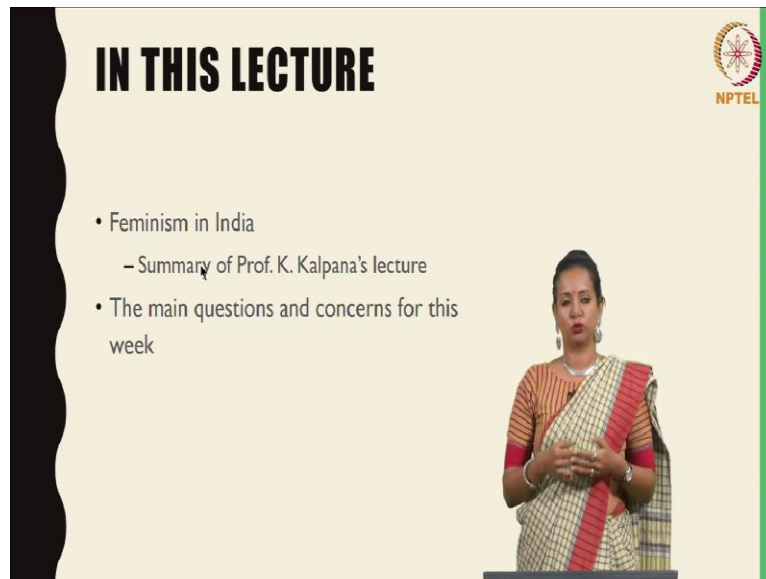


Feminism: Concepts and Theories
Dr. Mathangi Krishnamurthy
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Feminism in India: Summary of Guest Lecture

Hello, welcome back to Feminism Concepts and Theories. And today, for the second lecture of this week, we really are not going to do anything new. What I want to do over the next 30 minutes or so is give you a summary from the fantastic talk by Professor Kalpana Karunakaran that you heard in the previous lecture. And I want to just gather all of these points on a couple of slides for ease of access, as well as for you to have a single place from which to see the trajectory of the Indian feminist movement, post independence. So, let us get started without further ado.

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In this process, I also want to re emphasize the main questions and concerns for this week, as we set the agenda for the next few weeks going forward.

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SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS

- In cohort with the Indian national movement
- A different trajectory than the three waves of feminism was studied
- Indian women's movements as the driving force for feminism in India
 - Feminisms in India
- Intersectionality as fundamental
- A brief history


The slide features a video inset of Professor Kalpana, a woman in a saree, speaking. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner.

What were this salient characteristics of Professor Kalpana's lecture, mainly to look at post independence Indian feminism. So, it was mainly a brief history of the concerns post the 70s and the 80s in India. However, let me also bring to your attention the fact of feminism in India moving forward or having very close ties with the Indian National Movement, in other words, with decolonizing forces and anti colonial movements pre-independence.

And therefore, it is very important for us to remember that this might be a slightly different trajectory than the three waves of feminism that we have already studied. And I do not point this out to give the impression that the three waves of feminism that we spoke about are primary grids from which to understand the rest of the world, but for you to understand these kinds of movements in various parts of the world in dialogue with one another.


Please remember that in Professor Kalpana's lecture as well as in the general understanding of feminism in India, we focus on Indian women's movements. So, there is a strong activist core to everything that we discuss until about recently. And we are looking at ways in which women's issues are also closely tied to the development of the nation itself. In which case, please also remember that intersectionality, as we discussed in the third wave of feminism is fundamental to Indian women's movements in India, you can never discuss women's issues without also considering all the other issues that they come along with.

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SALIENT CHARACTERISTICS

- Major debates and discussions
 - Primarily covering post-Independence India
 - The Women's Question
 - Pre-Independence India
 - The Women's Question
 - Identity crisis of the new educated middle class
 - the first products of the colonial system of education



Therefore, in Kalpana's lecture, we looked at major debates and discussions primarily covering post independence India and we look at what is broadly called the "women's question." Now, what do we mean by the women's question and you will come across this very, very often in literature in the social sciences, in history, anthropology, sociology, on the women's question, try and think back to when is it that women become a question in newly independent or decolonizing India.

Here, many scholars locate this in relation to the identity crisis of the new educated middle class in India, who were the first products of the colonial system of education. And in these middle classes, there arose a particular kind of double consciousness; of them as citizens of the Indian National State, but also as newly formed citizens of modernity.

And one of the ways in which modernity was sought to be tested in new recruits, was by asking how is it that you treat your women? Are they given equal rights as the men? Do they have access to education, property, work, etcetera, etcetera? And therefore, it became incumbent upon these new middle classes when they made the argument of the capacity for self governance to also demonstrate their capacity for modernity through the treatment of their women. And there arose, the "women's question."

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PRE-INDEPENDENCE INDIA


- The first three phases of the women's question
 - Women's familial status, their access to education and better legal rights as the instruments of reform.
- In the fourth phase, after Independence
 - the rights to education, the vote and entry into professions, public services and political offices.



The first three phases of the women's question were about women's familial status, their access to education, and better legal rights as the instruments of reform. In the fourth phase after independence, women also automatically gained rights to education, the vote, and entry into professions, public services, and political offices.


As we saw in the discussion on first wave, so many countries were so late to give women the vote, that it was but natural for the Indian National State to think that we had solve the women's question. If we have already given women the right to vote and the capacity to citizenship, surely that exist no women's question. Therefore, literature, writings about women, feminist thought all of these lay quite dormant for the first 20 years after India's independence.

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POST-INDEPENDENCE ARTICULATION OF THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

- Early 1970's to mid-1970's
 - Thinkers, activists, organizers
 - Broad spectrum
 - Working with trade unions, youth movements, student's movements
 - Broadly left and socialist movements



Therefore, in Professor Kalpana's lecture, you were given a window into, a post independence articulation of the women's question, mainly in the early 1970s, to the mid-1970s, where you saw the rise of thinkers, activists, organizers across a broad spectrum, working with trade unions, youth movements, student movements, but politically, broadly left and socialist. Therefore, feminism in India was very much of a Marxist temper, taking into account the ways in which egalitarianism in society could not be guaranteed also without subsequent egalitarianism for women.

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POST-INDEPENDENCE ARTICULATION OF THE WOMEN'S QUESTION

- Impetus and motivation
 - The socio-political context in India
 - Price rise, rising unemployment, corruption, ongoing exploitation of the peasantry and tribal poor
 - Feminist movements in the West
 - Asian and African national liberation struggles of the period; women in those movements




The impetus and motivation for these forms of intersectional thought were the current socio-political context of India. Price rise, rising unemployment, corruption, exploitation of the peasantry, and the tribal poor. At the same time, women were, of course, inspired by feminist movements in the West, definitely, but also by Asian and African national liberation struggles of the period, and women in those movements.

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MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS

- Violence in both home and public places: Rape and dowry deaths
- Rape
 - Mathura (1972)
 - Custodial Rape
 - Rameeza bee (1978)
 - Maya Tyagi (1980)
- Rape law and judicial bias
- Burden of proof was shifted to Mathura
- Discussion of previous sexual history
- Parliament passes the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983



Some of the major issues and concerns that Kalpana spoke about were to do with headline events, often in relation to the legal sphere. One of the sets of issues that became prominent was violence in both home and public spaces. For example, rape and dowry deaths. In relation to rape, Kalpana spoke about three important cases Mathura in 1972, Rameeza Bee in 1978, and Maya Tyagi in 1980, and focused attention on the custodial rape of Mathura.

She spoke about how rape law and judicial bias were made the focus of women's movements and activism and the ways in which the Supreme Court decision shifted the burden of proof to Mathura. She spoke about how women railed against the discussion of the previous sexual history of the victim as reason to acquit the accused. And finally, as to how the efforts of women's movements led to Parliament passing the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1983, in response to such a kind of demand.

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The slide features a title 'MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS' in bold black text at the top left. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo. Below the title is a bulleted list of issues and concerns, with several items marked by red checkmarks and red circles. The list includes:

- Dowry deaths
 - Establishing a pattern
 - Feminist theatre as politically explicit
 - Politicizing the personal
 - Taking the domestic outside of the realm of family
 - Plays like "Om Swaha"
 - Appealing to the conscience of the public
 - The symbol of the "burning bride"
- State pressured to investigate all suspicious deaths within 7 years of a marriage

On the right side of the slide, there is a photograph of a woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a red and white striped sari, standing at a podium and speaking into a microphone.

The other set of major issues were dowry death where feminists in India try to establish a pattern to show the ways in which young women tended to show up as suffering particular kinds of burns, particular kind of circumstantial ways in which they were put to death, and how these patterns could help identify the systemic concern that was dowry death and also traced the rise of feminist theater as a politically explicit way in addressing these concerns. This was also the time when the personal was deeply politicized by women's movements, and the domestic was taken outside of the realm of family.


Kalpana spoke about plays like *Om Swaha* that spoke to these concerns and how they try to appeal to the conscience of the public in arguing that such acts were not only heinous, but deeply problematic for the development of the Indian moral fiber in relation to the nation state and its goals. The symbol of the burning bride became very important to women's movements during this time, and the state was therefore pressured to investigate all suspicious deaths of women within seven years of marriage.

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At the same time, as women's movements were making large strides in addressing these concerns also arose other kinds of needs. Along with these kinds of appeals to the state and to legal mechanisms, women's movements also had to provide short stay homes and safe houses for women in problematic family situations and also established Legal Aid cells for those seeking legal resource. They also provided vocational and alternative income training for women who would otherwise have been left alone to fend for themselves and therefore, there arose a need for organizational building along with these developments in feminist consciousness.

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THE PROBLEMS OF INSTITUTIONALIZATION

- New hierarchies
 - Professionalization and organizational power
 - Grant and fund writers
 - Lesser democratization
 - Reformist versus Agitation-al/ Mobilizational work




Along with these new institutions came the concomitant problems of institutionalization itself, such as new hierarchies, where those who are able to write funds, be appealing to grant, writing authorities gained more power than those working on the ground or field workers, thereby leading to the fear of lesser democratization and a binary drawn between reformist versus agitation or mobilizational work. So often the question was, which is the real work? All of this kind of appealing to state setting up organizations, these are merely reforms and will not lead to long term change, whereas mobilizational work or agitational work was romanticized as work on the ground.

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OTHER CONCERNS

- Interrogation of the Family
 - bell hooks
 - Site of violence, bias and discrimination
 - Endemic malnutrition of girls within families
 - Neglect and denial of affection to girls within families
 - Sex-selective abortions (From the 1990's)
 - In Mumbai scan centres - "Spend Rs.500 now; save Rs.5 lakhs later"



However, alongside these concerns, what came to the fore was the interrogation of the family itself as a site of violence, be it in rapes, murders, dowry death, what have you. Remember bell hooks and how we spoke right at the beginning of this class about the family itself as part of an instantiation of patriarchal power. And therefore, there began an interrogation of the family as a site of violence, bias and discrimination.

One of the things that people began to examine was the endemic malnutrition of girls within families, about how is it that families were able to focus different kinds of attention to male and female children and the neglect and denial of affection to girls within families, leading of course, to another important set of concerns in relation to sex selective abortions.

Kalpana gave the example of Mumbai Scan Centers that were legal at a point of time and used to advertise in public and say, "Spend Rs. 500 now" to determine the sex of the unborn child, "save Rs. 5 lakhs later" in terms of the dowry for the girl.

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IMPORTANT MOMENTS

- Sexual violence as one moment in a long spectrum of violence
- “Manushi” builds feminist consciousness
 - Women’s civil liberties within families
 - Consciousness-raising
- All issues as women’s issue




Other important moments were when they began to come a recognition of sexual violence as merely one moment in a long spectrum of violence against female bodies. *Manushi*, a journal began to build feminist consciousness during this time to ask about women civil liberties within families and to participate in a broad project of consciousness-raising. Thereby we come back to the question that we began with, which is that, which issues are women's issues in this trajectory? All issues, there was no way to separate the ways in which things affected women from larger socio-political happenings in society.

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WORK AS WOMEN'S ISSUES

- Availability of work
- Conditions of work
- Wages
- Women's rights as workers and women
 - Peasants, land poor majority, factory workers, construction workers



Another set of issues that was very important to the Indian feminist movement was work: the availability of work, the conditions of work, and wages. And while this might raise people's hackles in being very similar to second wave feminism that only cared about the rights of upper class women or white women in the U.S., here, movements were very concerned with peasants, land poor majority, factory workers, construction workers, those in the informal sector.

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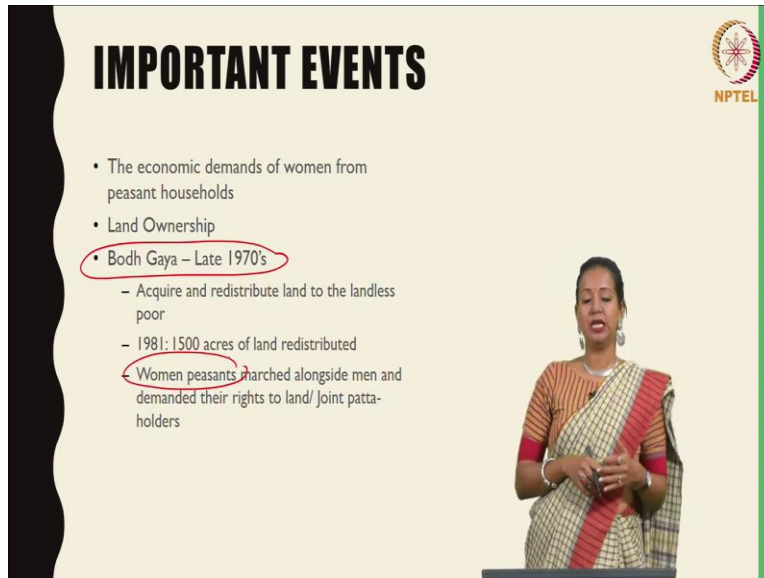
MILESTONES

- 1974 – Towards Equality
 - Committee on Status of Women in India
- 1975 – United Women's Liberation Conference: Pune
 - Tribals, peasants, college and school teachers
 - Defend the rights of women to participate in social production/ paid employment outside of home



Kalpana also outlined a number of milestones. 1974 the *Towards Equality* report released by the Committee on Status of Women in India. 1975 the United Women's Liberation Conference in Pune attended by a wide variety of women, tribals, peasants, college and school teachers where the conference defended the rights of women to participate in social production or paid employment outside of home.

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The slide features a title 'IMPORTANT EVENTS' in bold black text at the top left. To the right of the title is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a stylized 'N' and 'P' and the text 'NPTEL' below it. The main content is a bulleted list of events. The first bullet is 'The economic demands of women from peasant households'. The second is 'Land Ownership'. The third is 'Bodh Gaya – Late 1970's', which is circled in red. Under this, there are two sub-bullets: '– Acquire and redistribute land to the landless poor' and '– 1981: 1500 acres of land redistributed', both of which are also circled in red. The final bullet is 'Women peasants marched alongside men and demanded their rights to land/ joint patta-holders', which is also circled in red. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a photograph of a woman, Kalpana, wearing a yellow and red sari, standing and speaking.

- The economic demands of women from peasant households
- Land Ownership
- Bodh Gaya – Late 1970's
 - Acquire and redistribute land to the landless poor
 - 1981: 1500 acres of land redistributed
- Women peasants marched alongside men and demanded their rights to land/ joint patta-holders

The economic demands of women from peasant households was also emphasized. And Kalpana specifically spoke about the Bodhgaya struggle in the late 1970s, which was about land ownership for women, where the demand was to acquire and redistribute land to the landless poor. And in 1981, 1500 acres of land were redistributed. But women peasants who had marched alongside men demanded their rights to land along with them. They wanted to be joined, *patta*-holders.

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DEBATES WITHIN WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

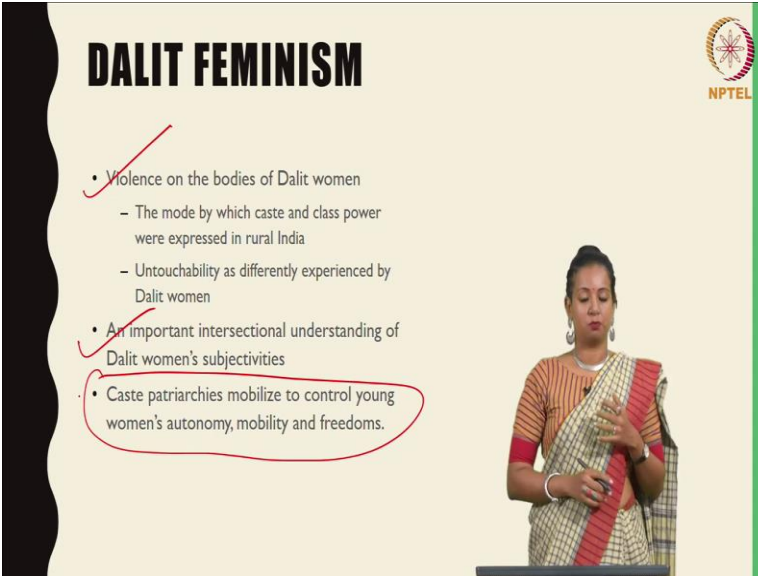
- A part of a larger organization fighting for rights and to raise feminist consciousness within that space Versus Autonomous Women's organizations
- The Question of the State
- 1980's: Religious fundamentalism and women's movements
 - Roop Kanwar
 - Shahbano



They were also concurrent debates within the feminist movement in India that spoke about whether it was better to be part of a larger organization fighting for rights and to raise feminist consciousness within that space. Or was it better to be an autonomous women's organization fighting solely for women's rights.

The question of the State continued to be paramount to the demands of women, because often the State was something that movements were critical of. But at the same time, appeals continued to be made to the State. One of the set of issues that brought to the fore this fundamental tension was in relation to religious fundamentalism and women's movements and Kalpana spoke about two important landmark cases, Roop Kanwar, and Shah Bano.

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The slide features a title 'DALIT FEMINISM' in bold black text at the top left. In the top right corner is the NPTEL logo, which consists of a circular emblem with a stylized 'N' and the text 'NPTEL' below it. The main content is a bulleted list on the left side of the slide. The first bullet point is 'Violence on the bodies of Dalit women', which has a red checkmark next to it. Below it are two sub-bullets: 'The mode by which caste and class power were expressed in rural India' and 'Untouchability as differently experienced by Dalit women'. The second main bullet point is 'An important intersectional understanding of Dalit women's subjectivities', also with a red checkmark. The third main bullet point is 'Caste patriarchies mobilize to control young women's autonomy, mobility and freedoms.', which is circled in red. In the foreground on the right, a woman wearing a patterned sari with red and white stripes is speaking into a microphone.

- Violence on the bodies of Dalit women
 - The mode by which caste and class power were expressed in rural India
 - Untouchability as differently experienced by Dalit women
- An important intersectional understanding of Dalit women's subjectivities
- Caste patriarchies mobilize to control young women's autonomy, mobility and freedoms.

Kalpana also spoke about Dalit feminism as addressing a completely different set of issues in relation to women's rights than, mainstream feminist movements in India, where Dalit feminists argued that violence on the bodies of women was of a different character. It was the mode by which caste and class power were expressed in rural India and therefore, untouchability was always experienced differently by Dalit women than Dalit men because it was assumed that Dalit women sexuality was always freely available and must be offered on demand to upper caste men. Therefore, Dalit feminism argued for an important, specific, located, intersectional understanding of Dalit women subjectivities. Kalpana also argued as to how even in the present-day caste patriarchies are mobilizing to control young women's autonomy, mobility, and freedoms.

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HUMAN RIGHTS IN CONFLICT AREAS

NPTEL

- “Mothers of Manipur” – July 1974
 - Amnesty International Report 1975
- Dual identity as women and as members of embattled minority groups
 - How do national feminists support and offer solidarity?
 - Collective appeal to repeal AFSPA – Women's groups in the North-East
 - Women in conflict areas are deserving of the same rights to security and dignity

Lastly, Kalpana brought the discussion to conclusion by speaking about the rights of women in relation to human rights in conflict areas, and spoke specifically about the agitation by the Mothers of Manipur in July 1974 and suggested that we read the Amnesty International Report of 1975 for details. Here, she asked an important question of how in relation to the dual identity of women in conflict areas, both as women and as members of embattled minority groups, national feminists can support and offer solidarity.

In relation to the Mothers of Manipur, Kalpana made the case as to how their agitation led to a collective appeal to repeal AFSPA or the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, by women's groups in the Northeast, along with women in other parts of the country. And how the focus on human rights and women's rights in conflict areas speaks about the need for women in conflict areas to find the same rights for dignity and security as guaranteed to women in other parts of the country.

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Lastly, Professor Kalpana spoke about things that we are going to discuss in the rest of the course, social media and women's movements, post Nirbhaya protest, and the ways in which we understand the current moment in Indian feminism, which we will discuss in the week on learnings and conclusions. I hope this has been an effective summary. Please do go back and listen to Kalpana's lecture and use these slides as reference points. Until next week...