

**Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues**  
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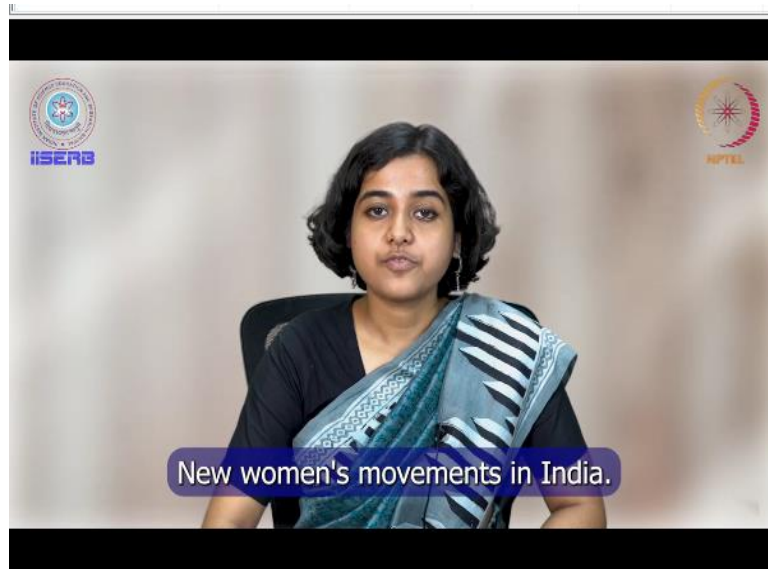
**Lecture-03**  
**Making of Indian Feminism-Part 2**

Hello everyone, in the previous lecture we looked at the pre and the post-independence phases of Indian feminism especially in the 18th and 19th century. We saw how women's progress was made an important part of the social reformist movements. The social reformers took up the questions of sati etcetera to show that India is capable of getting rid of its bad traditions and emerged as an independent nation.

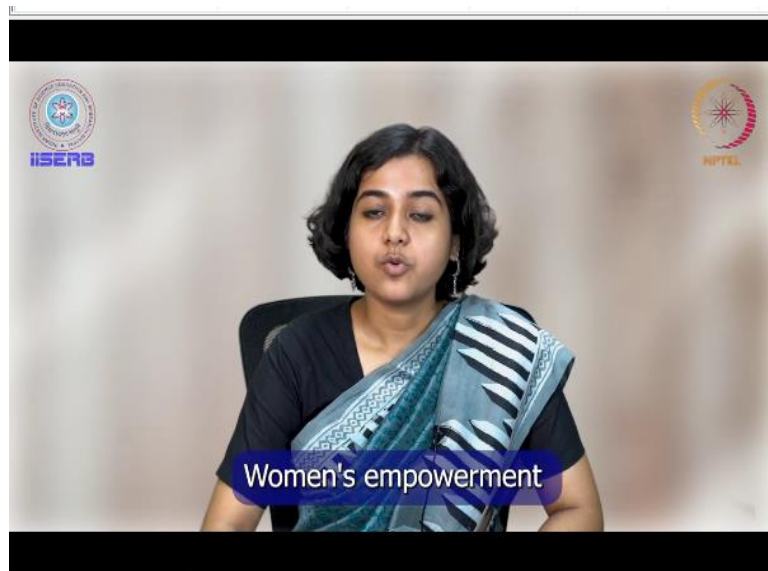
If you have any confusion, you can go back to the previous lecture and go through the points once again. The important thing that you have to remember is that social reformation did not question the gender hierarchy. Even though education was made part of the reformist project it was to make the women better wives and mothers. We will discuss this new woman in the next lecture.

Also, important to note that these issues and the way they were dealt with changed later on. Women started talking about labour and body; both these aspects will also be explored in the later modules. If you have any other questions, you can take a look and clear all your doubts. Today we will talk about some other aspects of feminist movement in the post-independence period.

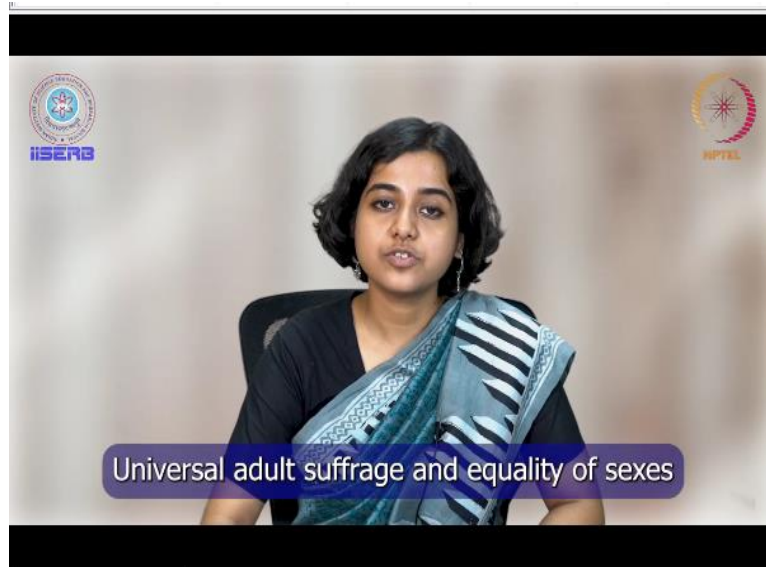
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The 1970s and 80s saw the emergence of new women's movements in India.  
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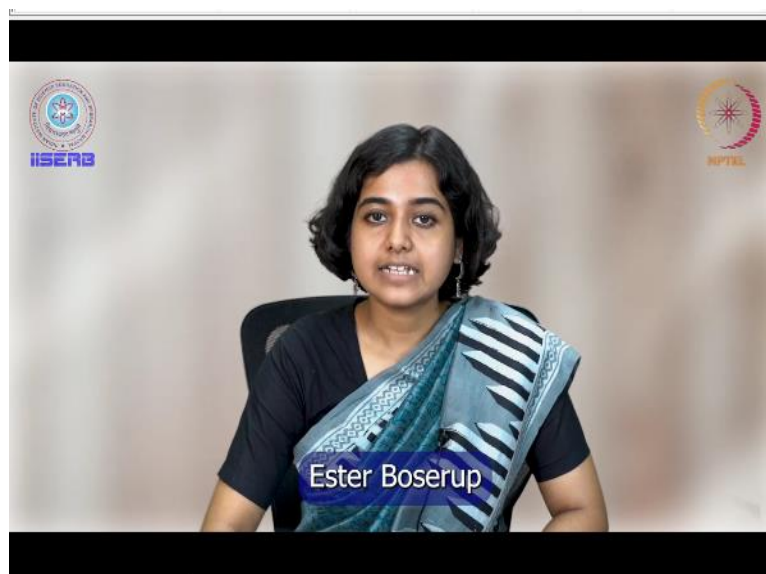
In the 1950s women's empowerment was made an intrinsic component of the nation building project. Mainstream women's movement forged an alliance with the Indian National Congress during the freedom struggle which grew under Gandhi's leadership.  
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The new Republic endorsed Universal adult suffrage and equality of sexes as a fundamental right. This gave out the feeling that the nation had finally resolved gender disparity. In other words, it was believed that all the battles were won. This assumption however faced a huge setback in the 1970s. Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan argue that the events at the international level brought new consciousness to the Indian scenario.

For example, during the 1960s Western countries focused on family as a site of women's oppression. There were radical feminist initiatives that challenged sexual objectification of women rape and violence against them. Parallel to this a series of questions were raised about women and other axes of inequalities.

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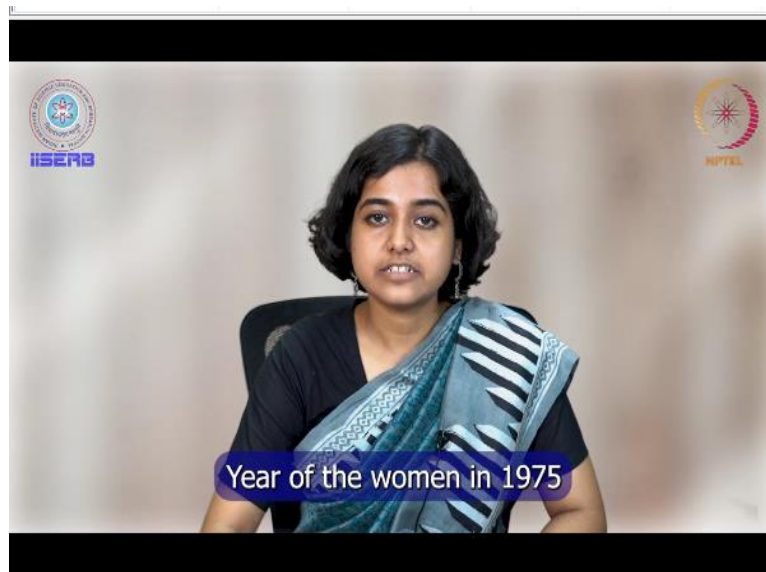
Ester Boserup notes over the work.

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Women's role in Economic Development published in 1970 focused on debates about Economic Development and the women's question in the non-western societies.

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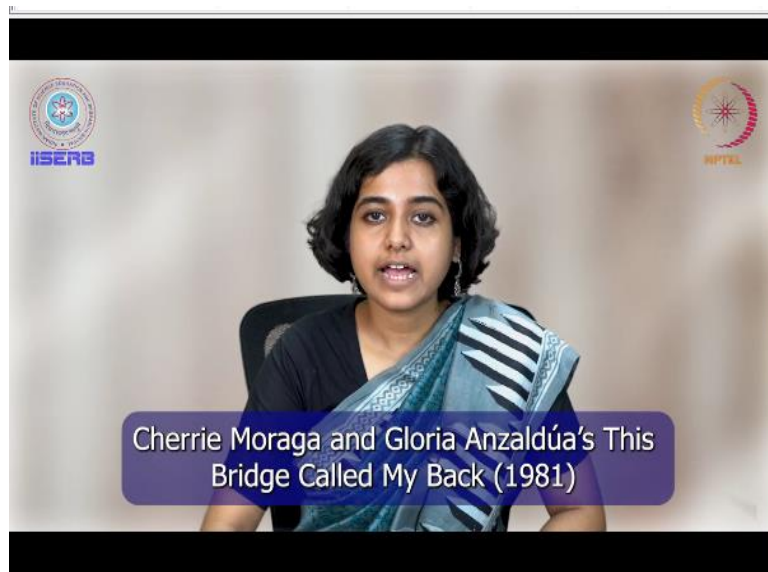
United Nations declared the year of the women in 1975 which resulted in the mobilization of women worldwide leading to a decade of the women. Three international conferences were organized by the UN to commemorate this milestone.

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One in Mexico in 1975, another in Copenhagen in 1980 and the third one in Nairobi in 1985. The 1970s also saw the rise of black Latina and Chicano feminisms that questioned the racial supremacy of Western feminism.

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Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back* emerged as a reaction to the racism of white feminism. This book celebrates the development of solidarity among feminists of colour.

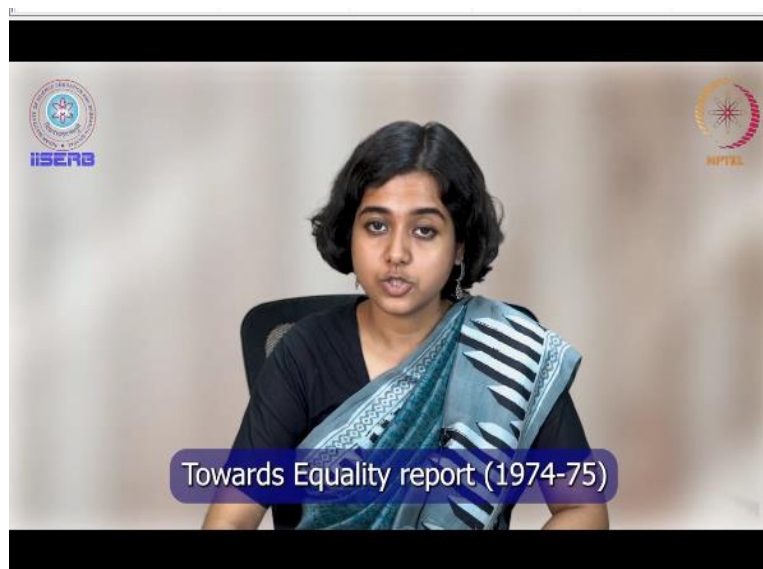
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The Black Feminist Statement published in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective highlighted not only the uniqueness of black women's experiences vis-a-vis white women but also with respect to black men. So, we can see how there was a global move and necessity towards exploring alternative identities and questions within feminism. These sentiments impacted the feminist movements at home as well.

In the 1950s the Indian state had opted for conventional models of development based on the models of developed countries.

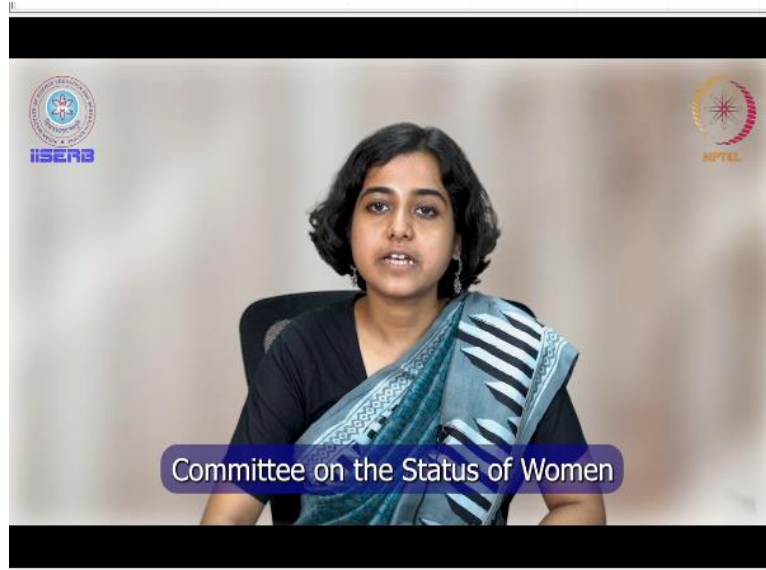
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But the failure of those models was visible with the towards equality report.

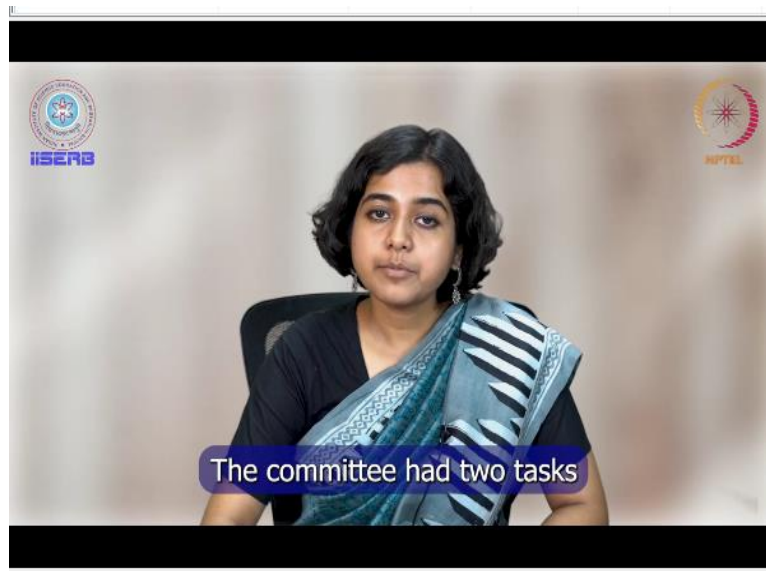
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This report was prepared by the committee on the status of women. In 1971 at the urging of the United Nations the Ministry of Education and social welfare appointed this committee to look into women's condition in India after independence. The purpose was to prepare a report for the international women's year to be held in 1975. The report which was published in 1974 and 75 on the status of women in India also known as the towards equality report highlighted that the condition of women has worsened since 1911.

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The committee had two tasks.

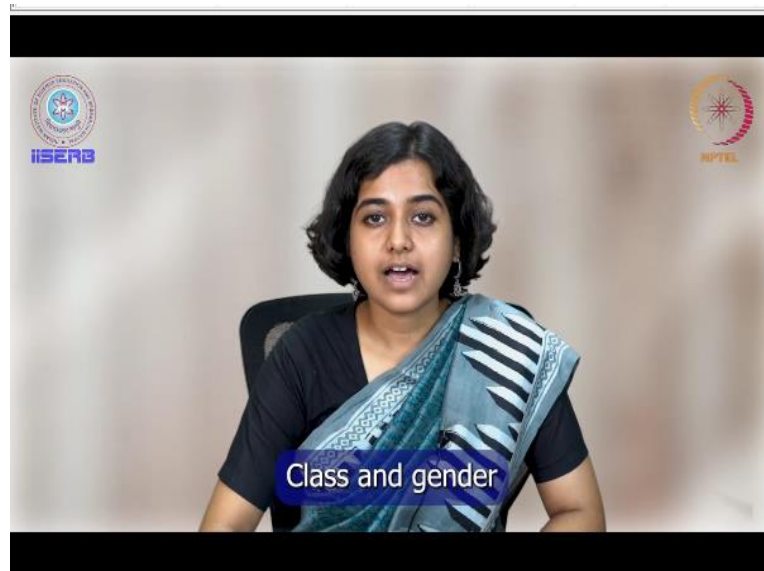
One to examine the constitutional, legal and administrative provisions that have been a bearing on the social status of women their education and their employment.

Two, to assess the impact of these provisions.

The committee concluded that there was an increasing marginalization of women in the economy and society. The CSWI report towards equality found demographic trends of declining sex ratio, disparities in the life expectancy and death rates between men and women. And the difficulties involved in women's access to literacy, education and livelihood. It was of the view that the Indian state had failed in its constitutional responsibility of gender equality.

The growing gender disparity had in fact caused relative isolation and discrimination of middle-class women. New questions were raised on women's education, employment and women's right over their bodies. The three major areas that mainstream Indian feminism in the post-independence era focused on are recognition that the personal is the political, taking up issues of class and gender.

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And thirdly the establishment of women's study centers. The purpose of these centers was to integrate research and life. During the 1980s women's studies was established in institutions.

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Such as SNTD, ICSSR, Institute of Social Studies Trust.

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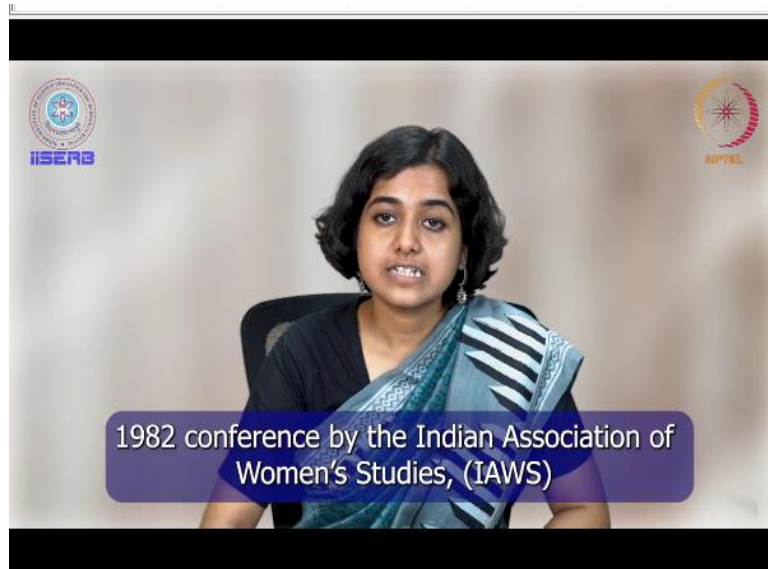


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The Center for Women's Development Studies and the Anveshi Research Center for Women's Studies. In 1983 Madhurisha the chairperson of university grants commission urged all universities to incorporate women's studies in their research and teaching. As a result, women's study centers were established in various universities; their syllabi were reformed to include women's writings and issues.

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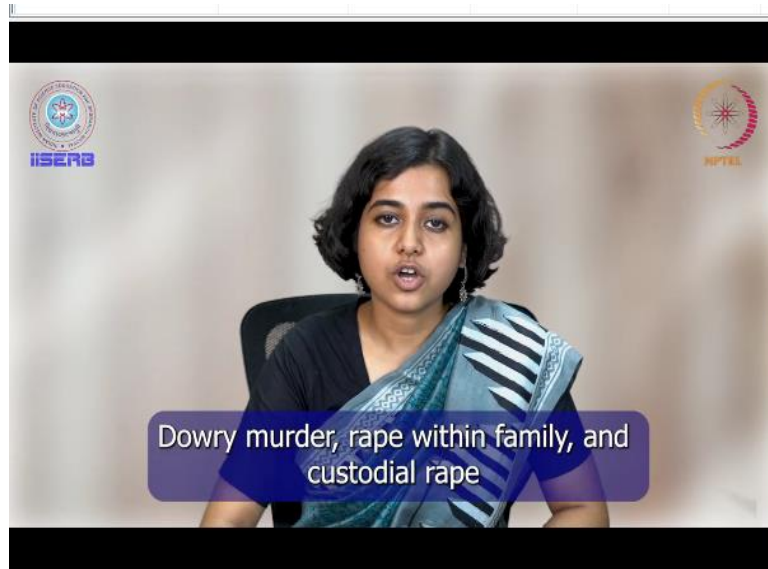
A major women's studies conference was organized in 1982 by the Indian association for women's studies also known as IAWS. Which addressed issues such as health, communalism, culture, environment, survival strategies, public policies, globalization etcetera.

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By 1986 when the new policy of Education was finalized it included women's equality and empowerment and also highlighted the importance of women's studies centers.

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The realm of the personal and the political was put forth through issues of dowry murder, rape within family and custodial rape. All of which highlighted that body does not merely belong to an individual; it is a consequence of several social familial economic and oppressive machinery of the state in action. Debates on rape and demands of his legal remedy resulted in further complicating the notion of justice for women.

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Samita Sen in her article towards a feminist politics points out that without political will or an enhancement in women's ability to claim and assert legal rights, laws existed only on paper. Hence women's groups of 1980 such as Manushi focused on providing service to individual women to make them aware of the laws.

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An interesting fact about Manushi is that the term was coined by Madhu Kishwar and Ruth Vanita for their journal. Manushi a journal about women and society in 1978. Since its establishment Manushi has actively contributed to the academic discussions on gender through publications and has also tried to build a bridge between academia and activism. This period thus marked the women's realization of rights.

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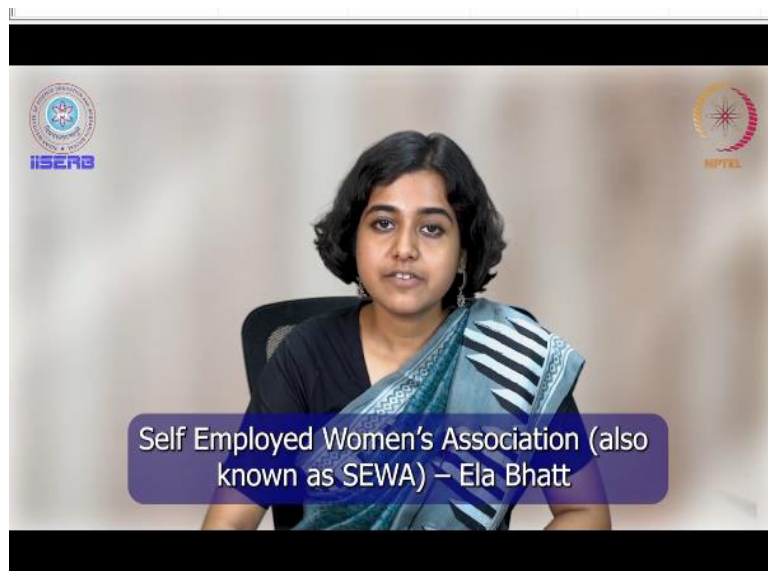
Feminist class consciousness brought a revolutionary change in the way women's work and women in the workplace were perceived. The gender inequality at the workplace the double burden of labour took front seat in feminist arguments.

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The Shahada movement was organized by feminists for the landless labourers in 1972.  
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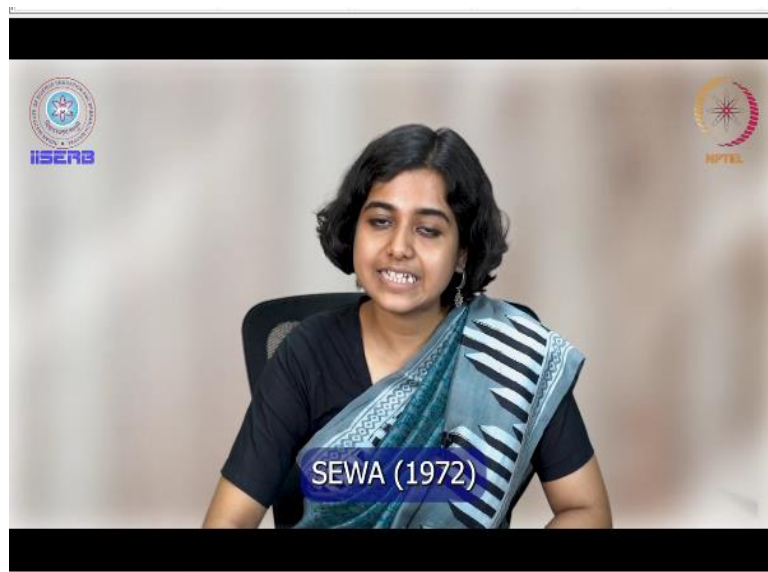
Ela Bhatt self-employed women's association also known as SEWA focused on gender and poverty related issues.  
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And the women's organization Progressive Organization of Women also known as POW presented feminist critique of radical leftism and gender oppression.

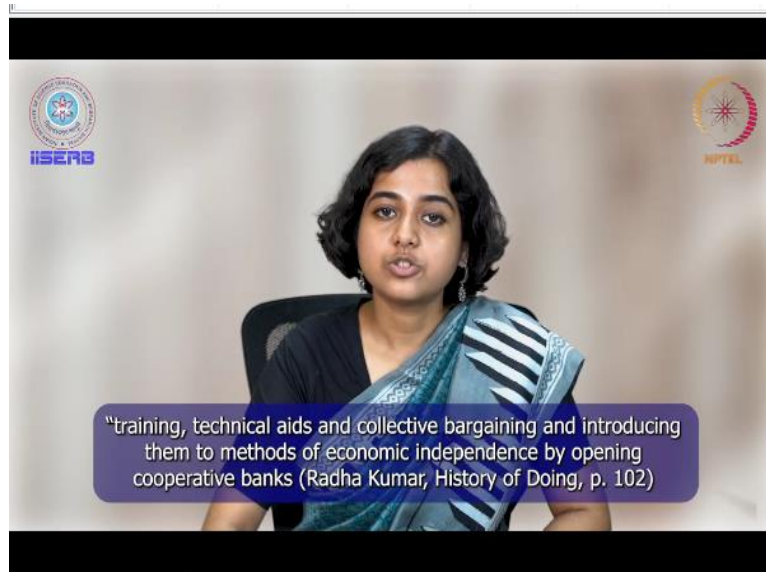
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Formed in 1972 by Ela Bhatt SEWA was part of TLA or textile labour association in Ahmedabad. SEWA aimed at organizing urban poor women and attempted to change their working conditions including the lowliest of the workers, the rag because SEWA focused on women who worked from home and faced innumerable harassments from the authorities, their labour was not recognized as socially useful.

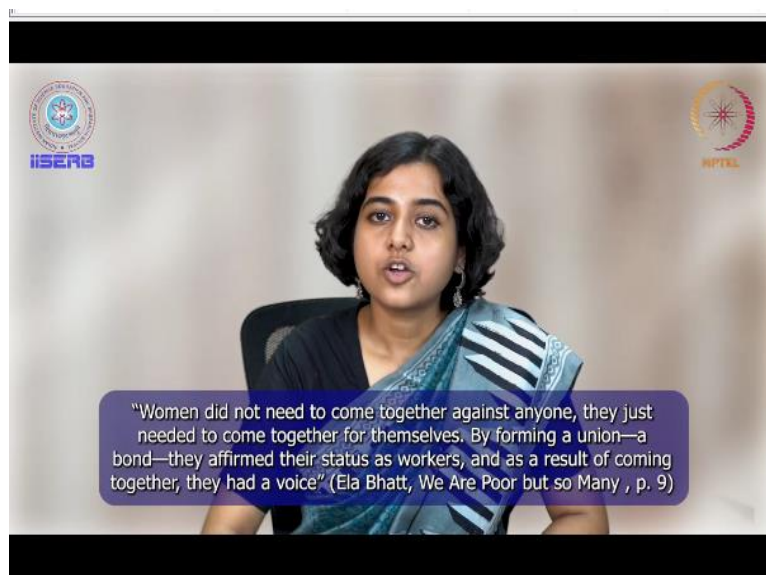
And hence they were deprived of regular employment and welfare benefits available to workers in organized sectors.

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SEWA became one such organization to improve their condition through training, technical aids and collective bargaining and introducing them to methods of economic independence by opening cooperative banks.

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As Ela Bhatt elaborates women did not need to come together against anyone, they just needed to come together for themselves by forming a union a bond they affirmed their status as workers and as a result of coming together they had a voice. We are poor but so many like Ester Boserup makes crucial intervention in many ways in terms of historiography where the dominant histories erase the struggles of lower-class women.

And in terms of methodology by establishing the link between gender and class; also, in terms of conceptualizing resistance by emphasizing on the collective as the way to gain assertion and

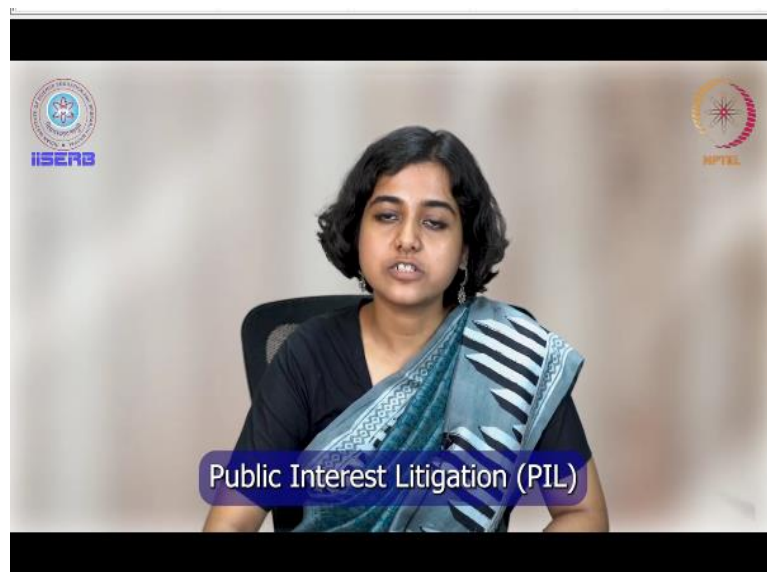
autonomy. The question of class was also explored in terms of access to labour and the disparity of wages along with in terms of sexual harassment in workplace.

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The milestone event in this respect was the VISHAKA guidelines in 1997. At the backdrop of the Bhavri Devi rape case which I will discuss in detail in the next classes.

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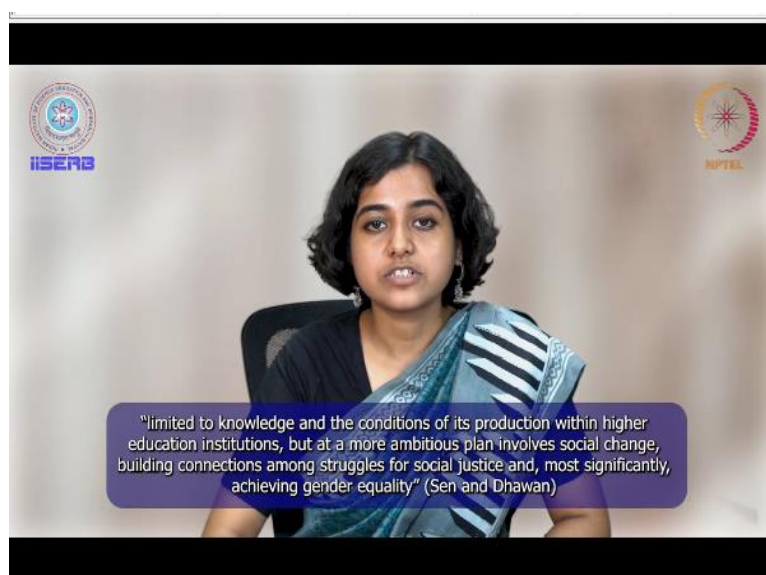
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Various women's groups laid by Naina Kapoor and her organization Sakshi filed public interest litigation to enforce the fundamental rights of working women under articles 14, 19 and 21 of the constitution of India. It is considered to be one of the most influential laws impacting women. The VISHAKA guidelines recognize sexual harassment in workspace in both physical and sexual terms.

Towards equality report also brought the urgency to make the nation more gender sensitive. As a result, 33 women study centers in universities across the country emerged with a view to engage in research and activism. Focusing on women and poverty, connecting women's movement with building Indian feminism as a theoretical category.

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The emergence of women's studies in India was not just limited to knowledge and the conditions of its production within higher education institutions but at a more ambitious plan involves social change, building connections, among struggles for social justice and more significantly achieving gender equality. This issue-based mapping highlights the vast area of women's issues that Indian feminism has addressed.

Through political agendas, movements and theoretical ventures Indian feminism has played a vital role in bringing about a radical change in the understanding of gender in the social and cultural spheres. Such presumed homogenization of Indian women however came to be challenged in the 1980s with the Shah Bano's case and the debate over personal law.

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Personal law has been defined by Radha Kumar as a curious conjoining of different family laws of different religious communities.

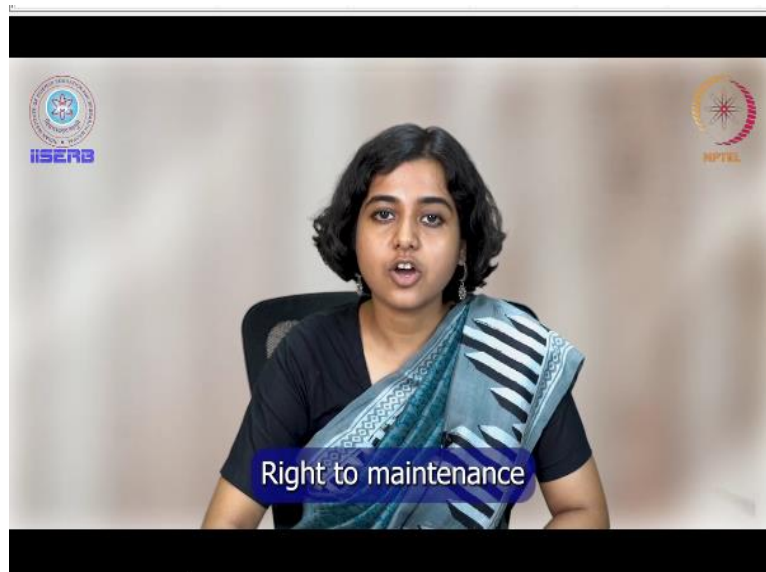
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Shah Bano's case claiming maintenance from her husband after her divorce garnered mass attention with the Supreme Court judgment.

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Granting Shah Bano's demand of the right to maintenance the Supreme Court held that section 125 of the criminal procedure code which entitled destitute, deserted or divorced women support from their husbands provided they were not destitute themselves, could cut across the barriers of religion. Considering how unjustly women have been treated in all communities.

This judgment thus assumed control and superiority over Muslim personal law where a husband was supposed to pay maintenance to the wife only for three months after divorce. This control was further enhanced in the judgment which urged the government to actually frame a



uniform civil court for all citizens of India. As a result, what ensued was a countless number of debates from Muslim organizations, feminists and political parties.

The uniform civil court represented national integrity at the cost of religious majoritarianism. The Shah Bano's Judgment along with the Ram Janmbhumi agitation in Uttar Pradesh in 1984 was perceived by Muslim communities as a threat to their particularity. Feminists such as Madhu Kishwar criticized the judgment for bringing in religion in what was primarily a women's rights issue.

The ever-increasing threat of Hindu majoritarianism created a faction within feminists where a committee for Muslim women's rights restricted the entry of non-Muslim feminists. Consequently, autonomous feminist groups realized that their demand for the implementation of uniform civil court ensuring women's rights as citizens of a modern secular state carried the threat of erasing communal and religious specificities. It seemed like an enforced entity.

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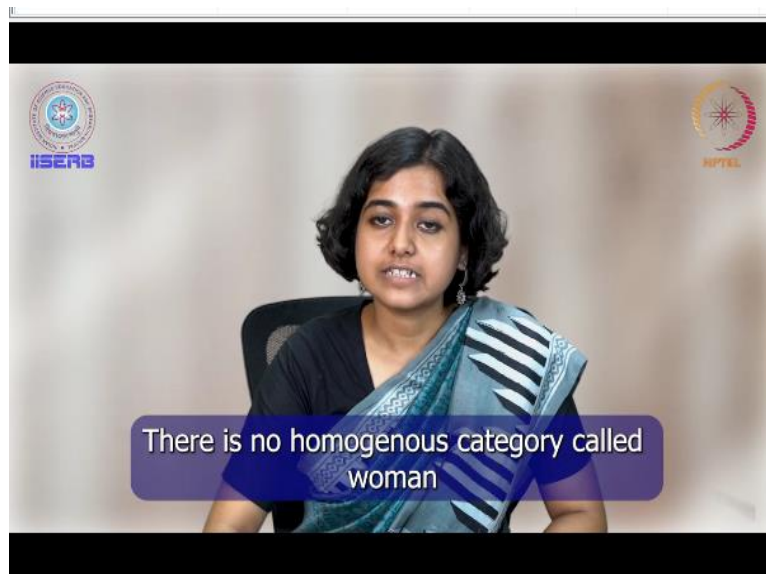
Kumkum Sangari in her seminal article politics of diversity, religious communities and multiple patriarchies has highlighted that the association of personal law with religious communities as proclaimed by pro-uniform civil court debate accepted religion as a single axis of diversity. She maintains that religious communities were in fact products of and carried within them the immense internal diversity based on cultures and patriarchies which the state ordained a uniform civil code would strategically ignore and erase. The Shah Bano's case thus brought forth three major realizations for Indian feminists.

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First, rights and religion are not contradictory realms of debate. In fact, rights of women could be defined by the religious communities they belong to.

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Which leads to the second point that there is no homogeneous category called woman or Indian woman. Women of India are in fact differentiated by communities' classes, casts and so on. Therefore, any definition of rights needs to accommodate this difference.

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And lastly women's issues cannot be approached from a single form of patriarchy. As Sanghari's article goes on to suggest feminists need to recognize multiple forms of patriarchies affecting different women in different ways. Now let us take a brief glance at what we learned in this lecture. The post-independence period brought about disillusionment about the idea of women's progress.

The promise made by and through the constitution and in the form of development of women did not help a large group of women 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 of Indian feminism; due to international pressure the government started focusing on women's issues.

As a result, we saw the birth of women's study 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 edifices of those differences. Thus, the personal, the workspace everything came to be questioned. Along with the class the impact of religion was also felt during the time through the Shah Bano's case.

These events showed that the situations of all women are not similar; depending on the groups they belong to the experiences of women and patriarchy also varies. This was an important realization. In the next lecture we will discuss the relevance of the specificity of identity in detail. Thank you.

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