

Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues
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Lecture-16
Nation through the Lens of Women's Autobiographies

Hello everyone, in this module we will talk about the theme of gender and violence. So, far we have talked about two components; an overview of women's movements in India and women in the nationalist imagination. We have mapped women's movements in a chronological and comprehensive manner; we saw that if we divide Indian feminism into pre- and post-independence phases.

There is a tremendous difference in terms of what issues were taken up and how we saw how women's progress was made an important part of the social reformist movement. The social reformers took up the questions of sati and widowhood to show that India is capable of getting rid of its bad traditions and emerge as an independent nation. This period saw the construction of the new woman also known as the bhadramahila who became intrinsic to the making of a gendered nationalist identity.

And this identity was contrasted to the immoral Western memsahibs and vulgar lower class lower caste women. After independence feminist movements in India began by addressing issues such as sexual division of labour and so on. Such issues completely shifted the focus from women as auxiliaries to men to the image of an economically independent woman and a woman seeking right over her body.

Women started talking about unequal wages, the gender division of skilled and unskilled work and how domestic labor and reproduction were not seen as work but a woman's natural duty. This section will delve into the post-independence period and the question of body in Indian feminism. We will explore in detail the feminist concerns in the post-independence period pertaining to dowry deaths, marital rapes etcetera.

It will look into the contributions made by women's organizations such as Manushi in bringing about significant social and legal awareness to politicize the personal. We will also address the specificity of bodily violence through the issues of caste and religion; it will delve into

instances of custodial rapes, impact of personal loss and gang rapes to highlight the specificity of gender oppression on women of different communities.

While on the one hand normative gender binaries are a matter of immense attention vis-a-vis the issues of violence nonsense and transgender people also suffer from overt forms of violence. This section will explore that aspect as well. The discussion on violence will also encounter how violence is often countered in multiple kinds of ways to cope with it. Now before going into the instances of violence and how feminists in India have tried to cope with it.

We first need to understand how violence is theorized vis-a-vis gender; such theorization has followed two trajectories physical and sexual violence. And more implicit forms of violence that have mental repercussions you have to remember that often both these things happen side by side the spaces where instances of violence take place can also be varied. According to Cynthia Cockburn since gender power shapes the dynamic of every interaction.

Violence is also closely linked with such gendered notions and practices. In feminist theorization gender violence has been analyzed in two ways. The male female binary in the sense of how the sexual difference between two genders leads to different experiences of violence. Later researchers have also opened up newer spaces for analysis of violence targeted and individuals or groups who do not conform to normative gender roles.

What underlies the basic concept of violence is the use of course? In fact, we can expand the concept of violence even further by asking what are the legitimate forms of violence and what are not? Now while talking about the relation between gender and violence two terms are often used simultaneously. These are gender-based violence and violence against women and the reason is most violence against women is inflicted for gender-based reasons.

And such violence affects women in a disproportionate manner. The human declaration on the elimination of violence against women defines violence as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

In the council of Europe's convention on preventing and combating violence against women and also domestic violence which was held in Istanbul its articles 3 offers the following definition. Gender-based violence against women shall mean violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately. Now you need to remember that as Cockburn mentions earlier gender needs to be understood in a larger sense where it includes individuals or groups who do not conform to the dominant gender binaries and even men.

What gender-based violence does it create? It creates an imbalance of power and disadvantages the non-dominant individual or group. Gender violence is often rooted in specific social and cultural structures, norms and values prevalent in a society. Moreover, different groups experience violence differently. The forms of gender violence are vast and varied.

It can be physical, sexual, verbal, psychological or socio-economic and can be inflicted through verbal or written formats the internet and even rape or murder. At the root of gender violence is the power imbalance imposed by patriarchy. Now violence is perhaps one of the most visible ways in which oppression is measured or understood. You have to remember that there are many ways in which violence occurs.

Some are visible forms of violence and some are invisible and often implicit. Similarly in the context of gender violence; violence actually occurs and is reflected through various formats. The 1993 Canadian panel on violence against women stated women will not be free from violence until there is equality and equality cannot be achieved until the violence and threat of violence are eliminated from women's lives.

In the post-independence period feminist movements especially in India have been vocal about different kinds of violence meted out to women. The issue of violence against women became one of the most prominent themes in Indian feminist movements during the aftermath of the 1974 report towards equality. The increase in dowry deaths and rapes brought forth the question of body women's right over their body's choice and so on.

Indian feminists questioned the structure of family and demanded legal redressal of domestic violence dowry murders, rape cases and so on. The question of marital rape challenged the hegemonic notions of the Indian family additionally the resurgence of the custom of sati or

widow immolation raised newer concerns about violence against women in the contemporary socio-cultural sphere.

Gail Omvedt in her book *Violence Against Women: New Movements, New Theories* gives the reference to the Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan organized in Patna in February 1988. This Sammelan or conference raised significant points about women and violence. The Nari Mukti Sangharsh Sammelan in their resolution wrote women face specific forms of violence rape and other forms of sexual abuse, female feticide which killing sati, dowry murders, wife beating.

Such violence and the continued sense of insecurity that is instilled in women as a result keeps them bound to home economically exploited and socially suppressed. So, the resolution argues that violence plays a major role in keeping women suppressed and economically exploited. The question is how does it do so? Firstly, we know that there are patriarchal systems operating in the society which dictate that women should stay within the house under the control of their fathers or husbands.

This domestic confinement already leads to the lack of economic opportunities. Since women do not get any opportunities to get trained in a profession, they have no choice but to go for low paid or unpaid forms of labour. In fact, we will discuss this aspect in detail in the next section on gender and labour. Now coming back to the question of violence such suppression keeps women in their propertyless and resourceless situation.

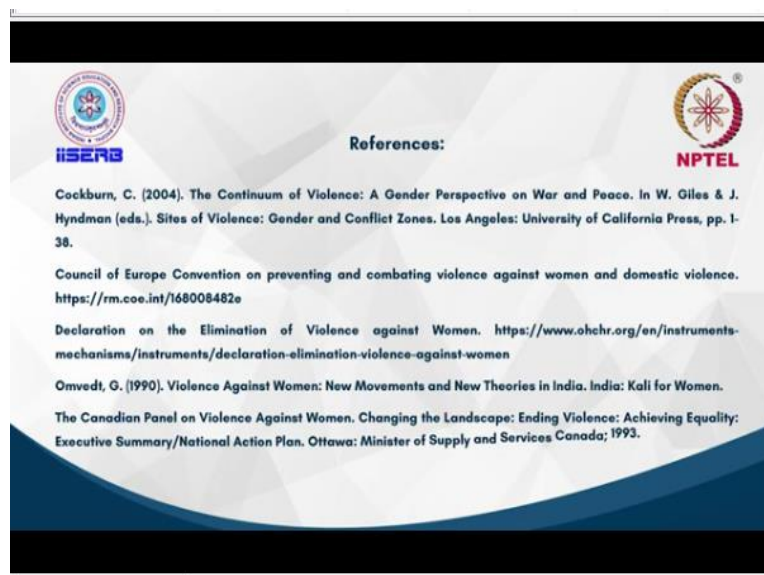
Their economic dependence leads them to be subjected to domestic violence, abandonment by husbands, lack of voice etcetera. The patrilineal Patri local family structure also does not give women access to property most of the times. We have to remember that women's deep privileged situation originates from their gender identity. This is how violence and sexuality are related.

Omvedt gives example of sati, dowry murder and rape to ask some important questions. Does violence necessarily have a sexual character? And is sexuality inherently biologically linked to force and dominance or can we locate social and historical factors that determine the nature of such a linkage today. Gender and violence take an interesting route when discussed vis-a-vis the patterns of class, caste and communities.

Depending on the groups women belong to they not only experience violence differently they also experience different forms of violence. It is ironical to think that in a setting where women are praised as strishakti or prakriti the reality of violence on women is so rampant. Now let us summarize today's lecture. Today we saw an introductory overview of gender and violence in the Indian context.

We learned that violence vis-a-vis gender can be theorized as physical violence, sexual violence, violence emerging from and causing economic disparities and so on. The spaces of violence also range from physical locations to social media. In other words, while talking about violence we need to remember that it takes many shapes and has different kinds of impacts for different groups of women. In the next lecture we will delve into the major issues taken by feminists in India with reference to gender and violence. Thank you.

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References:

Cockburn, C. (2004). *The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace*. In W. Giles & J. Hyndman (eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 1-38.

Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

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