brennan of Australia, when we pivot to action research and teacher action research. Now, as John Lewis urged, go make some good trouble of your own.

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