



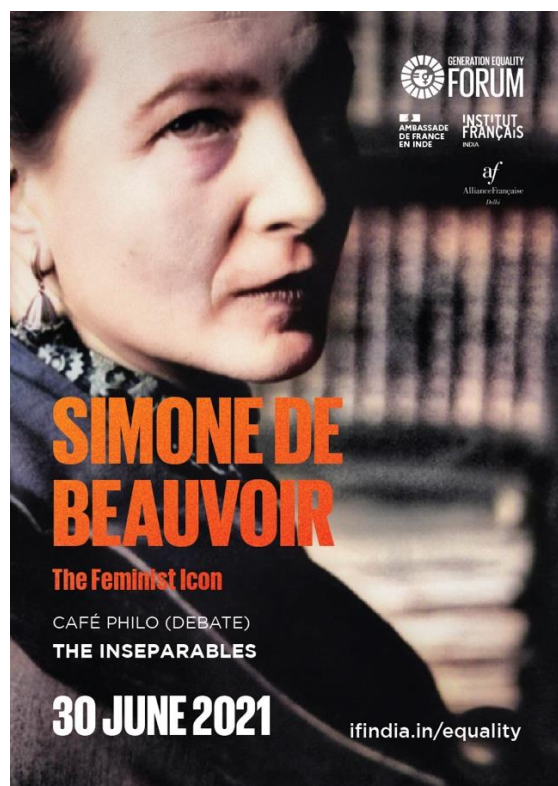
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PRESS RELEASE

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR – The Feminist Icon **Café Philo – Debate / 30th June 2021, 6.30 pm on Zoom**

On the occasion of
Publishing in 2020 an intimate work by Beauvoir withheld during her lifetime
Generation Equality Forum 2021, Mexico-Paris



Participants :

Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir - Philosopher and Simone de Beauvoir's adopted daughter

Divya Dwivedi – Philosopher

Marine Rouch – Historian, PhD student in contemporary history (FRAMESPA)

Aditi Maheshwari - Publisher at Vani Prakashan

Monica Singh - Hindi translator of *The Second Sex*

Moderator: Arunava Sinha - Indian translator and Associate Professor of Creative Writing at Ashoka University.

To attend register at:

<https://ifindia.in/equality/simone-de-beauvoir>

French author and existentialist Simone de Beauvoir has exerted considerable influence on feminist theory and gender studies around the world. In the context of the Generation Equality Forum 2021 and the publication of the book, *The Inseparables* (France, 2020), by Beauvoir's adopted daughter, Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir, the 'Café Philo' organized by the French Institute in India will delve deeper into how the work's protagonist brought about a feminist awakening in Beauvoir. Her landmark book considered the Bible of the feminist movement, *The Second Sex* (1949), will soon be translated in Hindi.

The Inseparables



2020 marks the first publication in France

This captivating unpublished novel from 1954 tells the first passionate and tragic friendship between two rebellious young girls, Simone de Beauvoir & Zaza. Beauvoir referred to women as the Second Sex because they always seemed to be defined in relation to men. This work speaks about Beauvoir's early life and a relationship that formed her views on sexism and gender inequality. This book also offers insights into Beauvoir's journey as a writer.

Having met during their early childhood, Simone and Zaza dreamed of independence and higher education in an age when this was not a given. Family pressure caused Zaza to give up studies eventually and she pursued a relationship thereafter that was doomed. She died at 21, defeated by the very forces that she wanted to fight against. Zaza finds her way into many of Beauvoir's works especially, 'Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter'. The two were 'inseparable', inspiring the book's content and title.

More of Beauvoir's unpublished works are on the anvil.

of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Inseparables*.

In the words of Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir:

Among the archives that Simone de Beauvoir entrusted to me, when she adopted me as her literary heir, there are many unpublished manuscripts, including a short story that she left untitled, the one that became "Les Inséparables" (The Inseparables). She gave me guidelines for managing this collection. A writer may have his reasons for not publishing a text immediately: but if s/he does not destroy it, it is because s/he may be planning to get back to it, to correct it, to make it public even after a long time, as Simone de Beauvoir herself did when, in 1979, she published "When Things of the Spirit Come First", which dates back from 1938. After her death, the perspective changed. With this long novella, I found myself before a finished work, which Simone de Beauvoir had preserved, which she had even had typed. A valuable work that deserved to exist by itself. Occupied for a long time with other publications, I was only able to devote myself to it in 2020. A title quickly became obvious: I chose a term that haunts its pages.

Simone de Beauvoir wrote it in 1954. She had just spent four years on a vast novel, "The Mandarins", which had won her the Goncourt Prize, and she wanted to take a break from fiction in favor of autobiography. For a long time, she had dreamed of reviving her childhood and her youth. But strangely, in spite of herself, her pen deviated from it: she centered the story not on the desired self-writing, but on the transposed evocation of the destiny of her great childhood friend Élisabeth Lacoin, known as Zaza. Thus, she found herself once again drawn to the fiction

genre, which explains her dissatisfaction and why she had discarded this text. She hence dived, without any detour, into the writing of the “Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter” (1958), the first volume of her great autobiographical enterprise.

The tragedy of Zaza’s brutal death at the age of 21 had left a mark on Simone de Beauvoir and she never stopped trying to do justice to her friend. At the time when she herself was emancipated, conquered her freedom and dashed towards the future, Zaza, instead of accompanying her, was destroyed. Elsewhere she confided: “The assassination of Zaza by her environment was for me a shattering and unforgettable experience.” An experience that certainly contributed to the foundation of her philosophical enterprise of demystification, and to the development of the feminist consciousness of the future author of “The Second Sex”. Zaza died because, like so many other women of her time but also of today, she was not allowed to become herself. The international success of “The Inseparables” can be explained by the various resonances, tender and profound, that this work triggers in readers. For some, it is an initiation, the discovery of Simone de Beauvoir, for others, a fascinating document. I am happy that it serves to confirm the influence of Simone de Beauvoir.

Writing to Simone de Beauvoir in order to exist: letters from her readers - by Marine Rouch

“You are the star of hope that shines through the frontiers, above the gloomy chorus of so many paths [sic] of unhappy, mistreated and despised women” (September 27, 1958). This sentence, written by a reader in 1958, sums up the hopes that thousands of women have placed on Simone de Beauvoir.

The writer received nearly **20 000 letters** between 1943, the year that marked the beginning of her literary career with the publication of her novel *She Came to Stay*, and 1986, the year of her death. When she published *The Second Sex* in 1949, it was a scandal. The intellectual world was outraged; François Mauriac, then a central French intellectual figure, launched a survey in *Le Figaro littéraire* on the decline of literature. But in the received letters, no ignition. Rather, relief, even recognition...and hope. But the book was still too theoretical, difficult to access for women – and men – who were not used to such reading. Ten years later, in 1958, Simone de Beauvoir published the first volume of her memoirs, *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter*. It was followed by *The Prime of Life* in 1960 and *Force of Circumstance* in 1963. The autobiographical block was then considered by women as a “work-mode of employment”, as the long-awaited demonstration of the philosophy of *The Second Sex*.

Thus, the letters from her women readers reveal a long and painful process of appropriation of the Beauvoirian work by women, even before feminist movements of the 1970s took up the theses of *The Second Sex*. The 1950s and 1960s therefore became the scene for the constitution of a collective space by women, with the objective of understanding and sharing a common experience.

Through my research, I wish to give voice to those who wished to testify about their condition to Simone de Beauvoir. In this collection, we come across women who struggle to reconcile their professional life with their personal life; women who are housewives, exhausted by the repetitiveness of household chores and lack recognition from their close entourage and society in general; also women belittled by their husbands, who seek at all costs to divorce at a time when the weight of tradition is still too heavy... All of them find in writing – literary or the more intimate letter to Simone de Beauvoir – a way to reflect on their condition. Writing to exist, that is the credo of these women.

Many of the letters echo our contemporary experiences despite an undeniable contextual evolution. Simone de Beauvoir still touches, still helps. The letters she received during her lifetime are a wonderful way to (re)discover her work.

ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS



Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir

Born in Rennes, Le Bon de Beauvoir studied philosophy at École Normale Supérieure de Sèvres. She met Simone de Beauvoir in 1960 and remained her close confidante for over two decades. Their relationship is evoked in *Tout compte fait*, which Simone de Beauvoir dedicated to her. She adopted Sylvie Le Bon in 1981. Sylvie Le Bon de Beauvoir was part of the team of the magazine *Les Temps modernes* until 1991. Since 1986, she has published many unpublished works of the writer: *Lettres à Sartre*, *Journal de guerre* (1990), *Lettres à Nelson Algren : un amour transatlantique* (1997), *Correspondance croisée entre Simone de Beauvoir et Jacques-Laurent Bost* (2004), *Cahiers de jeunesse* (2008), *Les Inséparables* (2020). She collaborated on *Cahier de L'Herne* n° 100 dedicated to Simone de Beauvoir in 2012 and is part of the editorial team of the Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, which published two volumes of *Memoires* in 2018 for Éditions Gallimard. She is currently planning to bring out other unpublished works.



Divya Dwivedi

Associate Professor at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, she teaches Philosophy and Literature. Her works are concerned with the ontology of the literary, the formality of law, literary, postcolonial racisms, political concepts, and speed. Dwivedi is the co-author (with Shaj Mohan) of *Gandhi and Philosophy: On Theological Anti-Politics* (Foreword by Jean-Luc Nancy; Bloomsbury, 2019). She is the editor of the journal *Philosophy World Democracy*. Dwivedi has recently edited “L’Inde: Colossale et Capitale,” a special issue of *Revue Critique* (no. 872-873, 2020) and a special issue of *Revue des femmes philosophes* (“Intellectuels, Philosophes, Femmes en Inde: des espèces en danger”, 2017). She is also the co-editor of *Narratology and Ideology* (Ohio State University Press, 2018) and *Public Sphere from outside the West* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).



Marine Rouch

She first discovered Simone de Beauvoir while reading *The Second Sex* in 2014 when she was an undergraduate student of History. It was a revelation, both on a personal and an academic level. She then wanted to better understand the influence of the famous essay on women in the 1950s, 60s and 70s. But she also draws on Beauvoir's work, on an almost daily basis, for her own personal trajectory.



Aditi Maheshwari

She heads the Department of Copyrights and Translation at Vani Prakashan Group and is the Managing Trustee at Vani Foundation. She teaches publishing and editing at the University of Delhi and Seagull School of Publishing, Kolkata. She is an advisor to Jaipur BookMark - South Asia's largest publishing platform. She also manages the award secretariat of Vani Foundation Distinguished Translator Award. Aditi Maheshwari-Goyal holds a Master's degree in English Literature, Business Management (Strathclyde Business School, Scotland) and M.Phil. degree in Social Sciences.



Monica Singh

She is a literary translator and French language teacher. She has undertaken literary projects with Rajpal & Sons, Apeejay Oxford Bookstores, Laelo Photographie, France, Saraswati House, and others. Her repertoire comprises the translation in Hindi of Patrick Modiano's *Accident Nocturne* (*Neeli Fiat Car*), *Du plus loin de l'oubli* (*Gumnami se paré*), *Voyages de nocces* (*Honeymoon*), *Rue des boutiques obscures* (*Main gumshudaa*), *Lettres à Anne de François Mitterrand* (*Tumhare liye, meri Anne*), French poems of a Swiss poet-painter, Jean Michel Robert for a book titled, "Banarasi Haiku", and several other works including textbooks, magazines, brochures.



Arunava Sinha

He translates classic, modern and contemporary Bengali fiction and nonfiction into English, and from English into Bengali. A two-time winner of the Crossword Translation Award, for Mani Sankar Mukherji's *Chowringhee* (2007) and Anita Agnihotri's *Seventeen* (2011), respectively. Won the Muse India translation award (2013) for Buddhadeva Bose's *When The Time Is Right*. He was also shortlisted for The Independent Foreign Fiction Prize (2009) for his translation of *Chowringhee* and longlisted for the Best Translated Book Award, USA, 2018 for his translation of Bhaskar Chakravarti's *Things That Happen and Other Poems*. He is also the editor of the Library of Bangladesh, a series of Bangladeshi fiction translated into English from Bengali, and of the *Book of Dhaka*, a collection of short stories from Bangladesh translated into English. He is Associate Professor in the Creative Writing Department at Ashoka University

ABOUT THE GENERATION EQUALITY FORUM

The Generation Equality Forum which, kicked off in Mexico City on 29th March and will culminate in Paris on 2nd July, is the most significant milestone for gender equality since the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. This ground-breaking multi-generational campaign and global gathering is convened by UN Women and co-hosted by the governments of Mexico and France.

Considering that no country has so far achieved full gender equality, the Forum will foster a series of transformative actions to accelerate the progress for gender equality by 2030. Action Coalitions will announce concrete plans of action and bold commitments to this effect, especially in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic which has pushed back progress with respect to equality.

The joint press release of 8th March of the President of the French Republic, H.E. Mr Emmanuel Macron, and the Executive Director of UN Women, Mme Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, states: "*During this crisis, we did not give up. Despite the pandemic, because of the pandemic, we have redoubled our efforts. We are more determined than ever to make progress and go forward.... We will convene Governments, international organizations, civil society, youth, the private sector and activists from the entire world to make concrete, ambitious and sustainable commitments towards achieving gender equality.*"

In India, a series of events, organised by the Embassy of France/French Institute in India, in collaboration with the Alliance Françaises network in India and their partners, have been scheduled from **March to July**. Announcing the programme of activities, H.E. Mr Emmanuel Lenain, Ambassador of France to India, said, "*Gender parity and diversity are the cornerstones of civil society and are vital criteria for economic growth. Gender equality is a priority for the French government and is being taken into account in all domains, including sustainable development, security, defence, environment, economic policy, the creative and cultural industries, scientific research and education.*"

Gender Equality Festival initiatives at : <https://ifindia.in/equality>

For queries and interactions with the participants of the debate contact –

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