Political Ideologies Contexts, Ideas, and Practices
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Intersectionality - and Intersectionality Worked Examples

Well hello everyone, we're continuing our topic of feminism. We'll do a sort of worked example, the kind of thing you might do in a seminar. We'll look at intersectionality first, that's a concept which has gained a great deal of currency in contemporary feminism. And we'll look at that first. Well, the term intersectionality is used a great deal in contemporary academic discourse in the social sciences and in the humanities. It may sound like a term from academic jargon, but it is actually a powerful way to reveal the magnitude of the task that we face anywhere, in changing the condition, the situations women face.

Well yes, it is a powerful way to reveal the magnitude of the task we face anywhere. The term itself, I'll start again - we're going to look at intersectionality as our concluding theme in the topic of feminism, we'll then go on in the next lecture to, to do a kind of worked exercise, a seminar, for discussion to raise questions arising from feminism and contemporary ways of thinking about it.

Well intersectionality is a term that you - that's been used a great deal over the last 20 or 30 years in the Humanities and Social Sciences. It may sound like jargonistic term invented by social scientists, but it is in fact, a very powerful way to reveal the magnitude of the task that we face anywhere in understanding the situation, and situations women face - and in thereby getting an idea of the kinds of things that we all of us need to do with where to bring about any, any significant changes, and I'll be blunt - improvements in that situation, in achieving equality.

Now, the term itself was in fact, the term 'intersectionality' seems to be a news first by a law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, I hope I've pronounced it right. It may be 'Kimberly', but given the accent at the end of the word, I call it Kimberlé; now Kimberlé Crenshaw, a professor of law, wrote a paper in 1989 showing how our existing legal procedures and even whole cultures make, make it impossible to see multiple forms of systemic and systematic discrimination.

They're made invisible by our existing legal procedures and even by whole cultures. Crenshaw starts with three cases in the United States Supreme Court. And she proceeds to

show how the respective ways the three cases were handled excludes crucial elements of multiple kinds of discrimination from legal discourse and excludes them by implication from other forms of public discourse.

You will remember that we concluded our topic of liberalism by looking at criticisms of the Supreme Court decision in *Hadiya* or *Shafin Jahan* in 2018. In that case, the Supreme Court was commended for upholding Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, but criticized for several aspects, for example, the delays in the ways waited handled the case, particularly over the length of time it took to call Hadiya before it as a witness, in expressing the principle of *habeas corpus* that is, and secondly, for the features, the significant features of Hadiya's situation which were simply not mentioned in the judgment.

Now, let us go back to Crenshaw. Crenshaw does exactly this. She did it in the late 80s, showing how three particular Supreme Court cases were handled in a way that excluded significant kinds of multiple forms of discrimination. Okay - the first case was *DeGraffenreid versus General Motors* 1976. The judgment came was made in 1976. Five black women, today the term 'African-American' is much more current, five black women lost their case alleging racial discrimination against General Motors, GM.

General Motors had dismissed them during an economic recession, and had dismissed them on the basis of seniority. Presumably they had not been working for the firm long enough and as long as other people, and so on. And therefore GM, on that basis, had dismissed them during an economic recession. The term used in other legal systems is 'made them redundant', because the work was debatable for them anymore. Now, General Motors had never employed black women until 1964, when the Civil Rights Act was passed by the federal government. The five women concerned had been taken on in 1970.

The Federal appeal court noted that General Motors had employed women - only white women - before 1964. And so this appeal court, a branch of the Supreme Court, rejected the claim, the plaintiffs' claim, that they had been victims of sex discrimination. GM had appointed women before, employed women before that, so the court threw out the sex discrimination charge.

The court recommended that the plaintiffs combine their case with another case alleging race discrimination by General Motors, by the same employers, apparently against male staff. So the court actually recommended that the plaintiffs combine their case with another case, alleging race discrimination, apparently, against African-American or black male staff.

But - the court rejected the complainants' attempts to argue that they had been victims of sex and race discrimination together.

The court said this would open a Pandora's box of combined claims. That was the decision into *DeGraffenreid versus General Motors* 1976. So the case was, the court was willing, did not find that there had been sex discrimination, and advised that the plaintiffs combine their t case with race discrimination, a charge of race discrimination against male staff at General Motors. But the court rejected the claim that the women in this case had been victims of sex and race discrimination.

Now the second case was the case of *Moore versus Hughes Helicopters Inc.*, Incorporated, 1983 The plaintiff was called Tommie Y. Moore. And she presented strong statistical evidence that the firm, [Moore] Hughes Helicopters, that is, that the firm Hughes Helicopters discriminated against women. And she also showed evidence of a less substantial disparity in the firm's promotion of white and black employees, though there was still a disparity.

Again, this went to a Federal appeal court, and the court rejected the claim that Moore had suffered discrimination because she was a black female. The court also questioned Moore's ability to represent white female employees. Now Crenshaw points out here that this makes discrimination against black women a less serious matter than discrimination against women in general.

It also, this decision also centralizes the experience of white women as the standard for judgment. In effect, the court was saying that it took discrimination against white women as a standard for judgment, and that discrimination against black women was somehow a subordinate matter subsumed under the question of discrimination against white women. Furthermore, as Crenshaw points out, the decision sets black women against white women in such matters.

Now the case may have been somewhat more complex than that, and the point has been made in analyses of Crenshaw's commentary on it, the point has been made that qualifications for promotion were required in that firm. They manufactured helicopters for the American military, if I'm not mistaken. Qualifications for promotion were required. And apparently none of those about whom Moore brought her case had the relevant qualifications. So none of those who Moore argued were affected actually had the relevant qualifications. But the general point Crenshaw makes stands, which is that white, discrimination against white women, is in effect privileged by the judgment over discrimination against black women.

What about the third case? The third case - *Payne versus Travenol Laboratories Inc.*, 1976. This time, a Mississippi district court found that there had been extensive racial discrimination by the firm and the court awarded back pay and constructive seniority to the staff who had suffered the discrimination. But the court would not allow a wider claim that all black staff had been victims of racial discrimination; in effect, the court accepted a sort of combined race and sex discrimination claim by the firm's black female employees, but it considered the situation of those staff insufficient for their case to apply to all the firm's black staff in a comprehensive race-discrimination case. Now I should point out that that was in a Mississippi district court, it did not actually go to the Federal appeal court, and I'll correct my written account of that.

But what's the result of these three cases? As Crenshaw points out, it's a contradiction. In some cases, black women are harmed because they're treated as being the same as others. In other cases, they're harmed because they are treated as being different. But as Crenshaw says the contradiction is caused by the failure on the part of the courts to see that people, indeed whole classes or groups of people, can be harmed in different ways at the same time, precisely because they have different kinds of relevant attributes anyway. Single-issue analyses simply cannot encompass the complexity of who we are, and of our situations.

Those who apply such single-issue analysis are, as Crenshaw says, like a doctor who attends a road accident, but treats the victims for only one kind of injury, when a victim or victims may have different injuries and different kinds of injury. This is the kind of thing that Crenshaw calls intersectionality. It may sound like a term from social-scientific jargon, but it reveals many dimensions of an extremely ugly state of affairs. If people suffer multiple structural or systemic or cultural disadvantage or oppression, then their position is going to result in multiple complex and interlinked forms of discrimination and disadvantage. And for the courts to focus on a single issue is, as Crenshaw says, similar to a doctor's treating a road accident victim for only one kind of injury, or perhaps just for one injury.

Now, since then, United States law has changed somewhat. Since Crenshaw's statement of the theme of intersectionality, the United States law has changed somewhat. One of the stronger current statements of the changes is the ruling in *Lam versus University of Hawaii*. In 1998, a federal appeals court recognized that the plaintiff had suffered discrimination on the basis of race, sex, and national origin. But, as Crenshaw points out, this kind of approach assumes that those who suffered the discrimination would have been all right, but for their sexual and/or racial characteristics.

Crenshaw herself says, put differently I quote, put differently,

> "The paradigm of sex discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of white women. The model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged blacks. Notions of what constitutes race and sex discrimination are, as a result, narrowly tailored to embrace only a small set of circumstances, none of which include discrimination against black women."

Crenshaw provides the example of the slave Sojourner Truth. In 1851, Sojourner Truth, a slave and African American slave, very possibly risked being lynched. But she unsettled both white male hecklers and white women who feared that her demand for emancipation would divert the struggle for the vote, and they urge that she wbe silenced. Sojourner Truth unsettled white male hecklers and white women by recounting her life as a slave and concluding, "And ain't I a woman?"

This was of course a challenge to patriarchy. And it was also a challenge to white women, to I quote, "Relinquish their vestedness in whiteness." Feminist theory, as Crenshaw concludes, remains white, that's and exact quotation, "remains white." These are powerful words, but the kind of points they make is recognizable in societies around the world in respect of multiple forms of systemic oppression and disadvantage.

The Me Too campaign, now hashMe Too, has rightly exposed a lot of very powerful and very rich men for the sexual abuse of that power and position; that's is happened in the last few years. But the name Me Too, was given to a movement by Tarana Burke, in 2007. She started the movement that year, 2007, under the name Just Be, Inc. That was a non-profit organization, providing help and advice to victims of sexual harassment and assault.

Burke is African-American. Burke herself says that when Alyssa Milano's hash Me Too became an overnight global sensation, she feared that some of her own most important work would simply be taken away from her and diverted to a purpose other than the one she had intended. Milano however did respond to contact from Burke by giving Burke due credit on the *Good Morning America* programme.

But - she had been unaware of Burke's campaign, which had been started a decade earlier. Burke herself says the Me Too campaign is bigger than any one person, and according to Milano, Burke's response to direct contact from Milano, from to direct contact with Burke was a way, I beg your pardon, I'll say that again, according to Burke herself Milano's contact with her was not hostile, and Milano herself says that "Burke was very gracious in accepting the apology for what looked like neglect, even if it was unintentionally neglect." But what are the

issues raised by intersectionality in this kind of context? They are certainly going to be extremely difficult to address. For example, the sexual brutality and exploitation suffered by black, by African-American women living under American slavery may well not get anything like the attention that they should in today's America, despite periodic recognition in academic research and occasion items in the corporate media. Gaining due recognition could well require painful acceptance and acknowledgement from the majority and dominant white community. And that would hold for almost every society in the world. Whatever else intersectionality is going to be rightly very, very uncomfortable for just about all of us. And it should be.

Well that concludes our exposition, our examination of feminism as a topic. We're going to go on in our next class to look at an analysis of forms of well, of what could well be intersectionality in Indian society and in a particular aspect of Indian political life. But we'll stop here for the moment, and we will start the worked exercise shortly.

Well, hello, everyone. We're about to wind up, to conclude, our examination of feminism, part of this NPTEL Ideologies course 2019-20. And we'll do it with a worked exercise, the kind of thing we would do in an academic seminar. We'll look at evaluations of a particular topic and try and reach some kind of conclusion. These are good evaluations. I'll send you the, you'll get the list of sources, there are only two sources here, and you get them with the materials for this particular topic.

The first item we'll look at was written by Ruchi Tomar in 2013. The title is 'Dalit Feminism: A Transformation of Rejection into Resistance'. It was published in *The Criterion*, which I think is an online journal, in 2013, issue 12 of *The Criterion*; it's freely accessible on the net. The second also seems to be freely accessible on the net. And that is a paper by Sikata Banerjee published in 2003, in the Women's *Studies International Forum*, volume 26, number 2, 2003. The title is 'Gender and Nationalism: The Masculinization of Hinduism and Female Political Participation in India'. That too, seems to be freely available on the net. Well, those are the two sources we are going to look at.

We will look at Ruchi Tomar's paper first: 'Dalit Feminism: A Transformation of Rejection into Resistance', published in *The Criterion* in 2013. Dalit women comprise about 16 percent of India's total [female] population, and 8 percent of the total population. The daily struggle for food and water is something they conduct under the permanent threat of violence. Here is a quotation from Basu cited in Tomas paper, I quote, "There is no girl in our *cheri* who has not been coerced or raped by the dominant caste men when they go to the fields to fetch water or for work." That's a young girl from Southern Tamil Nadu talking to a Dalit woman activist.

A *cheri*, if I'm not mistaken, is part of a village in which Dalits are required to live, I have seen one or two in villages around Tamil Nadu. And on that occasion I did ask about this and the man who was showing me around said that the children all went to the same school, which I thought well, they could at least spend spent some time growing up together.

But the man who showed myself and my group of students around was also very clear that Dalits living in the charity were not allowed to rape, I beg your pardon, to rent accommodation in the village. I pushed him on this once or twice, but he didn't really want to answer any further. So I w'll give you a quotation again: "There is no girl in our cheri who has not been coerced, or raped by the dominant caste men when they go to the fields to fetch water or for work." Tomar gives the citation.

Now, within the home, what actually happens? Dalit women within the home, not just when going out to work or to fetch water, Dalit women within the home, often suffer physical and verbal abuse at the hands of their fathers and brothers, they are raped by their father-in-law or brother-in-law, or forcibly made to submit sexually their husbands and to domestic and sexual violence of other kinds as well.

That is cited again, in Tomar's paper. And Tomar is very clear about this. The sources of unequal gender relations lie in sexual oppression, economic exploitation, and socio-cultural subjugation. In the Indian context, as she says, "Caste, gender and class are all interlinked." And that is shown in literature by depictions however, sympathetic of Dalits as victims. And Tomar gives examples from the literature, social scientific as well as literary material.

The response Tomar suggests, is Dalit womanism. Womanism is a term first used, I gather, by Alice Walker in 1893. What does it mean? Incorporates I quote, "Racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political considerations." And Tomar seems to contrast this to feminism. She says here, "Feminism places priority on women." Womanism, as she says, "Incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political considerations."

The "Womanism of the Dalits," Tomar says, "will be entirely based on the lives, experiences and consciousness of Dalit women". And Tomar goes on to analyse the implications. Literature by Dalit women is not new. An example is Muktabai's autobiographical work in the mid-19th century. Tomar says here that Muktabai was one of the first girls to go to school, if I'm not mistaken under the influence or perhaps even in a school, under the influence of Ambedkar, and or perhaps even in a school run or set up - not Ambedkar, by Jyotirao Phule, my mistake. Muktabai was one of the first Dalit girls to go to school. And that would have been as Tomar say, as Tomar says, under the influence of Jyotirao Phule. Now Tomar gives

more and very powerful examples from earlier and more recent Dalit women's writings, not least the work of Bama Faustina. The excerpts bear the clear stamp of often horrible but all too real experience. And they occasionally show bitter explosions of rage. Several of them are quoted in Tomar's paper. I won't read them out here. They are well worth reading, they are salutary.

What about the second paper we're looking at? This is by Sikata Banerjee, published in 2003 in *Women's Studies International Forum*. The paper is called 'Gender and Nationalism: The Masculinization of Hinduism and Female Political Participation in India'.

Banerjee shows the kinds of issues that women face when they want to participate in the Hindutva movement. Well, what's the background to this? As we know, women are overwhelmingly the greatest influence on young children. They transmit to children the ideas which make nations imagined communities, to use Benedict Anderson's term. And this idea of imagined communities, nations as imagined communities, this idea includes gendered ideas of nations.

Well, how does that relate to militant Hindu nationalism? That, as Banerjee notes is not monolithic, but has overlapping elements. Among its common elements are this, masculinity involves aggression, physical strength, and a willingness to go into battle. Women risk undermining such conceptions of masculinity if they become politically and or militarily powerful despite [the] religious examples of Kali and Durga.

Powerful women of this kind could also undermine cultural gender norms. Well, where do these come from? Where do these issues actually come from? Well, we'll come to that in a moment. The wider response to, the wider response of militant Hinduism is in part a response to colonial characterizations of Hindu culture as weak or effeminate, we'll come back to that.

But what are the responses on the part of women to be if they want to participate in militant Hinduism, in Hindutva? Well, one response would be to protect the nation's goods and land; another would be to fend off attacks on their bodies. Such attacks could stand for the nation and must not be sullied; the purity of the nation and its honour must not be sullied.

And what are the consequences? Among those are participation by women in violent rioting by Hindu mobs – Banerjee gives sources there. Secondly, notably extreme speeches filled with hate and potential incitement to communal violence. This is widely documented, women politicians on the Hindu right have engaged in precisely such kinds of speeches and

diatribes. A third response, a third consequence has been attempts to maintain the image of the motherland's purity. Some militant Hindu women's groups require celibacy, even if they may have the outward appearance of warriors with cut hair and practical, forceful clothes indicating that they are prepared for action and perhaps, military training and physical training for that and so on. But to maintain the image of the motherland's purity, some militant Hindu women's groups require celibacy, even if they have the outward appearance of warriors.

But if women are the mothers of the nation, celibacy, therefore, as Tomar points out, as Banerjee points out, I beg your pardon, celibacy involves a contradiction. You can't be a mother of a nation and be celibate at the same time. I don't want to be too flippant about this but it seems that, so to speak, artificial insemination does not seem to figure in these kinds of considerations.

But Banerjee's conclusion is that Hindutva is itself gendered and that it will not reshape dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity in Indian society. That's a very interesting conclusion to reach; it may well indicate a profoundly, morally and culturally conservative element in Hindutva, irrespective of routes whereby and processes whereby women can participate in militant Hindu movements.

So, Banerjee's conclusion is that Hindutva itself is gendered, and that it will not reshape dominant ideas of masculinity and femininity in Indian society. That kind of reshaping may well, therefore, have to come from elsewhere.

Well, I mentioned earlier the kinds of sources that Banerjee identified in colonial conceptions of the supposed effeminacy and weakness of Hindu culture. Yes, the origins of these in upper class colonial culture in the United Kingdom in the 19th century have been documented. And certainly, the racial insults, the grossly offensive sneers about Hindu culture by the colonials in the 19th century, from the 19th century, the mid-19th century onwards are well documented. But one very uncomfortable implication is therefore, that, so to speak, militant Hindu nationalism is at least partly generated by what I can only call a colonial hangover.

The shadow of the Empire lasts a very long time - and may well do so, in this regard, in addition to the many other ways in which it still continues. And that's in addition to Banerjee's conclusion that militant Hinduism as a gendered, as a gendered entity is not likely, not going, to reshape traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity in Indian society. So that concludes our topic of feminism.

We, in this conclusion, this worked example, we have looked at two papers which address the question of intersectionality in the context of the lives and writings of Dalit women, the refusal to accept rejection, the self-conversion into being acting subjects, writing, expressing experience authentically and powerfully is the process that Ruchi Tomar documents.

Secondly, Sikata Banerjee examines the contradictions, they are nothing less than contradictions, faced by women who want to participate in militant Hinduism. Participation itself seems to generate significant questions of what is to count as the feminine and whether Hindu nationalism can even accommodate such challenges. So that concludes our topic of feminism. We shall go on, in our next lecture to our seventh topic, and that is Ecologism.