

# Are Other Worlds Possible ? A Set of three books

Based on the transcripts from 'Open Space Seminar Series' sessions held at Delhi University from August 2003 – February 2004 on the theme 'Are Other Worlds Possible? The World Social Forum and Cultures of Politics'

## Book One : Talking New Politics

### Table of Contents

#### Introduction

#### Proem

#### Open Space Forums :

### Open Space 1 Envisioning the World

- Chapter 1 **Breaking boundaries**  
*Jai Sen, independent researcher and civil actor, New Delhi*
- Chapter 2 **Alternative frames**  
*Nivedita Menon, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi*
- Chapter 3 **Redefining the world**  
*Veena Das, Professor, University of Delhi and The Johns Hopkins University, USA*

#### Open Forum

### Open Space 2 Old Politics, New Politics

- Chapter 4 **New energies, new imagination**  
*Aditya Nigam, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi, as Moderator*
- Chapter 5 **Form and content**  
*Vinod Raina, Eklavya, Jubilee South, and All India People's Science Network, New Delhi and Bhopal*
- Chapter 6 **The politics of engagement**  
*Kavita Srivastava, PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties), Rajasthan*
- Chapter 7 **Feminist interventions**  
*Mary John, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi*

#### Open Forum

### Open Space 3 The Politics of Boundary

- Chapter 8 **A hierarchy of violence**  
*Urvashi Butalia, Author, Feminist, co-founder of Kali for Women, New Delhi*
- Chapter 9 **Understanding violence**  
*Deepak Mehta, Department of Sociology, DSE, Delhi University*
- Chapter 10 **Resistance, defence, or violence?**  
*Swapan Mukherjee, General Secretary, AICCTU, CPI(ML) Liberation, New*

Delhi

- Chapter 11     **A thousand voices**  
P V Rajagopal, *Ekta Parishad, Chhattisgarh*
- Chapter 12     **Revenge and collective guilt**  
Dilip Simeon, *Historian, Director, Aman Trust, New Delhi*
- Open Forum**

## **Open Space 4     Rhythms of other worlds**

- Chapter 13     **Forum as *raga***  
Chloé Keraghel, *Independent researcher, presently with UNESCO and ESPERTISE (ESPaces ouvERTS, Transformations et Innovations Politiques et Sociales), Paris, France*
- Chapter 14     **The importance of small things**  
Lachlan Tan, *Law student at Melbourne University, music student at the Melbourne Conservatory, Australia*
- Chapter 15     **Elements of new movement**  
Ezequiel Adamovsky, *Historian, teacher, and anti-capitalist and community activist, University of Buenos Aires, Argentina*
- Open Forum**
- Notes           **Searching for new politics**  
Amar Kanwar, *filmmaker whose film 'Freedom' was screened after the seminar, New Delhi*

### **Acknowledgements**

### **The Open Space Seminar Series**

### **WSF Backgrounder**

### **WSF Charter of Principles**

### **Glossary**

### **Index**

# Book Two : Interrogating Empires

## Table of Contents

### Introduction

#### Open Spaces :

#### 1 **Empire 1 : Globalisation - Questions of Capital, Labour, and Sustainability**

- Chapter 1 **Praful Bidwai**, *journalist and commentator, New Delhi*  
Chapter 2 **Jean Drèze**, *Delhi School of Economics*  
Chapter 3 **Jayati Ghosh**, *Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, JNU, New Delhi*  
Chapter 4 **Mahesh Rangarajan**, *Fellow, Nehru Museum and Library, New Delhi*  
Discussion

#### 2 **Empire 2 : Authoritarianism, Militarisation, & Nuclearisation : Questions of War, Peace, and Terror**

- Chapter 5 **Rohini Hensman**, *journalist, activist, Mumbai*  
Chapter 6 **Ashis Nandy**, *author, commentator, CSDS, Delhi*  
Chapter 7 **Achin Vanaik**, *journalist, commentator, and anti-nuclear activist, New Delhi*  
Discussion

#### 3 **Empire 3 : Caste and Race : Questions of Identity and Exclusion**

- Chapter 8 **Paul Divakar**, *National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, Hyderabad*  
Chapter 9 **V Geetha**, *Independent researcher writing on Gender, History and Culture, Chennai*  
Chapter 10 **Kalpana Kannabiran**, *Feminist, Sociologist, University of Law, Hyderabad*  
Chapter 11 **Gail Omvedt**, *Sociologist and Activist working on Caste, Class and Gender, Maharashtra*  
Discussion

#### 4 **Empire 4 : Fundamentalism, Communalism, and Nationalism**

- Chapter 12 **Purushottam Agarwal**, *Social and cultural critic, political analyst, Professor JNU, New Delhi*  
Chapter 13 **Swami Agnivesh**, *Bandhua Mukti Morcha, New Delhi*  
Chapter 14 **Ashok Vajpeyi**, *Poet and critic, New Delhi*  
Discussion

#### 5 **Empire 5 : Patriarchy, Sexuality, and Questions of Openness**

- Chapter 15 **Uma Chakravathy**, *author, feminist, and activist, New Delhi*  
Chapter 16 **Pramada Menon**, *Director CREA, feminist, author, New Delhi*  
Chapter 17 **Shalin Rakesh**, *Naz Foundation, New Delhi*  
Discussion

**Acknowledgements: The Open Space Seminar Series, WSF Backgrounder, WSF Charter of Principles, Glossary, Index**

# Book Three : Imagining Alternatives

## Table of Contents

### Series and Volume Introduction

#### Open Spaces :

#### 1                    **The WSF and New Internationalisms : The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace**

Chapter 1            **C K Raju**, *Physicist, Author of the book 'Eleven Pictures of Time', Indore*  
Chapter 2            **Suddhabrata Sengupta**, *Sarai, CSDS, Delhi*  
Discussion

#### 2                    **How Open ? Is Socialism the Only Possible Other World ?**

Chapter 3            **Dipankar Bhattacharya**, *General Secretary, CPI(ML), New Delhi*  
Chapter 4            **Kumkum Sangari**, *Professorial Fellow, Nehru Museum & Library, New Delhi*  
Chapter 5            **Dunu Roy**, *Sajha Manch, New Delhi*  
Discussion

#### 3                    **Cultures of Politics : The University as Open Space ?**

Chapter 6            **Anita Ghai**, *Lecturer, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi*  
Chapter 7            **Nandita Narain**, *Reader, St Stephen's College, Delhi University*  
Chapter 8            **Mukul Mangalik**, *Sr. Lecturer, Ramjas College, Delhi, as moderator*  
Discussion

#### Reflections / Refractions

Chapter 9            **Apunba**, *New Delhi*  
Chapter 10           **Radicals Collective**, *New Delhi*  
Chapter 11           **Vanessa Andreotti**, *Other Worlds project, University of Nottingham, UK*

#### Acknowledgements

#### The Open Space Seminar Series

#### WSF Backgrounder

#### WSF Charter of Principles

#### Glossary

#### Index

#### Graphics and illustrations

Time and budget allowing, we plan to extensively use graphics and illustrations. These will add to the concept of openness. Since the books will be presented as a collage of ideas and images, not as long blocks of grey text punctuated by illustrations, words will interweave with images, along with photographs and graphics.

## **Links**

We are also planning for the books to provide links – through references, illustrations, etc - to other related activities, including the World Social Forum itself, the UK ‘Other Worlds’ project, etc. There will be a listing of such activities and initiatives.

## **Issues to be resolved**

- ? We may invite two student-based initiatives that came out of the series, the Radicals Collective and Apunba to prepare texts reflecting on the content of the seminar series. These would be short reviews, of one-two pages each.
- ? We may also invite Amar Kanwar, filmmaker, who screened two of his films during the series, to give his critical reflections.
- ? The books may be seen as workbooks, with questions worked into the text to help a reader identify and understand the issues. Something like what the Other Worlds Education Project in the UK is doing, with what they call ‘self-reflexive questions’ and ‘open space questions’.
- ? We may add a one-page reflection upon additional things that happened during the course of the seminars – such as films screened, the concert that took place, the video filming at two of the sessions and the session that took place in the open (the last one), symbolising open space in itself.

## **Glossary**

We hope to build a detailed glossary that can help readers with unfamiliar terms. We are looking at ways to make the glossary more creatively accessible to the reader, both in terms of presentation of information, as well as in the formatting.

## **Biographies**

There will be a biography of each contributor, about 100-150 words, giving a clear background about each person and their achievements.

## **Target readers**

The target readers seek to enhance their knowledge on world issues. Specific groups that will benefit from these books:

- ? Students
- ? Young professionals
- ? NGOs and social movements
- ? Social and political activists
- ? All those seeking to enhance their knowledge on world issues in today’s turbulent times
- ? In general, the concerned but uncommitted.

## **Projected dates**

The target is to have all three books edited by October 31. These will be done sequentially, with the final manuscript of Book One scheduled for October 15. The final draft of Book Two will be ready by October 24 and that of Book Three by October 31. The projected publishing schedule will be to bring out the books by December 2004, in time for the World Social Forum in Brazil, January 26-31 2005.

The initial print run will be 2,000 copies each.

## **Distribution**

- ? **Target 1:** Sales at the WSF in Brazil, January 2005, a meeting of 100,000 people.
- ? **Target 2:** Extensive distribution in India through:
  - o The publisher
  - o Universities, colleges and schools
  - o Donors and their networks
  - o NGOs and their networks
  - o Movements and their networks.
- ? **Target 3:** Extensive distribution worldwide through international publishers.

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## Appendix 1

*The Open Space Seminar Series*

# **Are Other Worlds Possible ?**

## **Cultures of Politics and the World Social Forum**

**A Background Note**

**for the ‘Open Space’ Seminar Series at the University of Delhi,  
August – December 2003**

**Mukul Mangalik and Jai Sen, with the help of Madhuresh Kumar, July 2003, revised <sup>1</sup>**

### **Introduction**

This Note gives the background to and programme for a series of seminars coming up soon at the University of Delhi on the World Social Forum, the issues with which the Forum is concerned, and the culture of politics that the Forum offers. The series will be spread over two terms, August-September 2003 and mid October-December 2003.

The World Social Forum, initiated in Brazil in January 2001 as a challenge to the World Economic Forum in order to put forward another view of the world and its possibilities, is now widely seen as being a highly significant world initiative. The motto the World Social Forum has coined for itself is ‘Another World Is Possible !’.

At one level, the question we want to explore in this series is precisely whether and which kinds of other worlds are possible, and what roles the Forum is playing and can play in contributing to such worlds.

In principle, the Forum is meant to be an ‘open space’ for the free exchange of ideas amongst those critical of and/or concerned with neo-liberal globalisation and its impacts, and about the social, economic, and political order more generally. This relatively undirected ‘open space’ is one where people from a wide range of streams of thought and action can meet and interact, without feeling that they have to agree with the views of the organisers or that they have to subscribe to one or another’s ideas or prescriptions. The propositions and formulations that emerge from the Forum come out of this interaction, appear in the names of the participants and not of the World Social Forum, which itself takes no positions or ‘leadership’ on any issues beyond what is given in its Charter of Principles.

Since 2001 the WSF has moved from being a major event each January in Porto Alegre, timed to challenge the annual World Economic Forum held at Davos, Switzerland, to being a protest and an efflorescence and celebration across the world.

In November 2002, a European Social Forum was held in Florence, Italy, and some 500,000-1 million people marched in a peace rally in protest against the US-led war threatening on Iraq.

In early 2003, before the third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in late January, *four*

regional Fora were held in various parts of the world – the Asian Social Forum in Hyderabad, India, the Palestine Social Forum, an African Social Forum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and a Pan-Amazonian Social Forum in Belém, Brazil, as well as several thematic, national, and city fora.

There are also several ‘side’ or ‘peripheral’ events that take place during the Forum, some planned, many unplanned. These peripheral spaces play very important roles in defining the overall culture of the Forum, and in preserving (and elaborating) its openness. These include, for example, the Youth Forum and parallel events by civil and political entities that wish to relate to the Forum but prefer to maintain a little distance, as well as more formal ‘parallel’ events such as the World Parliamentary Forum, the World Forum of Mayors and Local Authorities, and the World Education Forum.

The annual world event in Porto Alegre is also changing. The first meeting in 2001 was predominantly a challenge to economic globalisation. In 2002 it moved to being a meeting that made a call for alternatives – ‘Another World Is Possible !’. And the third meeting in January 2003 was one marked by critical self-reflection on the WSF itself – both as structure and as process.

The steady growth in numbers attending the world event – from 25-30,000 people at the first one, to 50-60,000 at the second, to 100,000 at the third – attest to the relevance of the Forum to people all over the world. But it is not numbers alone that count. This growth has also brought its own share of organisational and management problems, both at the events themselves and also in the evolution of policy and strategy for the Forum as an idea, sometimes tending to overwhelm it. WSF3 is widely considered to be the point at which organisers, participants and observers began to seriously talk about how to practise alternatives to economic globalisation, and also to reflect on the extent to which the Forum is practising the principles it preaches. The Forum became aware of its own globalisation, as regional and problem-specific Forums mushroomed worldwide. Are the Forum’s ruling bodies, structures, and processes appropriate and adequate to a phenomenon growing exponentially and spreading globally ?

More importantly, there is perhaps reason to think that the WSF has struck at the level of meaning. It has made abundantly clear that there *is* an alternative to economic, capitalist globalisation, that there *are* alternatives; and that people all over the world are now mobilising to define and to live those alternatives. In this way, the WSF – along with all the other forms of global civil action that are also taking place - is arguably playing a profound role in freeing peoples all over the world of the shackles of the colonisation of the mind.

During 2002-3, the International Council of the World Social Forum made the decision after prolonged debate that the fourth world meeting of the organisation and process called ‘the World Social Forum’ will, for the first time, be held outside Brazil, in India. Holding the Forum in Asia and in India is a major and ambitious initiative towards the globalisation of the World Social Forum as an idea and as a culture, and will constitute a major landmark in the history of the Forum. Although the fifth world meeting is expected to again be in Porto Alegre, Brazil, holding the meeting in India will set a precedent that will almost certainly be followed in later years. It is therefore a crucial testing time for the Forum, in management as well as political-strategic terms.

Over the last three years, which are precisely the years in which the World Social Forum has

taken shape, some very important developments have taken place internationally. Across the world, capitalist globalisation is riding triumphant even as the economy unravels within its heartland, the United States, while wars have been unilaterally launched by some nations against others in declared pre-emptive defence of their self-interests, in defiance of world public opinion and the opposition from a majority of nation-states, brazenly bypassing the multilateral world order that has been built up over the past century.

One of the more audacious acts of militance in history took place on September 11 2001. In reaction, a 'war on terrorism' has been launched by nation-states across the globe and 'security' and surveillance measures are being relentlessly tightened, largely against civil and political protestors. The US has already moved decisively to the right; Europe seems to be moving that way; and Hindu, Islamic, Christian, and Jewish fundamentalisms are rampant in different parts of the world, including of course in India and other parts of South Asia. The shadows of imperialism and authoritarianism are increasingly evident. It is in this context too that we need to see the World Social Forum and what it means.

**Specifically, it is important to critically examine the vocabulary and culture of the politics of the Forum.** When it was formed, and as still stated in its Charter of Principles, the singular position of the World Social Forum was opposition to neoliberal globalisation, and implicitly also to a politics of violence. Over time, and especially in the world context that emerged in the period immediately following its formation, this has also come to include opposition to war and militarism. But this vocabulary has come to be dramatically expanded now that the world meeting is being held in India, to also include opposition to caste, communalism, and patriarchy. After much debate at its recent meeting in Miami (June 2003), the International Council of the Forum approved this widened vocabulary for the next world meeting of the Forum.

The WSF is also becoming stricter on this count, with both WSF India and the WSF International Council deciding during this year (2003) that organisations wanting to be members of its bodies have to give their written declaration of adherence to the WSF Charter of Principles. But do we perhaps not need to ask what purposes this widening vocabulary and growing conditionality are serving? Is this helping to persuade more people in the world of the value of opposing these empires? And beyond the taking of these positions by its leadership, just how effectively is the Forum confronting and contesting these empires?

Given the volatile world context within which the Forum is taking shape, the important initiatives and also positions that it itself is taking, as well as the major challenges it is facing, there is reason to think that the WSF is at a critical juncture. Maybe the Forum, as well as the thousands of organisations from across the world that are participating in and supporting it, would do well to take a step back and get a view of the larger picture of which it is one part, one frame.

**The seminar series proposed here is seen as a contribution to such a perspective.** It is moreover proposed in a context where the Forum is as yet hardly known in India, neither as an organisation / initiative or as the movement it is widely seen to be elsewhere, nor in terms of the interesting culture of politics it appears to offer, the culture of 'open space'.<sup>2</sup> There has been very little critical public examination in India as yet of the Forum, either as an idea or as a significant world institution.<sup>3</sup>

## **The Open Space Seminar Series**

In an attempt to address this obvious gap, we propose to organise a sustained series of seminars at the University of Delhi during August-December 2003, called '**The Open Space Series**', with the overall theme

### **Are Other Worlds Possible ?**

#### **Cultures of Politics and the World Social Forum.**

These seminars will be organised in two interweaving streams. One stream will deal with the structural issues that the World Social Forum has so far been concerned with and in many senses is organised around – economic globalisation, and militarisation and war – and also with the new issues that are being added to this vocabulary by it being held in India - religious fundamentalism and communalism, and caste, race, and patriarchy. In short, the empires that confront us and attempt to bind us, the empires that the Forum has decided to confront, both implicitly and explicitly. The other stream - alternating and intertwining with the 'first' - will deal with the relationship of the Forum to such issues and to such empires, but organised not in terms of the issues but of themes that we suggest are crucial to understanding the evolving culture of politics that the Forum offers : the question of old versus new politics; the increasingly contested question of the Forum as space or as movement; the crucial question of the Forum's relationship to and understanding of violence; and the challenge that 'the Forum', though commonly understood only as a world meeting that takes place each year, is – like much transnational movement - in many senses a construct in virtual space.

We close with two potentially very stimulating sessions : one examining the question of whether socialism is really the only possible other world; and the other exploring the possibility of whether the university can possibly adopt the radical culture of politics that the Forum in theory offers, of open space.

The seminar series is being organised under the banner of The History Society, Ramjas College, University of Delhi, by Mukul Mangalik, teacher of History at Ramjas College, and Jai Sen, independent researcher and civil actor, with the help of Madhuresh Kumar, a student working with Jai Sen, and Janaki Abraham, teaching at the Delhi School of Economics. The speakers being invited come from many different fields and persuasions, some well known others less so but all with important and fresh contributions to make.

The Series will also be punctuated by the publication of an important book on the World Social Forum that in many senses has the same objectives and that explores broadly the same themes – but on a world scale. Co-edited by Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, and Peter Waterman, this critical but committed collection of essays and documents on the Forum – tentatively titled 'The World Social Forum : Challenging Empires' – is expected to be out in November, and is likely to contribute strongly to the debate that this Series will hopefully generate.

One of the main objectives of this initiative is to involve and engage students in the idea and process of the World Social Forum, and the initiative will not be restricted to a series of seminars alone.

## **The Open Space Seminar Series - Timetable and Panellists**

### *Notes :*

The seminars were held at different colleges in Delhi University, North and South Campus, and generally started at around noon. Mukul Mangalik and/or Jai Sen moderated the sessions unless otherwise indicated. Reports were prepared on each session, and a Reader has been prepared and is available. The sessions were followed by film screenings, plays, and other performances.

August 19, Tuesday :

### **Cultures of Politics : The Idea of the World Social Forum**

**Venue : Seminar Room, Ramjas College, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

#### *Panellists :*

Veena Das, Professor, University of Delhi and The Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA

Nivedita Menon, Department of Political Science, University of Delhi

Jai Sen, independent researcher and civil actor, New Delhi

August 29, Friday :

### **Empire 1 : Globalisation - Questions of Capital, Labour, and Sustainability**

**Venue : Seminar Room, Ramjas College, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

#### *Panellists :*

Praful Bidwai, journalist and commentator, New Delhi

Jean Drèze, Delhi School of Economics

Jayati Ghosh, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Mahesh Rangarajan, Fellow, Jawaharlal Nehru Museum and Library

September 9, Tuesday :

### **The WSF and Old vs New Politics : Parties, social movements, and civil groups**

**Venue : Arts Faculty, University of Delhi**

#### *Panellists :*

Mary John, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Kavita Srivastava, PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties), Rajasthan

Vinod Raina, Eklavya, Jubilee South, and All India People's Science Network

+ with Aditya Nigam, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, as Moderator

September 19, Friday :

### **Empire 2 : Authoritarianism, Militarisation, & Nuclearisation : Questions of War, Peace, and Terror**

**Venue : I P College, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

#### *Panellists :*

Rohini Hensman, journalist, activist, Mumbai

Ashis Nandy, author, commentator, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi

Achin Vanaik, journalist, commentator, and anti-nuclear activist, New Delhi

### **Empire 3 : Caste and Race : Questions of Identity and Exclusion**

**Venue : Room No 1, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

#### *Panellists :*

Paul Divakar, National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights

V Geetha, Independent researcher writing on Gender, History and Culture

Kalpna Kannabiran, Feminist, Sociologist, teaching at the University of Law Hyderabad  
Gail Omvedt, Sociologist and Activist working on Caste, Class and Gender

October 31, Friday :

**The Politics of Boundary : The Question of the WSF and (Non)Violence**

**Venue : Seminar Room, Ramjas College, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

*Panellists :*

Urvashi Butalia, Author, Feminist, co-founder of Kali for Women, India's first feminist publishing house  
Deepak Mehta, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University  
Swapan Mukherjee, General Secretary, AICCTU, CPI(ML) Liberation  
P V Rajagopal, Ekta Parishad, Chhattisgarh  
Dilip Simeon, Historian, Director, Aman Trust

November 11, Tuesday :

**Empire 4 : Fundamentalism, Communalism, and Nationalism**

**Venue : Seminar Room, Ramjas College, University of Delhi (North Campus)**

*Panellists :*

Purushottam Agarwal, Social and cultural critic, political analyst, Professor JNU  
Swami Agnivesh, Bandhua Mukti Morcha  
Ashok Vajpeyi, Poet and critic, New Delhi

November 21, Friday

*(postponed from September 26, Tuesday; finally CANCELLED due to time conflicts with other commitments for speakers) :*

**Contested Space ? The Forum as Space, the Forum as Movement**

**Venue : Gargi College, University of Delhi (South Campus)**

*Invited panellists :*

Dinesh Abrol, Delhi Science Forum, Member WSF India Organising Committee, former coordinator, WSF India Programme Committee for ASF (2002-3)  
Ashok Bharti, Convenor, National Coordinator, National Conference of Dalit Organisations (NACDOR), and Member, Member WSF India Organising Committee  
Jai Sen, independent researcher and civil actor, New Delhi  
+ with Razia Ismail Abbasi, India Alliance for Child Rights & Women's Coalition Programme Centre, as Moderator

November 25, Tuesday :

**The WSF and New Internationalisms : The Culture and Politics of Cyberspace**

**Venue : Sarai, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies**

C K Raju, *Physicist, Author of the book 'Eleven Pictures of Time' – through Note for session*  
Suddhabrata Sengupta, *Sarai, Centre for the Studies of Developing Societies, Delhi*  
+ with Jai Sen, *independent researcher and civil actor, New Delhi as moderator*

December 2, Tuesday : **Empire 5 : Patriarchy, Sexuality, and Questions of Openness**

**Speakers :**

Uma Chakravathy, *author, feminist, and activist*  
Pramada Menon, *Director CREA, feminist, author*  
Shalin Rakesh, *Naz Foundation*

December 12, Friday : **How Open ? Is Socialism the Only Possible Other World ?**

### **Speakers :**

Dipankar Bhattacharya, *General Secretary, CPI(ML)*  
Kumkum Sangari, *Professorial Fellow, Centre for Contemporary Studies, Teen Murti  
Museum & Library, New Delhi*  
Dunu Roy, *Sajha Manch*

### **Followed by the ‘Open Spaces Concert’ by Indian Ocean and Phase Damage, a university students’ band**

December 19, Friday : **Cultures of Politics : The University as Open Space ?**

#### **Speakers**

Anita Ghai, *Lecturer, Jesus and Mary College, University of Delhi*  
Nandita Narain, *Reader, St Stephen’s College, Delhi University*  
Testimony by several speakers from the audience, coming from different points of view and different sections within the university community (the blind and visually impaired, students from outside Delhi, Muslims, Dalits, women, students of colour from other parts of the world)  
*and with Mukul Mangalik, Sr. Lecturer, Ramjas College, as moderator*

### **Post World Social Forum informal resumption of Series :**

February 11 2004, Wednesday : **Is the World Social Forum Helping to Make Other Worlds Possible ?**

#### **Speakers**

Chloé Keraghel, *Independent researcher on the World Social Forum, presently working with UNESCO, Paris, France*  
Ezequiel Adamovsky, *historian and anti-capitalist activist, teaching at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina*  
Lachlan Tan, *Law student at Melbourne University, music student at the Melbourne Conservatory, Australia*

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### **Endnotes and References**

<sup>1</sup> These three, while agreeing on the need to put together the series of seminars proposed in this document, do not necessarily agree on every word and formulation contained in it.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of this concept of ‘open space’, see : Francisco Whitaker, nd [January 2001] – ‘World Social Forum : Origins and targets’. Typescript in English, 3 pp. Available on the World Social Forum website, <http://www.forumsocialmundial.org.br>. Originally appeared as an article in Portuguese, in *Correio da Cidadania*, January 22 2001. Translated by Jesus Bengoetxea and Sandra Guimarães; Chico Whitaker, March 2003 – ‘Notes about the World Social Forum’. Revised version, dt March 17 2003; and, for a critique : Jai Sen, May 2003d – ‘The WSF as logo, the WSF as commons : Take a moment to reflect on what is happening in the World Social Forum’. A discussion note. Available on [http://www.choike.org/nuevo\\_eng/informes/1192.html](http://www.choike.org/nuevo_eng/informes/1192.html) and <http://www.choike.org>.

<sup>3</sup> The few articles that have appeared in the more important national press include : Devaki Jain, January 2003 – ‘The Empire Strikes Back : A Report on the Asian Social Forum’, in *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 11 2003; Sukumar Muralidharan, January 2003 – ‘Globalising Resistance’, in *Frontline*, Volume 20, Issue 2, January 18 - 31, 2003. Cover Story. Vol:20 Iss:02 URL: <http://www.flonnet.com/fl2002/stories/20030131009100400.htm>; and : Jai Sen, January 2003d – ‘The Long March to Another World’, in *The Hindu*, January 29 and January 30 2003, p 10. Also available on Transnational Alternativ@s <http://www.tni.org/tat/index.htm>