

Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues
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Lecture-29
Feminist Futures

Hello everyone, we are now at the concluding session of our course. Before concluding it, I wanted to actually wrap the whole session and summarize the course and also highlight the major points we have discussed so far. So, far we have learned many aspects from the course; we began with the concept of what is feminism, we learned that feminism is not man-hate it is about freedom.

For all those people who think that feminism is only about replacing patriarchy with matriarchy, it is a completely wrong idea. Historically feminism has evolved from the critical examination of inequality between the sexes to a more nuanced focus on the social and performative constructions of gender and sexuality. This is a far cry from claiming superiority.

Feminism's idea is not to replace one oppressive system with another, it demands freedom for all. At first glance feminism may seem only woman-centric because it incorporates the F of female and feminine within its terminology, but the answer to it is hierarchy. In a gendered society where men are assumed to reside higher than women and masculinity is considered superior to femininity being manly means assertive strong and courageous.

Everything that stands in contrast to the meek, weak and docile womanly nature which appears so evident in fairy tales. Hence like a girl has become a worldwide derogatory phrase it is often used against men in the army to chide them about their cowardice, we can see how this definition of being feminine includes not just women who are born of female sex but also men who are not manly.

Feminism confronts these stereotypes and surrounding femininity rather than being limited only to the identity category woman. At this point it is important to clarify that my understanding of men is not based on an overarching homogenization. I use it to refer to a constituent unit of patriarchy which exerts control over women, young and old men and also those belonging to other genders are having non-heterosexual preferences.

It is also rooted in caste and class. Feminism therefore it's not just about women, it is not about erasing men, it is about freedom and equality for all. The definition of feminism can change because it is based on historical and material lived realities perceptions and actions. Nivedita Menon in seeing like a feminist contemplates that feminism should continually question the multiple aspects of domination.

It does not have to reach any particular alternative model because that would mean an inversion of the present dominant system. Rather the act of questioning would enable feminism to adopt a subversive attitude towards the patriarchal modes and bring out the gaps and fissures which invest in gender domination by using those modes. It is in this awareness Menon argues that feminism's immediacy relevance and necessity lie.

Feminism today has gone beyond demanding mere legal reforms to end discrimination, it aims towards the emancipation of women, it includes issues such as public and private as gendered spaces. How women are subordinated within homes? The double burden of reproductive and productive labour, wage gap, workplace as a hierarchical space. Feminism in the era of social media and so on.

It challenges biological determinism the ascription of femininity and masculinity fixity of identity etcetera. Moreover, the constituency of feminist movement and thought have also undergone a drastic reformation. The participants and beneficiaries of feminism are no longer women alone; it includes LGBTQIA non-binary non-ablest and other anti-hegemonic groups. In fact, this is where the idea of gender as an intersectional category becomes crucial.

We mapped feminism in Indian historically context through the conceptions and constructions of women and women constructing themselves. In the process we looked at the historical juncture of social reformation and nationalism the themes of violence and labour and intersections of caste, class, religion, sexuality etcetera. 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. 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 indicate social reformation.

And since women's subordination was a stark reality reformation began with them. Raja Ram Mohan Roy eradicated the bad practices such as sati, child marriage etcetera, the new woman was modeled as an educated wife who would be perfect companion to the newly emerging bhadralok or gentleman. Now such companion and model kept the binaries of public domestic intact.

It did not question the hierarchies at all. The social reform however was designed only for the upper caste upper-class women. We took a look at the ideas propounded by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar and saw how crucial their contribution was to refine and redefine patriarchy as Brahmanical patriarchy. Phule proposed liberating the Shudras, atishudras and women from the slavery of Brahmanism stands in stark contrast to the upper caste reformers who focused on the issues concerning upper caste women such as sati, widow remarriage etcetera.

And completely neglected issues concerning lower caste women. Ambedkar encouraged self-respect among women; he argued that caste functions through endogamy and subordination of women's sexuality. He viewed Manu's turning of Brahminic idea of ideal womanhood that is exaltation or exalting the husband following pativrata ideology into state laws for being the perpetrator in enhancing and continuing a hierarchy by which marriage kinship and the degradation of women link structurally in reproducing graded inequality in society.

In Annihilation of caste, he presents intermarriage as the only real remedy to abolish caste. During the 1920s a non-Brahminical movement that was gaining prominence was the self-respect movement under EV. Ramaswamy Periyar, it was launched with a view to challenge the Brahminical system and creates a new social order of equality for the adidravidas. The 19th century not only saw the woman's cause at the center of social reformation and also saw the rise of women activists both as participants and as leaders.

The 1910-20 is credited with the first attempts at setting up all India women's organizations. We also saw different women's movements in India which either did not get included in mainstream Indian feminist movements or were ignored. We learned that when it comes to women's movements the very idea of woman is questioned and contested. To address these

concerns, we have explored different kinds of movements anti-patriarchal, ecological, anti-caste, Dalit feminist etcetera.

In all these cases women of different communities and classes were participants and they also contributed significantly to highlight how gender functions along with other customs and other systems? Post-independence period saw a transition women started talking about freedom in different ways as economic independence and right over their bodies. Unlike the social reformist assumption patriarchy as a system of oppression came to be questioned in the post-independence period.

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

The post-independence period brought about disillusionment about the idea of women's progress the promise made by and through the constitution in the form of development policies did not help a large group of women. That towards equality report revealed a dire situation for women of India. The non-white feminist movements in the West also contributed in propelling the changing sensibility in Indian feminism.

Due to international pressure the government started focusing on women's issues. As a result, we saw the birth of women's studies centers and departments. In this period there was also a shift in approach to gender. Instead of accepting the natural difference between men and women, Indian feminism started questioning the very edifice of those differences. Thus, the personal, the workspace everything came to be questioned.

Now along with class the impact of religion was also felt during this time through the Shah Bano case. These events showed that the situations of all women are not similar. Depending on the groups they belong to their experiences of patriarchy also vary. This was an important realization. With the reference to the theme of violence the question of body and women's right over it became crucial in Indian feminism.

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 it has different kinds of impacts for different groups of women.

We explored in detail the feminist concerns in the post-independence period pertaining to doubted deaths, marital rapes etcetera. It looked into the contributions made by women's organizations such as Manushi in bringing about significant social and legal awareness to politicize the personal. We also addressed the specificity of bodily violence through the issue of caste and religion.

We delved into the instances of custodial rapes, impact of personal laws, gang rapes to highlight the specificity of gender oppression on women of different categories. 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 over forms of violence. So, we have explored that aspect as well.

Moreover, we saw how counter violence often becomes a way to cope with it. Now we saw the very interesting development of feminist activism through social media also known as the hashtag Metoo movement as a response to violence against women. It highlighted issues of women's voices, nickname blaming, access to public space, right over their bodies, new spaces for solidarity and so on.

Finally, we talked about gender and labour, we looked at productive and reproductive labour and the class question. The feminist analysis of the sexual division of labours the distinct contributions and challenges of productive and reproductive labour for women and the problem of visible and invisible work. We have seen how the gender division of labour informs and impacts the private and the public spheres.

Such division of labour draws on the biological differences between men and women. However, as we have seen such presumptions do not always translate into reality. Women continue to do heavy domestic chores moreover women's labour outside the house is also

highly discriminated in terms of wage distribution. They tend to get jobs that are extensions of their domestic roles.

Women are also more likely to get selected for unskilled professions and they are paid less compared to men. We learned the huge setback women workers in textile industries faced because of industrialization. The gender disparity in labour became prominent even more during the liberalization phase with tendencies such as feminization of labour. We have looked in detail at the impact of globalization on labour as well.

While labour has remained central in Indian feminist analysis another aspect that also is largely invisible is the role of identity in impacting and restricting women's access to labour. So, we delved into caste and heteronormativity in understanding how they shape the contours of gender and labour. We have also explored the complexities of labour and agency through sex work all sorts of work that a domestic woman performs such as cooking, nursing, cleaning etcetera can be commercialized.

But sex performed outside the framework of marriage, lack social sanction. This is an important problem with regard to the social legitimacy of sex work. By blurring the boundary between husbands using women and non-husbands doing so as a sex worker is actually posing a very serious threat to the patriarchal institutions as family and marriage. The sex workers subvert the stable identity of woman as located within the material practices of the patriarchal heterosexual family.

What is considered appropriate desire is that which brings about lineage and property systems. Throughout her autobiography Nalini Jameela problematizes this issue. As we have discussed she says prostitution often practiced on the pretext of marriage is bad. She narrates how her client and she were forced to pass off for men and wife during their stay in lodges. The first occasion he came right on time, he bought me a glitzy sari and told me to change into it.

All this preparation was to make people think I was his wife. After that he got me a mangalasutra from a shop that sold gold-plated jewelry. On the other hand, work seen as an agential act through its proclamation of financial independence may in turn reproduce the castiest and classist stereotypes. We have also talked about how casteist classist assumptions

are imposed on Dalit women that perpetuate the positions and the notions of their sexual availability.

We discussed the matters highlighting the problematic of victimhood and agency, choice and complicit agency. Now agencies seen as an opposition to victimhood is often asserted to direct resistance. However, this is not the only way in which one can achieve agency. We also learned that methods such as negotiation may also prove to be agential. This is a significant epistemological contribution in terms of how feminist agency is conceptualized.

During the course of our study, we have gone through numerous books stories, films, cases and so on. We have also talked about theories of intersectionality difference, solidarity, feminist standpoint and so on. We learned that woman is not a monolithic category, it is important to recognize the differences among them. Moreover, gender often functions in conjunction with other structures of oppression such as caste, class etcetera.

This is where the idea of intersectionality comes in. The concepts of difference and intersectionality mark a shift from imposing homogeneity to the acknowledgment of difference in seeing how different groups of women are affected through different intersecting structures. Difference teaches us that not all women are similar, it is necessary to identify specificities that underlie these constructions.

Intersectionality or the study of intersecting structures of oppression provides the necessary methodology to look at difference and critically analyze it. Now you have to remember that all these aspects together constitute feminist thought and approach. And it is an ongoing practice we have also argued that the position of a feminist is neither restricted to women alone nor can it be restricted to any specific ontology.

Being a feminist is a conscious position that is achieved through political awareness and not just being born as a woman. It is a position that critically examines how the structure of gender works in tandem with other oppressive systems such as caste, class, religion and so on to create specific situations for different groups of women. So, what we are interested in is necessarily the process and not just the examples and outcome.

Moreover, we have also seen that there is no single category called woman. We theorize this with the notion of difference. Difference here once again does not mean separation or discrimination, it means the ability to identify how the groups are affected through different structures, it teaches us that not all women affected similarly by patriarchy and the specificity is to opt for a more holistic approach that would benefit a greater number of people.

What I tried through this course is to give you all a glimpse into what feminism in India broadly looks like. What are all the major movements were and what were the different kinds of strands. Now what I want you to do is to think of this as a starting point. From here it should go forward. As I said feminism is an ongoing movement and we have seen it begun with women but it now incorporates many other identities.

It becomes possible because at the root of feminism is the notion of emancipation for all. So, think of feminism and this course as just the beginning because as Nivedita Menon writes in seeing like a feminist it comes slowly feminism does, but it just keeps on coming. Thank you.

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