



# POV

Community  
Engagement & Education

DISCUSSION GUIDE

## The World Before Her

A Film by Nisha Pahuja





TORONTO, 2013

Many years ago on my first trip to India, I was invited to attend a reception in Bombay. The event was at a posh hotel and was attended by socialites, film stars and media types who had all gathered to celebrate Miss India—Yukta Mookhey—winning the Miss World pageant in London.

Yukta, as one would expect from a beauty queen, was resplendent. She towered over her subjects and had the whitest teeth I'd ever seen. No matter where I stood on that terrace overlooking the Arabian Sea, I could see Yukta's crown bobbing its way through the throngs. People were euphoric, filled with national pride. Having grown up in the West where most of us regard beauty contests as passé, I found Yukta's homecoming both curious and moving. For me, it was as much about her as it was about India.

I have been going to India now for nearly 15 years, and the more time I spend there, the more I realize that what India does best is teach. It teaches one to see that assumptions are never safe and nothing is simple. Sabira Merchant, one of the key pageant voices in the film, says, "There are two Indias." I would say there are many Indias, and they are doing battle with each other now, just as they always have been. In **The World Before Her**, I chose to focus on the battle between tradition and "modernity," fundamentalism and capitalism, and how that battle plays out on the bodies of women. In some ways, what hangs in the balance is not just the future of women in this country but the very future of the country itself—for how can democracy flourish in a place so obsessed with sons that it aborts 750,000 girls every year? Distressing. But I remind myself that profound change can only happen slowly, and it is futile to hate or judge. Time is not the same the world over.

One generalization I will allow myself about India is this: Since the early 90s when the government first allowed foreign corporations and satellite TV to infiltrate the country's shores, it has changed in dramatic ways. To say these changes are good or bad is in some ways to miss the point—for countries, like people, stumble and rise and evolve. I realized through the process of making this film that India is at a very interesting crossroads and, more and more, women in India are demanding to be heard. Sadly, as they are staking their claim in this new country, the violence and oppression against them continue to mount. History has shown repeatedly, however, that those who want freedom must fight for it, so women are fighting.

When producer Ed Barreveld and I embarked on making this film in 2008, both of us thought the Miss India pageant would be an interesting way of looking at modern-day India. And then two things happened on a research trip—I met Pooja Chopra, Miss India 2009, and later Prachi Trivedi, an instructor at Durga Vahini, a network of fundamentalist Hindu camps for girls. After I met them, I knew we had to try to do justice to the complexity of their lives.

Through Pooja I came to understand what a pageant really meant in a country like India. For many girls, its rewards went beyond fame and money. It was about freedom—freedom from the narrow geography of being a woman. And yet I had to wonder whether these girls were really free, or were simply trading in one set of shackles for another. That is the underlying question in the story of Ruhi Singh, our young pageant hopeful, who undergoes Botox injections and skin whitening, all in the hopes of winning the crown. I don't know if Ruhi is more "free" than the girls at the fundamentalist camps, but I do



Director Nisha Pahuja.

Photo courtesy of Mrinal Desai





know that she, like Prachi and all the women in the film, is a product of a particular time in her country's history. A history the West is partly shaping. When so much goes into making us who and what we are, do we not then have to question the very notion of freedom itself?

Over the course of making the film I lived half the time in Bombay and half the time in Toronto. I think because of this I was able to make real inroads into the fundamentalist world.

Initially, the fundamentalists were to play a smaller part in the film, but once Prachi told me about the Durga Vahini camps, I knew if I could get access to one we'd be able to make a film that looked at two conflicting visions of India and Indian women.

Getting inside the camp took nearly two years. A camera crew had never before been given access. Somehow, through luck and chance and with Prachi's guidance, I made the right connections, went through the right doors—and, perhaps most importantly, avoided the right people!

Apart from Prachi, the fundamentalists found me as curious as I found them—I was 40, unmarried and often disheveled-looking and my Hindi was both shrill and halting. Some of them insisted I bring my passport to meetings and show them my Indian visa; others were sure I was a Christian spy. But eventually most of them let their guards down, especially Prachi.

When editor Dave Kazala and I went through Prachi's interviews, we often had to take breaks. Sometimes that was because we had no clue what she was saying, but often it was to recover from what she said. Prachi spewed such venom and was so insidiously poisoning the minds of young girls, and yet she herself was a victim of the system she was defending. The great tragedy, of course, is that she knew it but didn't know how to break the cycle. As Ed Barreveld says, "If the film has a heroine at all, it's her."

Ironically, filming the fundamentalists was far simpler than filming the pageant world. It seemed like every time we were making real progress with one of the contestants, she was suddenly whisked off to hair and makeup, or some off-limits fitting or event for the sponsors. It was a nightmare. I knew I was missing out on process and real story. So I lost hair, and ate.

In the end, the film told us what it needed to be, as all films do. Along the way, Dave Kazala and I said goodbye to characters and storylines we had previously felt sure we couldn't do without. All films have their challenges. This one was fraught with them. I know that I, producer Cornelia Principe, editor Dave Kazala and associate editor Sean Kang found **The World Before Her** the toughest film we've made. I also know that because of them, Mrinal Desai and Prachi Trivedi, it has been the most worthwhile.

### **Nisha Pahuja**

Writer/Director/Producer





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## INTRODUCTION

**The World Before Her** (57 minutes) is a fascinating portrait of two women and two Indias. It reveals a world of startling contrasts between urban and rural, jeans and saris, consumer culture and poverty. In this world, rapid economic development fuels a sharpening conflict between tradition and modernity—especially when it touches on women and religion. In focusing on two particularly thoughtful young women—one a militant Hindu nationalist, the other a contestant for Miss India—*The World Before Her* provides a timely account of a multi-faceted, often confusing clash over values and the future of the world’s largest democracy.

As an outreach tool, the film’s complex picture of deeply contradictory lives provides an excellent springboard for discussion. In addition to questions about women’s status, **The World Before Her** challenges viewers to look at family violence, the sexism embedded in both Western influences and fundamentalist Hindu culture and what it means to be a woman in a developing nation caught in a tug-of-war between modernization and devotion to tradition.

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**The World Before Her** is well suited for use in a variety of settings and is especially recommended for use with:

- **Your local PBS station**
- **Groups that have discussed previous PBS and/or POV films relating to girls coming of age, conflicts between traditional and modern gender roles, or nationalism, including *The Light in Her Eyes*, *Girl Model*, *No More Tears Sister* and *Shadya*.**
- **Groups focused on any of the issues listed in the Key Issues section**
- **High school students, youth groups and clubs**
- **Faith-based organizations and institutions**
- **Cultural, art and historical organizations, institutions and museums**
- **Civic, fraternal and community groups**
- **Academic departments and student groups at colleges, universities and high schools**
- **Community organizations with a mission to promote education and learning, such as your local library**

**The World Before Her** is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people looking to explore the following topics:

- **beauty industry**
- **beauty pageants**
- **capitalism**
- **coming of age**
- **culture/heritage**
- **developing economies**
- **domestic violence**
- **economics**
- **education**
- **femininity**
- **feminism**
- **gender roles**
- **girls**
- **globalization**
- **Hindu nationalism**
- **India**
- **media**
- **Miss India**
- **modernizing versus preserving tradition**
- **political violence**
- **race**
- **religious fundamentalism**
- **religious studies**
- **sexism**
- **Western influence**
- **women's studies**

## USING THIS GUIDE

This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection, designed for people who want to use **The World Before Her** to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit [www.pbs.org/pov/outreach](http://www.pbs.org/pov/outreach)



## Introduction to Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions in the world. It originated around 8,000 years ago in the Indus River Valley in modern-day Pakistan. Today, there are an estimated one billion people practicing Hinduism worldwide—950 million of those in India. The religion consists of a variety of beliefs with no single set of practices or holy book or even a single founder. Because of this, Hinduism is often considered a way of life rather than a single religion.

Most Hindus believe in a supreme god whose form is represented by a pantheon of gods and goddesses. The central trinity of deities that Hindus recognize is Brahma, the creator of the cosmos; Vishnu, preserver of the cosmos; and Shiva, destroyer of the cosmos. Hindus recognize many incarnations of these deities; for example, Krishna and the Buddha are considered incarnations of Vishnu.

The most ancient Hindu texts are the Vedas, though there are many documents and scriptures based on the Vedas. Common to all texts is the idea of morality and a code of conduct, which is encompassed in the central concept of dharma. Hindus also believe that a soul passes through a perpetual cycle of life and death and that a soul's rebirth (or next incarnation) is dependent on karma, or how the previous life was lived.

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## The Hindu Nationalist Movement

(NOTE: The words "fundamentalism," "revivalism" and "extremism" are often used interchangeably to describe Hindu nationalism, though scholars prefer to use the phrase "political Hinduism.")

The Hindu nationalist movement in India has become a pervasive cultural and political force in the country over the past 20 years. The nationalist ideology emerged, in part, as a response to the pressures of British rule (1858-1947) and the cultural and religious influence of the West. The movement especially attracted those with fears of religious minority groups, particularly Christians and Muslims. In the 1920s, the movement gained traction among poorer Hindus (the lower caste) who felt oppressed by the

ruling Hindu elite and for whom the idea of returning India to its "pure Hindu roots" was appealing. India's population identifies today as 80.5% Hindu, 13.4% Muslim, 2.3% Christian and 1.9% Sikh.

Most Hindu nationalists reject secularism and advocate for Hindutva, an ideology that defines Indian culture and politics in terms of Hindu religious values. In some cases, this ideology has led to a militant intolerance of religious minorities, especially Islam and Christianity, and it has led to a number of violent anti-Muslim and anti-Christian acts, most notably the destruction of a mosque on an alleged Hindu holy site in 1992, an anti-Muslim pogrom in the western state of Gujarat in 2002 and the burning of churches in the eastern state of Orissa in 2008. The nationalists responsible for the violence argue that the targeted communities pose a danger to Hinduism. Hindu nationalists also feel that their culture—and its traditional gender roles in particular—is threatened by Western-style fashion, media and consumerism.

Though ideological differences (especially regarding the use of violence) exist among Hindu nationalist groups in India, the primary groups in the movement are the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its youth wings—Bajrang Dal (male) and Durga Vahini (female). The Hindu nationalist political wing is the Bharatiya Janata Party, or B.J.P., one of the two major political parties in India (the other is the secular Indian National Congress). The B.J.P. led a coalition government from 1998 to 2004, but it was defeated in the 2004 and 2009 elections. While the Indian National Congress won 206 seats in the national assembly in 2009 (a 60% increase from the previous election), the B.J.P. won just 116 (a 30% decrease).

However, the B.J.P. is gaining in popularity again now that Narendra Modi, the chief minister of Gujarat and widely believed to be one of the key architects of the anti-Muslim Gujarat riots in 2002, is poised to take over leadership of the party.

The next general elections in India will take place in 2014.

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## Durga Vahini

In December 1992, 55,000 women participated in anti-Islam demonstrations in the ancient city of Ayodhya. This demonstration was one of the first high-profile, visible contributions of Indian women to the political right wing.

While this type of confrontational action is not encouraged by all Hindu nationalists, women in the movement have been used to symbolize a victimized Hindu culture and the need to return to a "Mother India" and "pure" ideals of womanhood, in which women's roles as wives and mothers are the most important parts of their lives.

The Durga Vahini was created in the 1990s as the women's youth wing of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and is one of the many active women's groups that have emerged in the Hindu nationalist movement. The Durga Vahini was started by female political activist Sadhvi Rithambara to mobilize lower- and middle-class women to contribute to Hindu nationalist culture. Main principles of the group include seva (service), suraksha (safety) and samskara (values). In Hinduism, the warrior goddess Durga is the principal form of Devi, or the divine feminine spirit. Legend has it that the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, along with all of the Hindu gods, unleashed Durga to slay the demon Mahisasura.

Women who participate in religious political organizations in India are often critiqued by traditional feminists due to the movement's emphasis on a strong patriarchal authority structure that undermines women's inde-

pendence and adheres to the idea of a male-dominated society. Women who are involved in these movements, however, see participation in them as an entryway into the political arena that they cannot otherwise easily access. Many of these women see the reclaiming of the traditional female space (home) and the pure ideals of womanhood as a form of empowerment and a way for women to command influence and become participants in the public sphere.

While the Hindu nationalist movement emphasizes traditional gender roles, women who participate often appropriate traditionally masculine traits and adopt assertive, militaristic identities. Thus they enter the political sphere as mothers/nurturers and soldiers—a balance many scholars see as defining the inherent ambiguities of female participation in right-wing political movements.

The type of training program seen in **The World Before Her** is popular among women's wings of Hindu nationalist groups and focuses on self-defense techniques. These camps typically admit women 15 to 35 years old and are designed to empower women as fighters in the nationalist movement, as well as to combat the rise in sexual abuse of women and young girls in India. Training focuses on "de-feminizing" and desexualizing the female body, and many Hindu nationalists blame Westernization and Islam for an increase in sexual violence. It is a common belief among Hindu fundamentalists that Hindu women have been sexually violated by Muslim men for centuries. Due to this belief, women have become a weapon for violent mobilization against Muslims and a symbol of the threatened Hindu culture and religion.

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## The Miss India Pageant

The inaugural Miss India pageant was held in 1959, about 10 years after India gained independence, as a way to promote a new image of India internationally. Beautiful, young women showcased Indian textiles—traditional symbols of resistance to colonialism. It wasn't until 1994, when two Indian pageant winners went on to become Miss World and Miss Universe, that Miss India was elevated to prominence.

Vimla Patel, the founding editor of the popular Indian women's magazine *Femina* and an organizer of the first Miss India pageant, has often said that the pageant played a role in defining the modern Indian woman.

In *Making Miss India Miss World: Constructing Gender, Power and the Nation in Postliberalization India*, Susan Dewey writes, "When India became independent, there were, because of the various states in India, different kinds of women. There was a Maharashtrian woman, there was a Punjabi woman, but nobody had identified what was an Indian woman. There was a question mark here. Who is the Indian woman? Nobody knew. Who was going to put all these threads together and make one fabric? That was the question. And the answer to that was *Femina* and Miss India."

Every year, in August or September, *Femina* magazine and *The Times of India* print entry forms for the Miss India pageant that thousands of young women from all over the country fill out and submit. To be eligible, a woman must be taller than five feet six inches and under 25 years old. An entry form is accompanied by two photographs—one full body shot and one close-up—and the judges evaluate the women's natural beauty and figures based on the

photographs. Based on those criteria, approximately 100 women from across the country are selected as finalists to undergo second-round interviews. From there, 20 women are chosen to go to Mumbai to compete in Miss India, with the hopes of continuing on to compete in Miss World and Miss Universe.

For 30 days prior to the contest, contestants are housed in a hotel, where they undergo a strict grooming and training regime that includes two fitness classes a day, meals catered by a dietician, cosmology and skin bleaching sessions and seminars on fashion and modeling. Contestants are also advised on how to champion social causes without being overtly political, as a way of appealing to Indian middle classes, as well as the judges. The women are allowed to leave the hotel only a few times and are under close supervision.

While Miss India is seen by some as a gateway to social mobility, a majority of the contestants are urban and from northern India and have elite, cosmopolitan backgrounds. Pageant officials frame the Miss India pageant as a celebration of Hindu women's empowerment in an attempt to align it with Hindu nationalist politics and avoid attacks for encouraging sexual exploitation of the female body.

Since 1996, there have been numerous protests against pageants in India. In 1996, when India hosted the Miss World pageant, demonstrations led by the Durga Vahini and other women's nationalist movements raged across the country.

The Miss India pageant is watched by over one billion people worldwide.

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Selected People Featured in **The World Before Her**



**Ruhi Singh** - Miss India pageant contestant



**Prachi Trivedi** - Hindu nationalist youth leader



**Sabira Merchant** - pageant advocate



**Ruhi Singh's parents**



**Prachi Trivedi's parents**





**Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen or pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:**

- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you ask him or her?

- What did you learn from this film? What insights did it provide?
- If a friend asked you what this film was about, what would you say?
- Describe a moment or scene in the film that you found particularly disturbing or moving. What was it about that scene that was especially compelling for you?

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

### Coming of Age

What is the significance of the film's title? How would you describe "the world" that awaits Ruhi and Prachi as they enter adult life?

What do you see in each young woman's experience that gives her confidence? What experiences undermine that confidence?

In Prachi and Ruhi we see what pageant advocate Sabira Merchant describes as "the two Indias." How would you describe the way each of those "Indias" defines success for women? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each pathway in terms of helping these young women achieve economic success, political power and personal fulfillment? What facets of each pathway might be described as oppressive or sexist?

Prachi says, "I'm different from girls. I'm different from boys. And I don't know how to behave. Many of my friends have told me this. While making me, God was in a different mood. So he combined two things together, and sent me down. I'm the only child of my father so he grew me up like a boy and a girl both." What does her struggle with gender identity reveal about her beliefs about what makes a "real woman"? In your life, who has the authority to establish what constitutes "proper" or "natural" womanhood? What are the sources of those people's ideas? How do notions of proper womanhood affect you?

Many Indian girls are encouraged to look up to Miss India as the ultimate standard-bearer for beauty. Who were/are the models of beauty for you? Growing up, what did you learn about what is "most beautiful"? Where did your ideas originate? Whose interests are served by the particular standard of beauty that you learned? Who is harmed or disadvantaged by that standard?

### Modernization, Westernization and Tradition

What's the difference between modernization and Westernization? What might India look like if it modernized, but not in a way that emulated Western nations? Is that possible?

What, specifically, do the Hindu nationalists find objectionable in the pantheon of Western values, especially in relation to beliefs about womanhood? On the flip side, what do pageant supporters admire about Western culture? In your view, in what ways do Western influences benefit Indian women and in what ways are they detrimental?

Consider these views:

Ruhi: A lot of people think that if, you know, if you allow women to work and get modern and get educated you lose your culture and your heritage and your deep-rooted values but I don't agree. If we want India to develop I think all of us have to change. We have to change our mentality.

Prachi: It has been said that India was a golden bird but people are forgetting our history. We are becoming modern, our country is becoming modern. Our past is our roots. We cannot leave our roots.

Pageant advocate Sabira Merchant acknowledges the tension, saying, "There is a dichotomy, the sense that the girls of today seem like they're very with it, very modern, but yet they have the traditional values. They have this feeling like they're going sometimes on a collision course. Should we go with the old world or should we go with the new world?" In your opinion, are these worldviews mutually exclusive? Are there ways to both modernize and preserve tradition? Why don't Ruhi or Prachi seem to think so?

Diction coach, Sabira Merchant, describes the painstaking process of making young women into beauty queens (teaching them how to speak and how to walk the ramp, improving their skin and straightening their teeth) as "a manufacturing unit where you go inside and you're polished



like a diamond to the best that you can be polished to. That's it. A modern Indian woman." What is it about the process that makes the women who participate modern?

Prachi sees the contradiction in her situation: "Whatever I'm thinking for my life is against the system for which I'm working." Without entirely abandoning Hindu tradition, how would you address the inequality inherent in fundamentalist Hindu attitudes towards women? Does straying from traditional roles for women require abandoning traditional Hindu heritage?

Much of Prachi's struggle reflects a larger social struggle going on in India—namely the choice to live for oneself or the duty of living for one's family or society. What are the pluses and minuses of each choice?

As the family watches the pageant on television, Prachi's mother says, "It takes courage. It's a new culture. They're young and they like this. There's a generation gap. They're not going to follow the old ways, our ways. They'll do things in a new way. Each generation chooses a different path. These girls will, too." Have you experienced a "generation gap"? What were the issues or life experiences that created the gap? How do people bridge the gap?

### The Pageant Path

What do you see the Miss India pageant offering women and girls in India?

A photographer prompts the contestants to look "sexy, not bitchy." What do you think he means?

What is your reaction to pageant director Marc Robinson placing cloaks over the women so that only contestants' legs are visible? What does this exercise suggest about what the Miss India pageant values?

Why do you think pageant culture requires revealing clothing and sexual posing? What kind of power does that kind of public presentation offer to women?

Diction coach Sabira Merchant defends the pageant as an unparalleled opportunity to gain exposure. And Ruhi's reaction to appearing on the front page of the Bombay Times is "Wow, this is like a dream come true." What is the particular power or appeal of visibility in a nation with one and a half billion people? What are the costs—both financial and personal—for the particular kind of exposure that pageants provide?

Ruhi's mother indicates that the pageant is her daughter's "way out." What are the "ways out" of

obscurity or poverty in your country? How many of the pathways for girls require them to adhere to Western or pageant standards of beauty? How do the pathways for girls compare to the pathways open to boys?

One Hindu nationalist critiques the pageant by noting that contestants endorse "foreign products and millions of Indian girls buy these products and who do they give their money to? Foreign corporations. Are you seeing the picture?" What economic picture do you see? Who benefits financially from pageants?

Both feminists and fundamentalists object to pageants. What do people on these very divergent ends of the political spectrum see in pageants that lead them to share this position?

Prachi sees pageants as a step backwards for women. Is this a fair critique?

In the past, protestors have reacted to scantily clad women by throwing stones, threatening families and even dragging women out of pubs. As a result, the Miss India pageant conducts its bikini competition behind closed doors. In your view, does this count as a victory for such protestors? What makes a protest effective or ineffective?

What was your reaction to Rakul Preet's response to the pageant interview question about a gay child: "Well, honestly, if I found out that my son was gay I would be shocked. I would probably slap him, but then later I feel choosing your sexuality is one's own decision and if he wants to go ahead with that, I have no problems. As far as I am concerned, I prefer [him] to be straight." What are the links between the pageant's construction of gender and prejudice towards gay men?

Ruhi recalls her sister "using this [skin lightening] cream which was called 'Made in USA.'" Why would women seeking to represent India's ultimate standard of female beauty use skin lightening cream? Why would a manufacturer of that cream (Pond's) sponsor the event? In what ways is the focus among Indian women on having fair skin akin to fair-skinned women in other cultures wanting to tan? In what ways is it different?

### The Hindu Nationalist Path

What does Prachi's Hindu nationalist ideology offer that is positive for women and girls? In terms of women's well-being, what is problematic?

Despite government labels to the contrary, Prachi doesn't



see herself as a terrorist. What do you think? Does the word “terrorist” accurately describe Prachi? Why or why not?

At the camp, the girls receive physical and weapons training because, Malaben Rawal, National Head of the Durga Vahini, says, “If you face an attack you should be strong enough to defend yourself, whatever the situation.” Yet the same men who arrange this training expect unquestioning submission from their daughters. In your view, why don’t Hindu nationalist leaders fear that the girls they have trained to fight will use their skills to resist being dominated by men like Prachi’s father?

Prachi’s father has beaten her and burned her foot as punishment. What are the connections between men’s violence against women (and children) and a sexist worldview?

Hindu fundamentalists routinely protest beauty pageants as attacks on Hindu culture. Prachi’s father says they are “vulgar,” not beautiful. What, specifically, about a pageant’s display of women contradicts his beliefs about proper womanhood?

Prachi says, “My life is not to get married, to produce children. I have the feeling I’ve not been made by God for these things.” In contrast, her father says that it doesn’t matter what Prachi wants. “Marriage is her duty. She has to get married and she will... I won’t be looking after her my whole life.” Why is marriage important in cultures that adhere to patriarchal gender roles, and why is it that fathers have the authority to dictate what their daughters can do?

Prachi says she hates Gandhi and would agree with Pragya Singh’s teaching that “Without violence, it’s impossible to move forward. That’s why I say, if even one pure Hindu’s blood is shed, you must stand up and fight for him. Krishna once said, ‘Whoever is a sinner, badly behaved, an oppressor or a pervert one must fight him, destroy him and wipe him out, and that is a blessed deed.’” Prachi sees this violence as self-defense, not murder (which would be forbidden). In your view, is the self-defense argument justified? Why or why not?

Typically women do not fare well in societies that embrace violence. How do you square this with Prachi’s embrace of violence or the movement’s belief that its violence is (at least in part) in the service of protecting women from corrupt Western influences?

Prachi’s father says, “I get upset with Prachi when she talks about her career. What career? As far as India is concerned, man’s tendency is to rule. So it’s a male dominated society.” Prachi accepts that she has no power to change this attitude because, “Being a girl, you can’t do anything.” What do you think Prachi could do if given the chance? What skills and strengths has she received from her upbringing?

**Additional media literacy questions are available at:**  
[www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php](http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php)

## Taking Action

- **Host a series of screenings for young people and use the film as an opportunity to talk about gender role expectations: Boys and Girls Clubs, Scout troops (both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts), girl-only groups, such as Girls Inc.**
- **Have a Women’s Pathways to Power event for girls and women (mothers, grandmothers, female community and business leaders, church elders). Invite the women to share the stories of their individual paths to success and compare those paths to those taken by the young women in the film.**
- **Invite a speaker who specializes in women and development issues to compare conditions for women in India with conditions for women in other developing and industrialized nations, and/or to compare conditions for women with conditions for men. Discuss which conditions provide women with the greatest amount of freedom, security, health and economic opportunity.**
- **Investigate the role that media play in perpetuating specific standards of beauty. Look at who sponsors and makes money from beauty pageants. Discuss how pageants are specifically designed to serve the economic interests of those sponsors or owners. Contact the sponsors to let them know what you think about their events’ messages about women.**



## FILMMAKER WEBSITE

### THE WORLD BEFORE HER

[www.worldbeforeher.com](http://www.worldbeforeher.com)

The film's website provides interesting production notes, along with general information and press about the film.

## Original Online Content on POV

To further enhance the broadcast, POV has produced an interactive website to enable viewers to explore the film in greater depth. The website for **The World Before Her**—[www.pbs.org/pov/worldbeforeher](http://www.pbs.org/pov/worldbeforeher)—offers a streaming video trailer for the film; an interview with filmmaker Nisha Pahuja; a list of related websites, articles and books; a downloadable discussion guide; and special features.

## What's Your POV?

Share your thoughts about **The World Before Her**

by posting a comment at <http://www.pbs.org/pov/worldbeforeher>

### MISS INDIA PAGEANT

<http://feminamissindia.indiatimes.com/>

The pageant website includes contest rules and news coverage, along with contestant interviews and diaries.

### VISHWA HINDU PARISHAD

<http://vhp.org/>

The official website of the Hindu nationalists seen in the film explains the movement's philosophy, activities and goals.

## Beauty and Body Image

### FEMINSPIRE: "SKIN LIGHTENING, RACIAL IDENTITY AND BEAUTY STANDARDS: STOP THE MADNESS!"

<http://feminspire.com/skin-lightening-racial-identity-and-societal-beauty-standards-stop-the-madness/>

In this blog post, Teah Abdullah connects skin lightening with colonialism. The post includes examples of skin lightening cream ads.

### THE GUARDIAN: "RACISM AND SKIN COLOUR: THE MANY SHADES OF PREJUDICE"

[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/04/racism-skin-colour-shades-prejudice](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/04/racism-skin-colour-shades-prejudice) -

Bim Adewunmi looks at issues surrounding skin lightening.

### OBJECT: "WHY OBJECT TO BEAUTY PAGEANTS?"

[www.object.org.uk/campaigns/beauty-pageants](http://www.object.org.uk/campaigns/beauty-pageants)

This UK-based human rights organization focuses on combating the objectification of women and offers a fact sheet about issues with beauty pageants.





## Gender Issues in India

### **DASRA**

[www.dasra.org/girl-empowerment](http://www.dasra.org/girl-empowerment)

The website of this Indian organization focused on philanthropy for social change includes a downloadable version of a report titled "Owning Her Future: Empowering Adolescent Girls in India."

### **INDIA TOGETHER**

<http://indiatogether.org/women/>

On a page dedicated to women and women's issues, this online news organization provides articles on daily issues confronting women in India.

### **JUSTICE FOR WOMEN**

[www.justiceforwomen.org](http://www.justiceforwomen.org)

This is the website for an initiative started in response to highly publicized rapes; it provides young Indian women's perspectives on life in India.

## Gender Issues Around the World

### **INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTION WATCH ASIA PACIFIC**

[www.iwraw-ap.org/](http://www.iwraw-ap.org/)

Enter "India" as a search term to find specific information about women in that nation on this organization's website.

### **UNITED NATIONS: WOMENWATCH**

<http://www.un.org/womenwatch>

The United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality aggregates information on U.N. programs, treaties and statements related to gender equality on this page. Enter "India" as a search term to find country-specific documents.



## HOW TO BUY THE FILM

To order **The World Before Her** for home or educational use in the U.S. or Canada, visit <http://www.worldbeforeher.com>



Produced by American Documentary, Inc. and beginning its 26th season on PBS in 2013, the award-winning POV is the longest-running showcase on American television to feature the work of today's best independent documentary filmmakers. POV has brought more than 365 acclaimed documentaries to millions nationwide. POV films have won every major film and broadcasting award, including 32 Emmys, 15 George Foster Peabody Awards, 10 Alfred I. duPont-Columbia University Awards, three Academy Awards® and the Prix Italia. Since 1988, POV has pioneered the art of presentation and outreach using independent nonfiction media to build new communities in conversation about today's most pressing social issues. Visit [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov).

### POV Digital [www.pbs.org/pov](http://www.pbs.org/pov)

POV's award-winning website extends the life of our films online with interactive features, interviews, updates, video and educational content, as well as listings for television broadcasts, community screenings and films available online. The *POV Blog* is a gathering place for documentary fans and filmmakers to discuss their favorite films and get the latest news.

### POV Community Engagement and Education

POV's Community Engagement and Education team works with educators, community organizations and PBS stations to present more than 600 free screenings every year. In addition, we distribute free discussion guides and standards-aligned lesson plans for each of our films. With our community partners, we inspire dialogue around the most important social issues of our time.

POV has the honor of receiving a 2013 MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions. Major funding for POV is provided by PBS, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council, the desJardins/Blachman Fund and public television viewers. Funding for POV's Diverse Voices Project is provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Special support provided by The Fledgling Fund and the Lucius and Eva Eastman Fund. POV is presented by a consortium of public television stations, including KQED San Francisco, WGBH Boston and THIRTEEN in association with WNET.ORG..

### American Documentary, Inc. [www.amdoc.org](http://www.amdoc.org)

American Documentary, Inc. (AmDoc) is a multimedia company dedicated to creating, identifying, and presenting contemporary stories that express opinions and perspectives rarely featured in mainstream-media outlets. AmDoc is a catalyst for public culture, developing collaborative strategic-engagement activities around socially relevant content on television, online, and in community settings. These activities are designed to trigger action, from dialogue and feedback to educational opportunities and community participation.

You can follow us on Twitter @POVengage for the latest news from POV Community Engagement & Education.



Front cover: A scene from *The World Before Her*. Photo courtesy of Storyline Entertainment



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