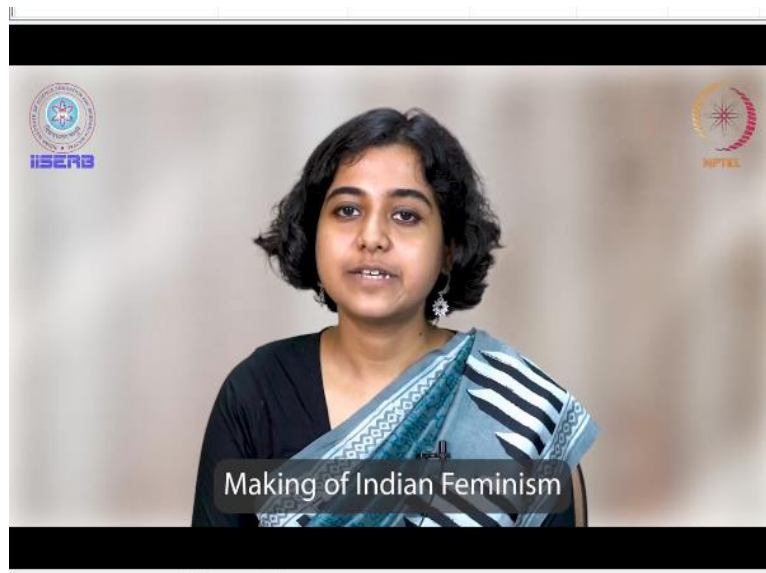


Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues
Prof. Dr. Anandita Pan
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Science Education and Research-Bhopal

Lecture-02
Making of Indian Feminism-Part 1

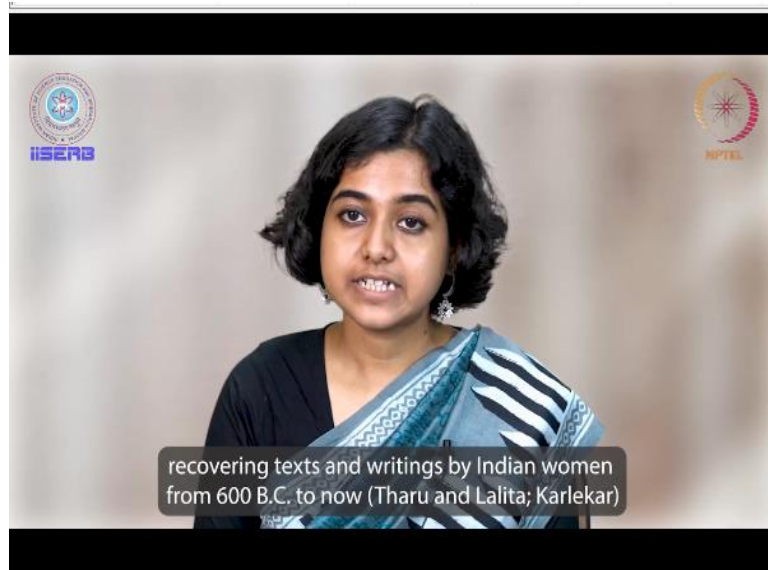
Hello everyone, in the previous video lecture we talked about the concept of feminism, its components and its relevance. We learned that feminism is not about man hate; it is about equality and equal opportunities. In fact, feminism is an evolving concept, it started with equality among men and women but today it has come to include the causes of people of other genders, oppressive structures that function along with gender and so on. In this video lecture we will talk about the history of Indian feminism.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:56)



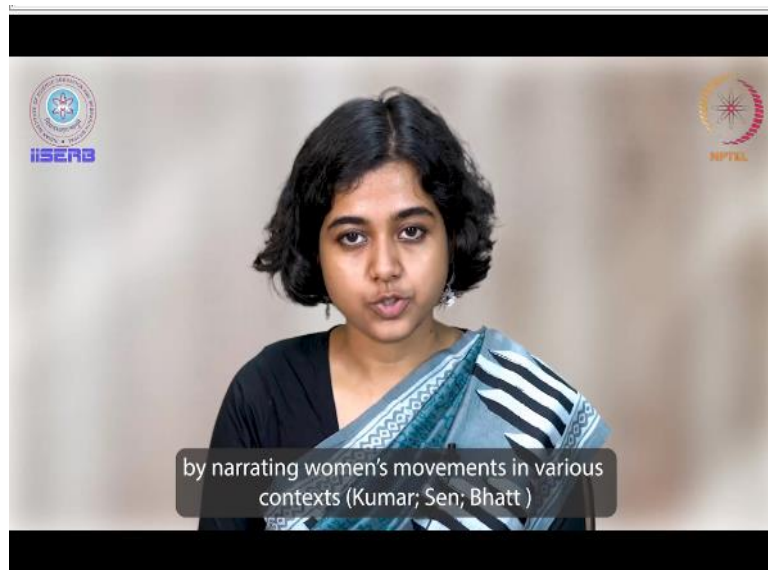
Or as I like to call it the making of Indian feminism. Indian feminism as we know has been outlined in various manners.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:03)



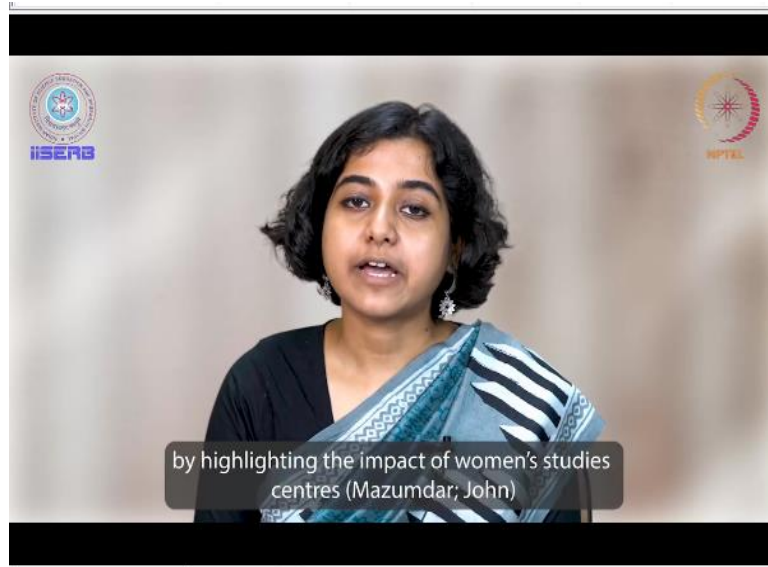
By recovering texts and writings by Indian women from 600 BC to now by Tharu and Lalita and Karlekar.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:13)

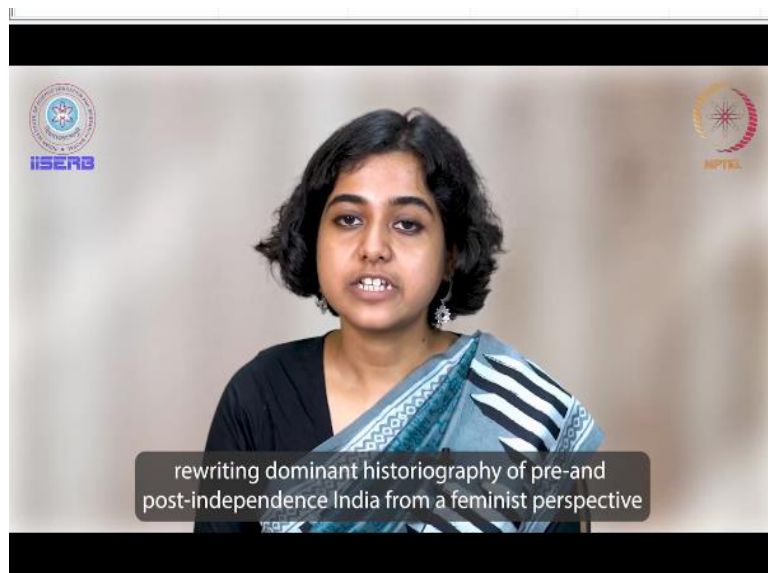


By narrating women's movements in various contexts by Kumar, Sen, Bhatt and so on.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:18)



And by highlighting the impact of women's study centers by Mazumdar and also Mary John.
(Refer Slide Time: 01:27)



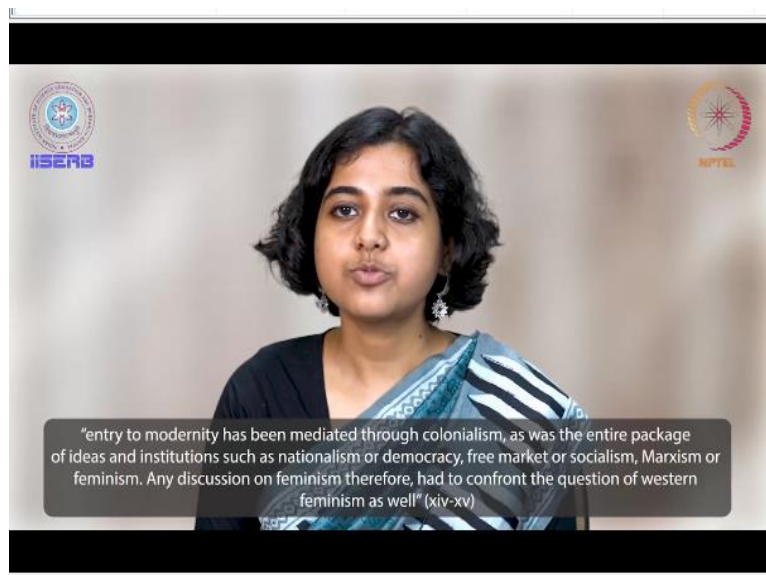
And finally, by rewriting the dominant historiography of pre- and post-independent India from a feminist perspective. In this way the feminist history of India has challenged the erasure of women from history and has shown what kind of issues emerge when history is seen through a feminist lens.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:48)



Maitreyee Chaudhuri in her book *feminism in India* presents a conceptual mapping of Indian feminism and locates it at the interface between activism and history. She makes an interesting observation with reference to the seeming disconnect between activism and theory in Indian feminism. Chaudhuri argues that for Indian feminism reference to Western feminist models have been inevitable.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:19)



And the reason for this is that Indian feminisms I quote entry to modernity has been mediated through mediated through colonialism, as was the entire package of ideas and institutions such as nationalism or democracy, free market or socialism, Marxism or feminism. Any discussion on feminism therefore had to confront the question of Western feminism as well. It is for this reason that the theorization and historicization of Indian feminism follows the ways in which

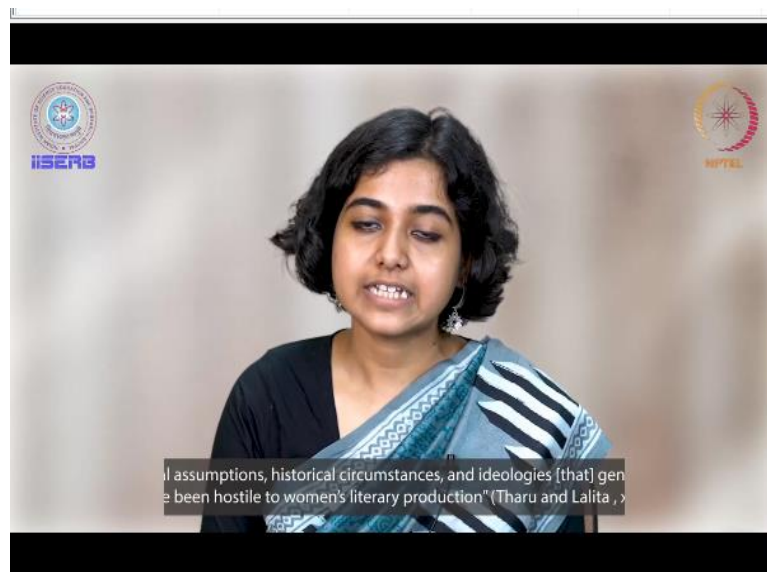
women were made part of the Nationalist project and how women negotiated with such constructions.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:55)



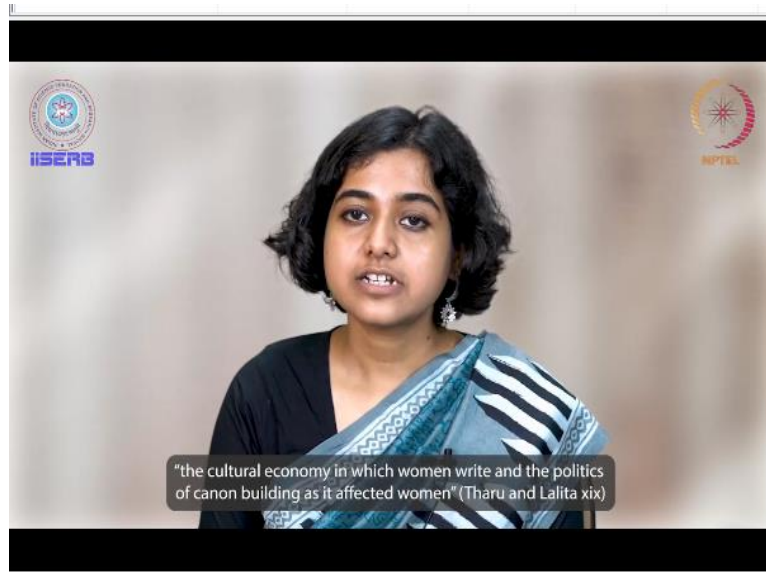
Susie Tharu and K Lalita's two volume anthology women writing in India remain one of the greatest repertoires of women's writing in India across centuries.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:11)



In the preface Tharu and Lalita state that they began compiling these volumes to challenge the critical assumptions, historical circumstances and the ideologies that generally have been hostile to women's literary production.

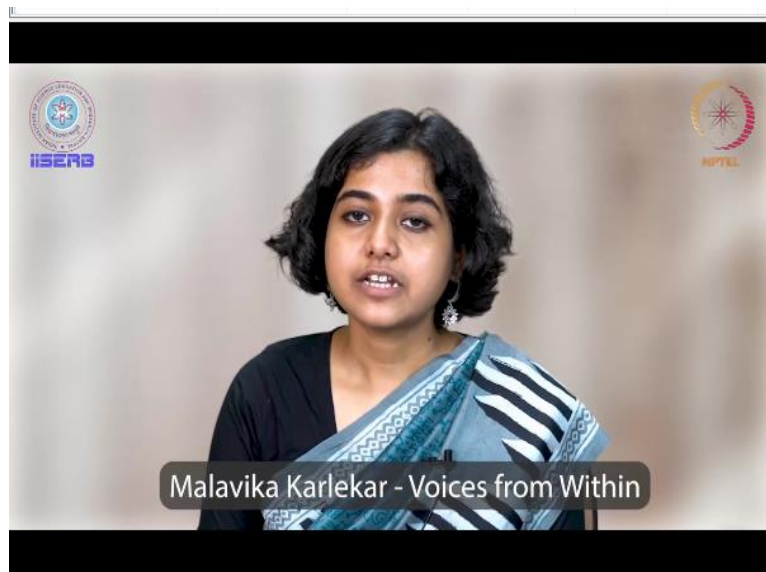
(Refer Slide Time: 03:24)



This recovery unfolds the cultural economy in which women write and the politics of Canon building as it affected women. The method of recovering women writers through history served two purposes; it addressed the erasure of women in the dominant narratives and provided a gendered understanding of those meta narratives. Women writers who were so far neglected from the mainstream history and literature gained new place.

And their voices brought about a change in the way mainstream history and literature are presented and perceived. This aspect is also visible in the recoveries of Indian women's autobiographies.

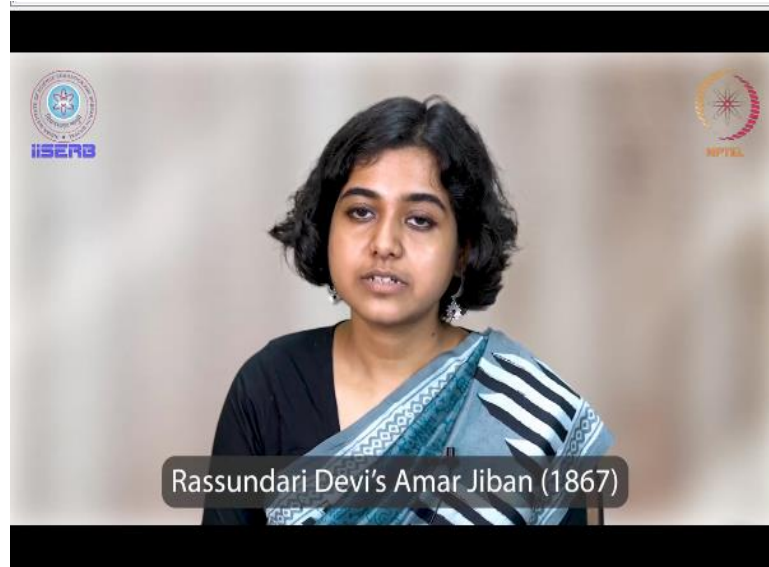
(Refer Slide Time: 04:10)



For example, Malavika Karlekar *voices from within* recovers 19th century Bengali women writers to show how their perspectives problematize the Nationalist reformist representation of

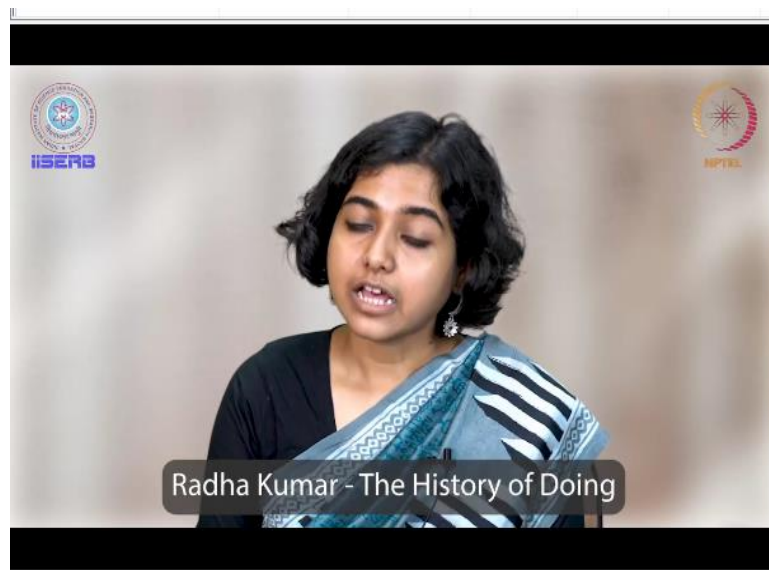
women. Women in the Nationalist period were presented as key markers of Nations cultural and social identity.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:32)



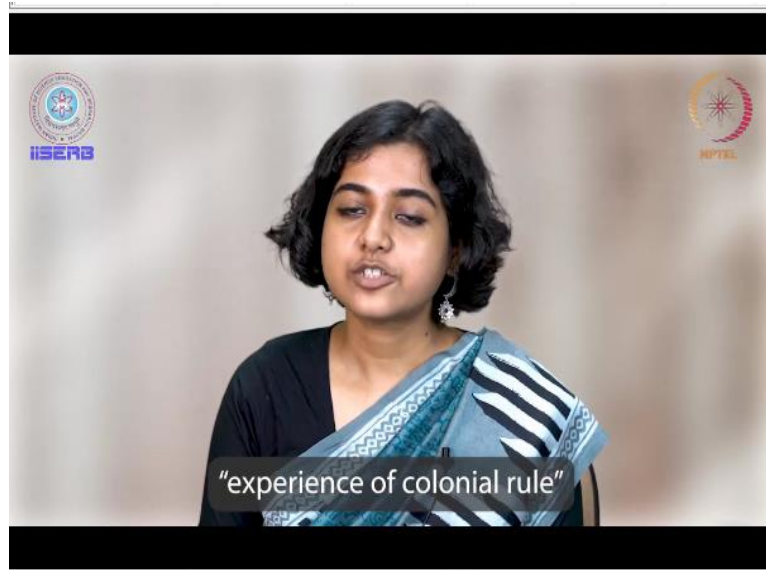
Women's autobiographies such as Rassundari Devi's Amar Jiban published in 1867 presented a very different picture; we will discuss these aspects in detail in the future lectures.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:43)

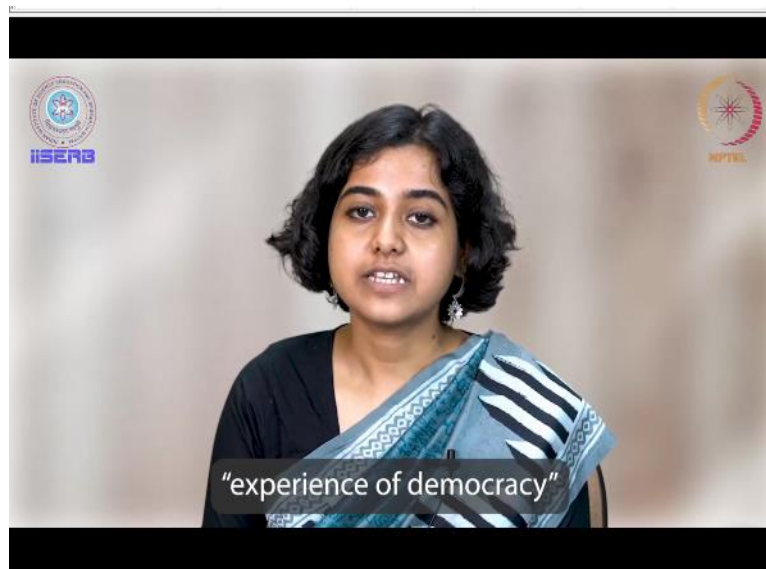


Radha Kumar in her seminal book the history of doing mentions that Indian feminism can be chronologically broadly divided into pre- and post-independence phases.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:55)



While the experience of colonial rule dominates the pre-independence period.
(Refer Slide Time: 05:01)



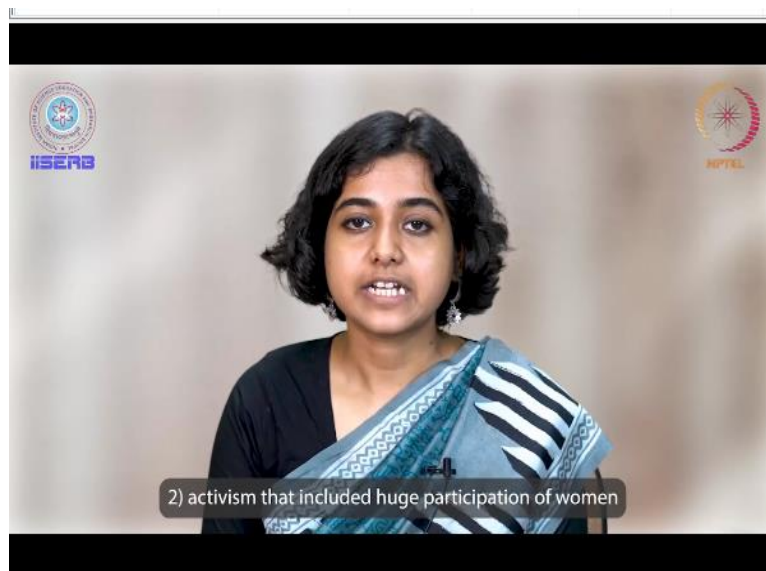
The experience of democracy dominates the post-independence period. Indian feminism struggle for gender equality has encompassed various economic, socio-cultural as well as political agendas. Women's movement in India has in her discussion Radha Kumar lays out three strands of feminist movements in India.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:26)



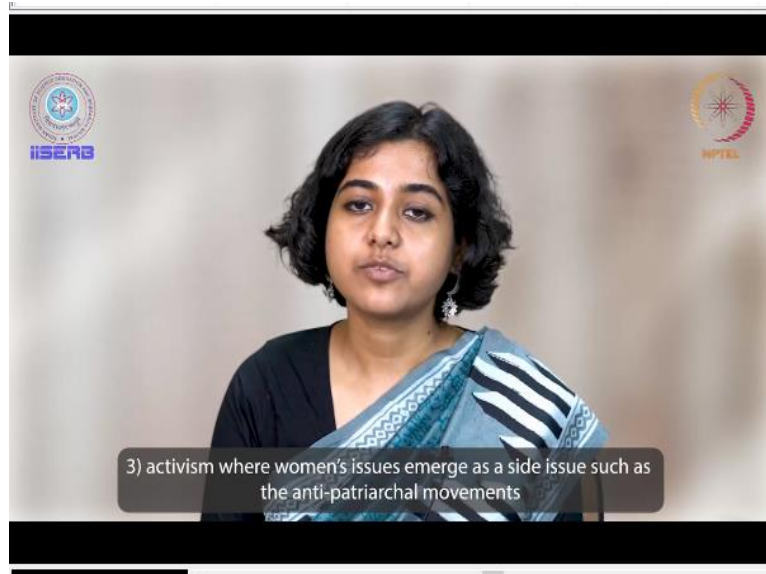
Activism concerning women's issues such as right over body and physical violence.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:32)



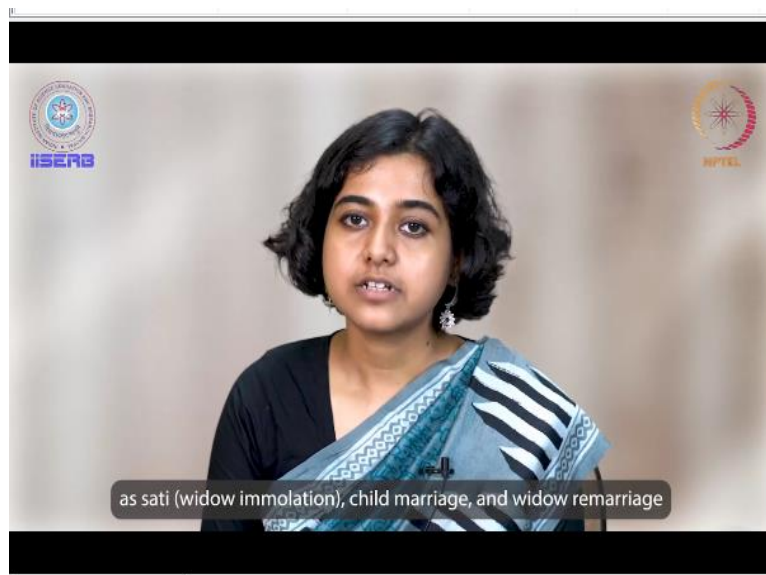
Activism that included huge participation of women such as the Telangana and the Tebhaga movements.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:39)



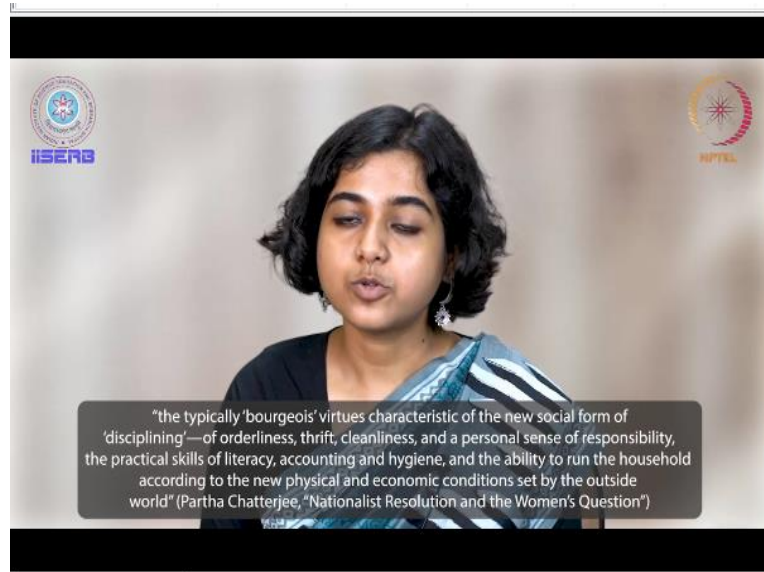
And finally, activism where women's issues emerge as a side issue such as the anti-patriarchal movements. Now let us take a look at how these activisms were informed and impacted by the experience of colonial rule and the experience of democracy? The 19th century is noted for focusing on the rights and wrongs of women. As part of the social reformist agenda the nationalist leaders made women's issues a central agenda for transformation.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:16)



Women's issues such as sati or widow immolation, child marriage and widow remarriage were introduced in social reformist project in order to bring out a holistic change in Indian social and cultural scenarios. These women popularly came to be known as the new women. We will discuss the formulation of this category in detail in the upcoming lectures. Following the legal abolition of sati and child marriage new attempts were made to break tradition by educating these new women in order to make them better wives and mothers.

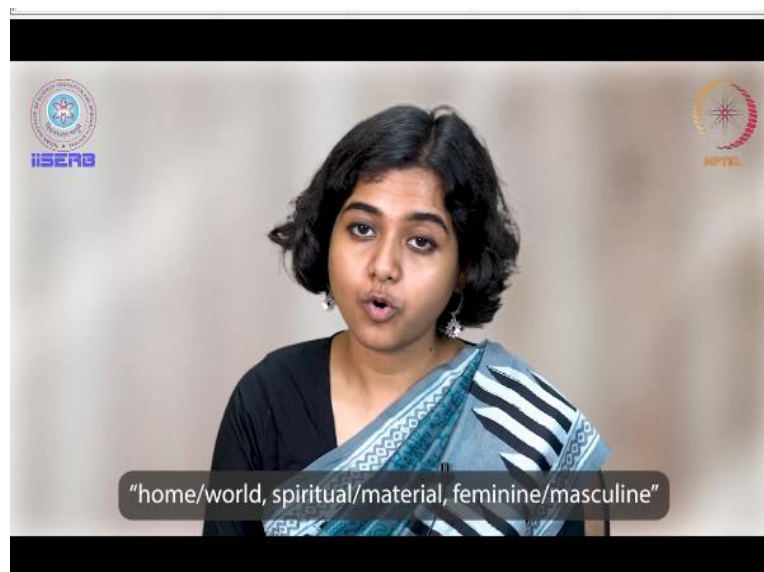
(Refer Slide Time: 06:56)



Education as Partha Chatterjee notes was meant to inculcate in women that typically Bourgeois virtues characteristic of the new social form of disciplining of orderliness, thrift, cleanliness and a personal sense of responsibility. The practical skills of literacy accounting and hygiene and the ability to run the household according to the new physical and economic conditions set by the outside world.

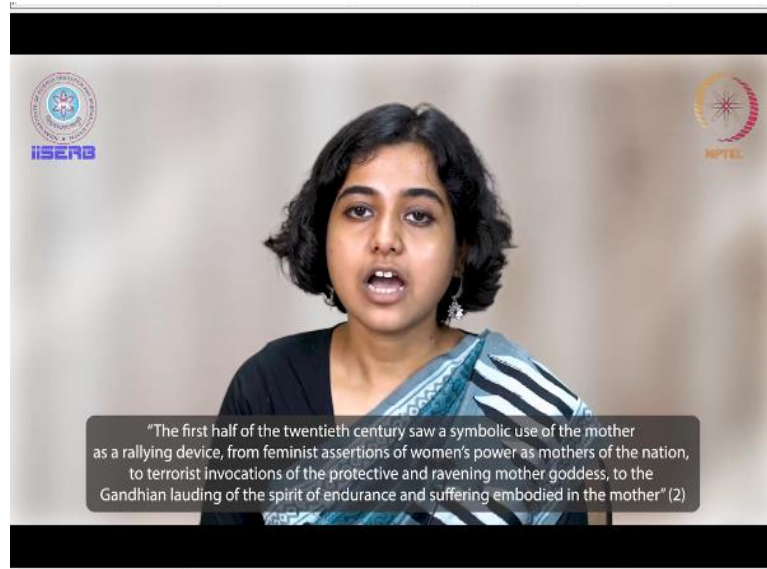
Partha Chatterjee in his article the Nationalist resolution of the women's question points out how the image of the 19th century modern woman also known as the Bhadra Mahila or gentle woman was constructed to follow the dualities of Home versus world, spiritual versus material, feminine versus masculine.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:36)



This new woman fashioned to fit the new patriarchy was not only contrasted with modern western mem sahibs, it was explicitly distinguished from the patriarchy of indigenous tradition. From this we can see how the social reformist movement took a woman's question while keeping the gender hierarchy intact.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:06)



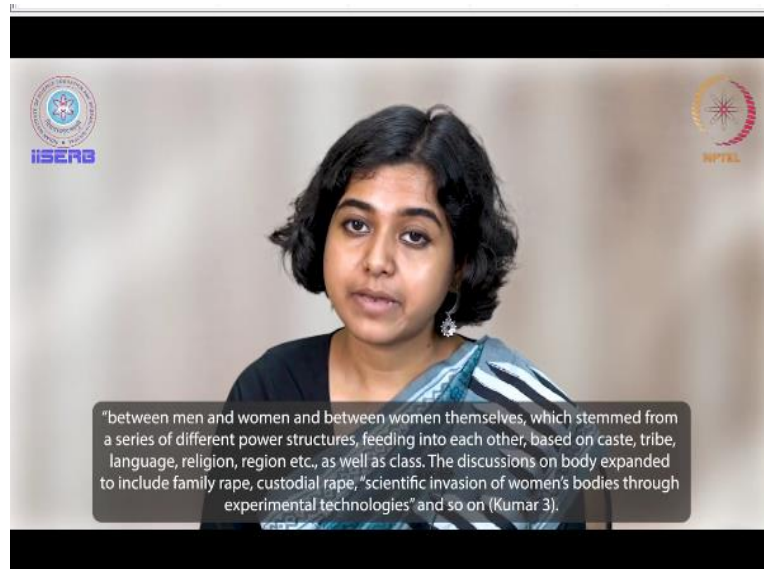
Radha Kumar observes the first half of the 20th century saw a symbolic use of the mother as a rallying device, from feminist assertions of women's power as mothers of the nation, to terrorist invocations of the protective and ravaging mother goddesses to the Gandhian lauding of the spirit of endurance and suffering embodied in the mother. You should also remember that in the early years of the movements for women's rights difference among men and women was taken for granted.

That is why when social reformers were giving English education to the new women it was to make them better wives and better mothers. The increasing visibility of women as participants in the national congress fashioned a new kind of feminine political role wherein women became the shelterers. And also, the protectors of husbands and sons fighting out there for freedom of the country.

It is interesting how neatly the public private roles vis-a-vis gender shaped women to fit them in the changing society. After independence feminist movements in India began by addressing issues such as the 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.

A woman seeking right over her body, women started talking about unequal wages, the gender divisions of skilled and unskilled work and how domestic labour and reproduction were not seen as work but as women's natural duty. Kumar mentions that the feminist class consciousness in the 1970s gave rise to consciousness regarding other inequalities.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:00)



Between men and women and between women themselves; which stemmed from a series of different power structures feeding into each other based on caste, tribe, language, religion, region, etcetera as well as class. The discussions on body expanded to include family rape, custodial rape scientific invasion of women's bodies through experimental technologies and so on.

In her celebrated play *Harvest Manjula* Padmanabhan highlights how the capitalist colonial use of poor women in the developing countries as guinea pigs for reproductive experiments results in *Calamity*. In other words what we started seeing is a transformation of ideas in terms of what constituted women suffering. We will discuss women's movements and its various aspects in detail in the upcoming lectures.

Now let us summarize the lesson before we move on to a new section. The history of feminism in India has been written in many ways; as a chronology, as a conceptual category and as a critique of dominant history seen through the lens of gender. And in all these instances there have been different ways in which women's issues were taken up. If we look at Indian feminism before and after Independence, we see a huge transition in terms of approach.

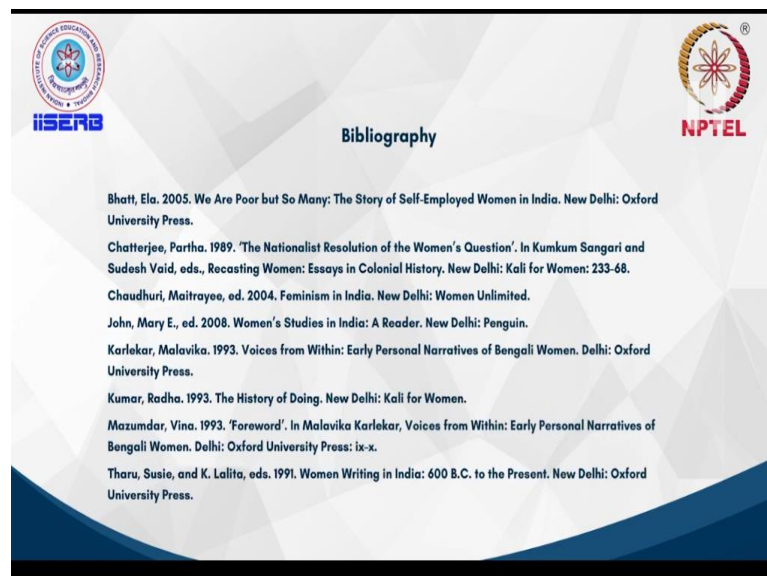
In the colonial period the intention was to complete a social reformation. Since women's subordination was a stark reality; the social reformers such as Ram Mohan Roy began by eradicating the bad practices such as sati, child marriage etcetera. The new woman was modeled as an educated wife who would be a perfect companion to the newly emerging Burgula or the gentleman group.

Such companion and model kept the binaries of public versus domestic intact; it did not question the gender hierarchies. Post-independence periods saw a transition; women started talking about freedom in different ways as economic independence and as right over their bodies. Unlike the social reformist assumption patriarchy as a system of oppression came to be questioned in the post-independence feminist movements.

However this is not to claim that there was no opposition to patriarchy in the pre-independence period as women writers such as Rassundari Devi and others have shown there was a parallel discontent from women in the 19th century. This sentiment at that time remains subservient and did not gain any prominence. The 1970s also brought new sensibility to explore gender vis-a-vis other structures of oppression such as caste, class, religion, sexuality.

In the next lectures we will talk more in detail about the other directions that post-independence feminism moved to. Thank you.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:07)



The slide features a light blue background with a geometric pattern. In the top left corner is the IISERB logo, and in the top right corner is the NPTEL logo. The word "Bibliography" is centered in a bold, black font. Below it, a list of references is provided in a smaller, black font.

Bibliography

Bhatt, Ela. 2005. *We Are Poor but So Many: The Story of Self-Employed Women in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Chatterjee, Partha. 1989. 'The Nationalist Resolution of the Women's Question'. In Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*. New Delhi: Kali for Women: 233-68.

Chaudhuri, Maitrayee, ed. 2004. *Feminism in India*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited.

John, Mary E., ed. 2008. *Women's Studies in India: A Reader*. New Delhi: Penguin.

Karlekar, Malavika. 1993. *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Kumar, Radha. 1993. *The History of Doing*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Mazumdar, Vina. 1993. 'Foreword'. In Malavika Karlekar, *Voices from Within: Early Personal Narratives of Bengali Women*. Delhi: Oxford University Press: ix-x.

Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita, eds. 1991. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.