

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

**Lecture-21**  
**Resisting Violence**

Hello everyone. In the previous lectures we talked about three forms of gendered violence that have been crucial to feminist movements in India. These are dowry related violence, domestic violence and rape. But as we saw gender-based violence is not limited to women alone. In fact, the concept of gender needs to be expanded beyond the heterosexual binaries and boundaries. Moreover, violence need not always be physical and sexual.

We explored the complexities of various kinds of displacements in Mona's story. While, talking about these aspects the focus has primarily remained on the victimized women and the different ways to remove such victimization. Now, the question is, are women marginalized or even the marginalized groups constantly victimized. What are the ways in which they also proclaim their assertion? What is their response to violence?

Is it violence or is it something else. In this lecture, we will talk about those agential forms of reaction to violence. Now, at this point you may ask is the answer to violence also violence. Well, we will explore this aspect in the lecture in detail. We will also simultaneously look at not just how violence has been countered through violence, but also how social media has been used as effective tool to pose opposition.

So, let me begin by talking about one of the recent cases. The Nirbhaya rape case, it caused nationwide uproar about the prevalence of gender-based violence in India. It triggered an introspection into the nature of Indian society, it is ideas of patriarchy and the failure of the legal system, which could not protect the women of the country. So, the narrative was primarily cloaked within the discourse of protectionism.

As a redressal to the violence inflicted on Nirbhaya, there was a demand for chemical castration of the perpetrators. This raised some important questions. Is violence an answer to violence or rather in what circumstances is violence justified. On the other hand, it has also been argued that Nirbhaya's case received such nationwide response and not just by feminists is because of

her upper caste identity. This is all the more visible, because other cases of rape such as the Jisha rape case.

So, Jisha was a Dalit woman from Kerala, who was gang raped, did not get similar support from the people at large. Therefore, the question that we can add along with whether, violence is an answer to violence is under what circumstances is violence and under an answer to violence. As I have mentioned in the earlier lecture the protests after the Nirbhaya case resulted in a change in law through the criminal law Amendment Act of 2013 that altered various sections of the Indian penal code, the code of criminal procedure and the Indian Evidence Act.

These amendments included capital punishment for rape cases that have led to death or rendered the victim in a persistent vegetative state and a minimum of 20 years imprisonment for gang rape. New offenses such as talking acid attacks and voyeurism were added into the definition of rape. The minimum sentence was changed from 7 years to 10 years. Now the opposition to Nirbhaya rape case was felt not just through protests on the streets.

The mode of these protests expanded to social media as well. After the Nirbhaya case was reported there ensued a vast conversation on social media by men and women who were neither activist nor associated to any organization but spoke about the case. The participation of individuals generated a huge shift in activism in India. The social media opened up scope for newer conversations.

Although how far it was successful in raising consciousness remains a question. As Martin and Valenti have noted the social media platforms provided an opportunity to individuals, civil society actors and activists to construct, shape and export the objectives of a movement including farming of ideologies, setting the agenda and constructing the flow of the narrative. Thus, during the Nirbhaya protests many 24-hour news channels depended on social media and drew stories from Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

The scope of social media in understanding different kinds of violence faced by women were first realized worldwide through the hashtag Metoo movement. Let me explain it for you. The hashtag Metoo movement originating in the USA and popularized by Tarana Burke's use of the hashtag to highlight the prevalence of sexual harassment in the film industry took the world by storm. It was a first of its kind movement that emerged in the social media.

The naming and shaming list allowed women to tell their stories in their own disembodied voices while claiming agency over the borders, which are systematically violated in the real world, in around their bodies and selves. Now, the World Wide Web became the ideal platform to connect women across the globe. Chandra and Ailing started identify the hashtag Metoo movement as a collective and connective collaboration.

The proclamation Metoo contains within itself a sense of solidarity, affinity and assertion. The hashtag Metoo has claimed to mark a new era in Indian feminism by introducing feminist articulations into the quotidian through the powerful use of the social media. The hashtag Metoo movement in India claims inheritance of previous movements such as the 2009 Pink Chaddi movement against moral policing.

The 2011 slut walk movement against victim blaming and the 2015 Pinjra Tod movement against sexist curfew in hostels and the 2017 Bekhauf Azadi. All these movements from which the hashtag Metoo claims heredity of our movements proclaiming women's right to access public space. The movement has been propelled by the power of personal narratives. As such it has become a great exemplar of modern-day praxis of personal is political.

Pointing out the difficulties in speaking out about sexual harassment, V. Chandra notes that the popularity of social media owes to the removal of the corporeality from the context. She writes the digital media offers an aesthetico-politics of hashtag stories without the physicality of women's bodies or voices. It allows women to narrate their traumatic experiences to the neutral computer screen.

The movement emerged and took shape predominantly as sexual harassment in the workplace. The term workplace is used in a broader sense incorporating public institutions where women work and study. It started famously with Raya Sarkar's LoSHA list of names of sexual harassers including several prominent academics. LoSHA or List of Sexual Harassers in Academia was a crowd-sourced list of sexual harassers in academia.

Now, it is important to mention that Sarkar's list was originally not meant for public consumption. It is also important to mention that, Sarkar did not mean to publish the list initially. However, the list opened a floodgate of responses, which followed two streams.

Veracity expressed through opinion shared on social media versus the opportunity provided by an online movement to avoid the strenuous and often unavailable process of legal redressal for sexual harassment.

Feminist online platforms such as Kafila expressed their concerns regarding the due process, arguing that it would undo the years of effort put by feminists to ensure legal acknowledgment of sexual harassment. Nivedita Menon wrote in Kafila it worries us that anybody can be named anonymously with lack of answerability. It was pointed out that this approach of naming could potentially delegitimize the long struggle against sexual harassment and makes the struggle more difficult.

At the same time the list garnered much support as well. Pointing at the legal and institutional lacuna in properly addressing the cases of sexual harassment the use of informal networks, such as the social media to unveil the names of harassers was seen as an act of tremendous courage. The list has been lauded for naming harasses. As V. Geetha mentions, the problem of sexual harassment lies in allowing harasses the benefit of anonymity.

Women reporting harassment continues to be a rare occurrence due to the immense social stigma attached to it. In addition to normative gender hierarchies that perpetuate such stigma the locations of power such as academic institutions or film industry contribute in instilling fear of ostracization. Moreover, as Geetha notes the flip side of this is that the price of not speaking out is even worse, years of trauma and forced dissembling.

Geetha mentions, that when women do speak out and there are many who do the due process is tedious. This is true not only of what transpires in the internal complaints committees but in the justice system as a whole, where suffering and hurt have to be validated through established protocols that involve evidence gathering, halting testimonies and clever arguments.

Court judgments might salvage the experience of anger and hurt by foregrounding ethical arguments that validate what victims have undergone, but procedures are what they are tiresome and tiring. We keep with them, but that does not take away that their tedium. Then, there is the question of relief to do with sexual harassment: Apologies, dismissal of persons, guarantees that such things would never be allowed to happen again.

Now, the movement progressed outside the realm of the academia to incorporate the Bollywood film industry political leaders as well as noted journalists. The sharing of survivor stories has served as a means to challenge the taboo of victimhood while, also creating the possibility for solidarity. Chandra and Erlingsdottir term it as a contagion effect. They write this is how a protest swells into a movement.

Indeed, the contagion effect present here is perhaps the most potent force behind a single outcry of rage becoming a concerted effort towards lasting change, a progression that bespeaks the utopian desire of all revolutions. As such, hashtag Metoo inscribes itself into the political and historical present as the realization of a quasi poetical possibility or rather impossibility, where each new voice and story makes tangible the desire for a global transformation.

The hashtag echoes a larger hole beyond the individual. It is an “I” with countless others a “we” of solidarity and shared experience, allowing women and people of all genders across social, ethnic, political or sexual divide to understand that they are not alone and that the nature of sexual harassment and abuse transcends these boundaries. Now, one of the biggest claims of the Metoo movement and rightfully, so has been the emergence of women's voices.

Women's lack of visibility and voice is further solidified by their relegation to the domestic sphere. As mentioned earlier the Metoo movement in India has taken shape to bring about women's voices in the public sphere. Vinita Chandra historically traces the silencing of women within domestic spaces under protective clothes in demarketing public spaces inaccessible to them and in schooling their bodies to make them as inconspicuous as possible in the public gaze.

She also points at the hashtag Metoo movement's crucial attempt in breaking this silence. The movement has thus been delineated as one attempting to bring women to the public sphere. It is important to note that much of Indian feminism has been that of women's lack of access to the public sphere. Malavika Karlekar recovers 19th century Bengali women's writings to show how problematize the nationalist reformist notion and representation of women as key markers of nations culture and identity by highlighting the patriarchal undertones that reconfigure the gendered binaries of public private within the nationalist discourse.

Thus, the construction of women also known as the new woman followed this binary. Both in literary imaginations as well as political movements, breaking the shackles of domesticity has been a major issue in mainstream Indian feminism. As early as 1867, Rassundari Devi likened her marriage to that of a prison. The public private binary was brought forth in the post-independence feminist movement through issues such as women's right over their bodies, sexual networks of power, women and labour and so on.

Major attempts were made to recover women in history, while also simultaneously inserting them in dominant domains of knowledge. The pedagogical reformation is noteworthy to mention here. Mary E. John credits the publication of the report towards equality for feminism's entry into Indian academia. The report revealed an unprecedented deterioration in the condition of the vast majority of women since, the 1911 and the 50s.

As a result, women's study centers were born within universities. John mentions that through these centers and research units a fundamental shift was thus inaugurated. From women as subjects to be educated, to women as new subjects of investigation and study, a detailed discussion of this is provided in the earlier lectures. You can go back to those lectures and take a look once again.

Now, such instances of interiorization, is further strengthened through the stigma of victimhood. Shaming or victim blaming coupled with social ostracization continues to be an inherent aspect of sexual oppression of women. Under such circumstances victims of sexual harassment are forced to remain silent and anonymous. Here, the impact of language is very important.

The victim or accuser is now defined solely through the identity of a victim of sexual harassment and as one, who complained against it. Contrastingly when innumerable women use the Metoo hashtag on social media they choose to negate the stereotype single identity imposed onto them. In this way use of the hashtag becomes an act of regaining personhood and agency. Herein lie is the importance of anonymity.

The hashtag Metoo movement has brought forth critical discussions regarding, anonymity. The movement has allowed spaces of support and solidarity to emerge creating a means of dealing with stories, memories and experiences of sexual harassment and violence suffered by people

of all genders. Now one example is fearless and chunky girl in unlimited girls. Paromita Vohra documentary unlimited girls opens with fearless or the narrators online persona, who is searching for love.

As she logs onto a site named all you need is love.com women who get it the viewers are greeted with a surprise. The site, unlike the heteronormative image that it portrays serves as a platform for women to don their alternate persona and converse with each other about love, life, politics, and feminism. The anonymity and wider reach provided by the internet and unlimited girls marks a new direction in feminist practices by bringing together women of different regions, different ideas and different aims.

Now, it is also important to mention that criticisms towards hashtag Metoo have pointed at it is ultra heteronous, the relegation of women with disabilities as outsiders. In the Indian context the hashtag Metoo movement has also come under scrutiny for it is classism and casteism. The hashtag Metoo movement also initiated important conversation about such constituency women. In India the movement encompassed the fields of academia and media specifically, cinema and journalism.

The movement is seen as initiating a new wave of feminist consciousness in India across different realms. In the process however, the constituency of this movement that is women and the idea of feminism have been contested by Dalit feminists, who have argued that the concept of sexual harassment in the workplace, on which the hashtag Metoo movement is built comes at the cost of erasing cost and promoting a savarna feminist ideology.

Questions about the hashtag Metoo persist. Whose storytelling is more visible? Does identity in terms of caste class and gender play a role in determining subject within the Metoo movement, how do we confront? The issues of who speaks for whom? Is solidarity achieved by acknowledging difference or by erasing, it in the Indian context the issue of class also becomes important.

Who has access to social media through smartphones is a question that becomes very important. In essence the hashtag Metoo movement in India has become a movement by and for the upper and middle classes. It shows that the understanding of sexual harassment has solely a result of

gender oppression will only reproduce caste-blind discourse and invisibilize the Dalit women and their experiences.

In case of Dalit women for whom going out or the public private binary is not a concern the Metoo's excessive focus on the public private binary automatically erases the Dalit women. So, the question then remains, who is this movement for and who it intends to represent? The hashtag Metoo movement in claiming solidarity and agency, not only ignores the factor of accessibility to digital platforms it also represents gender in a singular homogeneous term.

The crucial message of the hashtag Metoo movement should be that solidarity does not imply homogeneity; alliances can and should be made across differences, making heterogeneity a constructive and productive agent for change. Now, let us summarize today's lecture. Today we talked about two kinds of responses to gender-based violence that is, violence and the use of social media.

We saw how both the strategies have their benefits in terms of bringing together many people, but the question remained as to whether it was truly solidarity based or whether it eliminated differences among women and imposed homogeneity on them. In the next set of lectures, we will explore this aspect further through the issue of gender and labor. Thank you.

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