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Neera Desai dies of cancer

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Mumbai : Dr Neera Desai, one of the pioneers of women's studies in India, died at her residence in Dadar on Thursday. She was 84 and was suffering from cancer.

Desai set up India's first Research Centre for Women's Studies at SNDT Women's University and served as its first director. She had authored several books and research works on women's issues including Feminism as Experience published by Sound and Picture Archives for Research on Women. Her other major works include Women in Modern India, Two Decades of Women's Movement, Women and Society, etc.

Professor Vibhuti Patel, director of department of Post-Graduate Studies and Research and a close associate of Desai, said, "I had been working with her since 1977. In all these years that I had known her, I thought of her as a warm person who was forever motivating and ever ready to experiment with new ideas. She was a major institution builder. This is a period when women's studies is coming of age. However, she started work in this field in the early 50s and for over two decades fought a lone battle to raise awareness about the same till the 70s when she began garnering support from several quarters."

Patel remembers Desai as an enthusiastic participant of women's rallies on International Women's Day. "No matter which part of the world she was in, she would make it a point to attend rallies on March 8. Such was her spirit," she said.

Desai retired in 1985 but continued working for women's issues. "She would regularly travel from her residence in Dadar to Bhilwada where she was an active participant at a rural development centre. Her major areas of interest spanned from issues of tribal and dalit women to those from other strata of society."

Desai's son Mihir Desai is an eminent human rights lawyer and her husband G R Desai was a renowned sociologist who passed away 10 years ago.

A memorial lecture has been organised on Monday at 3 pm at the SNDT Juhu campus.