

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

**Lecture-06**  
**Dalit Women's Activism**

Hello everyone.

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:24)**



In the previous video we learned about the important contributions made by anti-caste movements in reorienting gender and Dalit women's participation.

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:31)**



(Refer Slide Time: 00:36)



We discussed the roles played by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar in promoting Dalit women's cause in terms of education, marriage, labour, choice and so on. Two important observations that emerged from this lecture are women or Indian women in fact are not a homogeneous entity based on their caste identities women face patriarchal oppression differently. And therefore, patriarchy needs to be revised to incorporate not just the difference in terms of gender but also in terms of caste, class etcetera.

In today's lecture we will talk about the caste gender debates in the post-independence period and the emergence of autonomous Dalit women's organizations. Before going into the history, I would like to tell you all briefly about the contributions of Dalit feminism.

**(Refer Slide Time: 01:26)**



One of the biggest contributions of Dalit women's activism has been to redefine patriarchy as Brahmanical patriarchy.

**(Refer Slide Time: 01:36)**



This recognition has proved that the oppression of Indian women is not one dimensional.

**(Refer Slide Time: 01:44)**



Uma Chakravarti defines Brahmanical patriarchy as I quote,  
A set of rules and institutions in which caste and gender are linked, each shaping the other where women are crucial in maintaining the boundaries between castes.

**(Refer Slide Time: 02:01)**



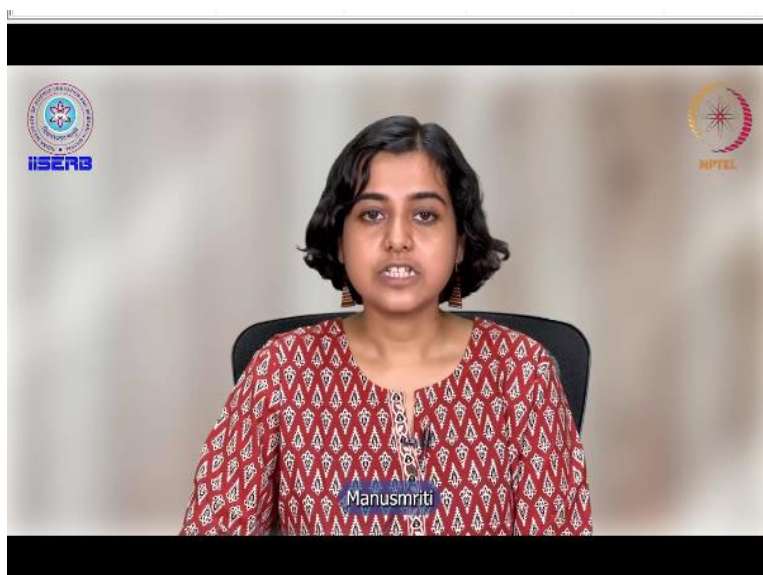
**(Refer Slide Time: 02:06)**



Patriarchal quotes in this structure ensure that the caste system can be reproduced without violating the hierarchical order of closed endogamous circles. Each distinct from and higher and lower than the others. Further, Brahminical quotes for women differ according to the status of the caste group in the hierarchy of castes with the most stringent control over sexuality reserved as a privilege for the highest castes.

And finally, it incorporates both an ideology of chaste wives and pativrata women who are valorized and a structure of rules and institutions by which caste hierarchy and gender inequality are maintained through both the production of consent and the application of coercion.

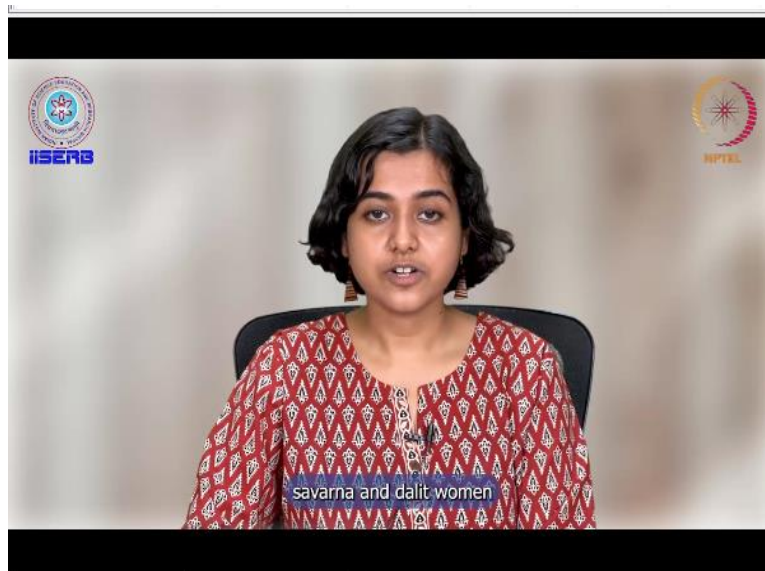
**(Refer Slide Time: 02:54)**



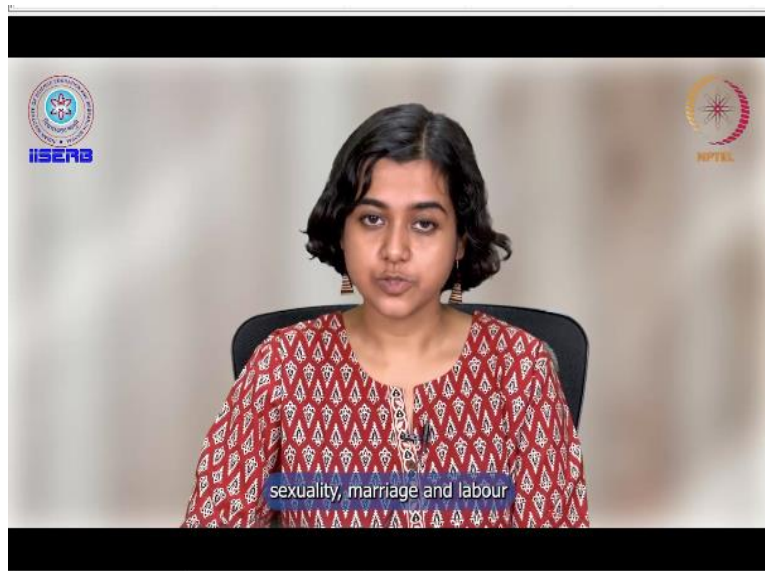


quoted in the text such as the Manusmriti the ideologies of Brahmanical patriarchal structures are integrated into the caste system.

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:04)**

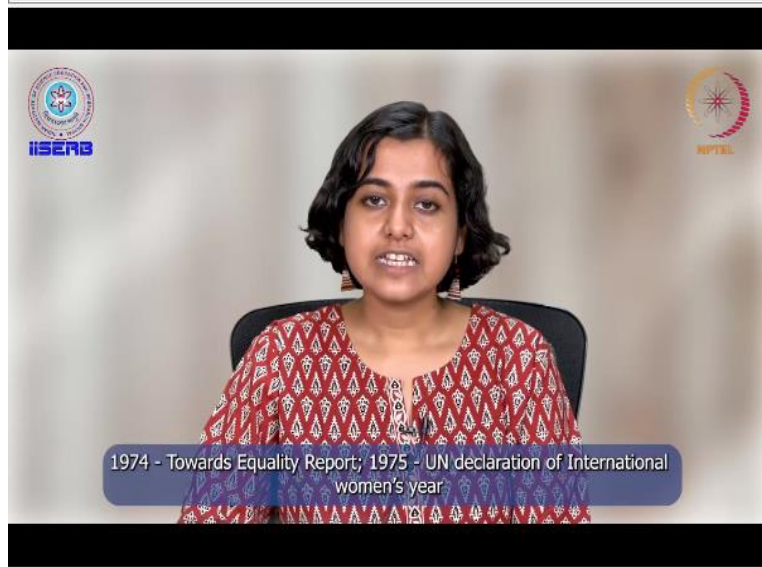


**(Refer Slide Time: 03:07)**



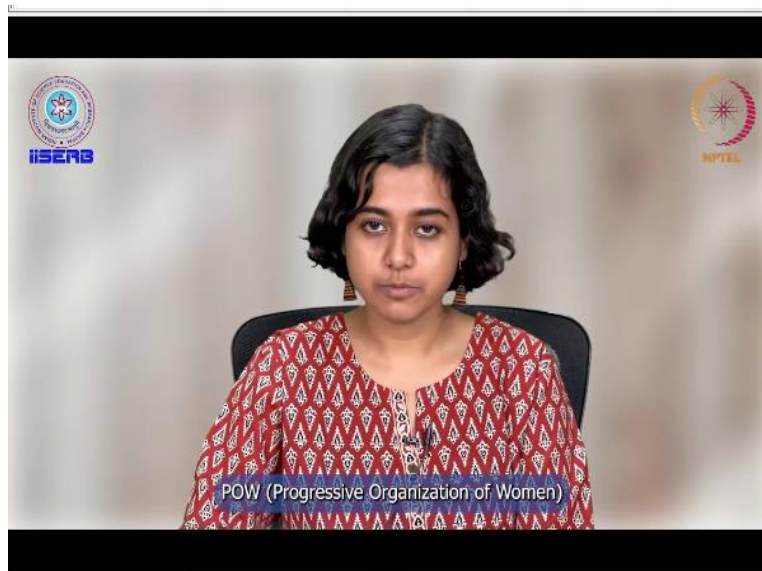
It sets different sets of rules for Savarna and Dalit women in terms of sexuality marriage and labour. Interpreting patriarchy in the form of Brahminical patriarchy brings about a revolutionary change because it shows how different categories of oppressive characteristics affect different groups of women differently. This mission will become very crucial for our understanding in future as well. Now let me talk briefly about the post-independence phase.

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:39)**



As I have mentioned in the earlier lecture the 1974 towards equality report and the 1975 UN declaration of international women's year saw the rise of several feminist groups.

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:48)**



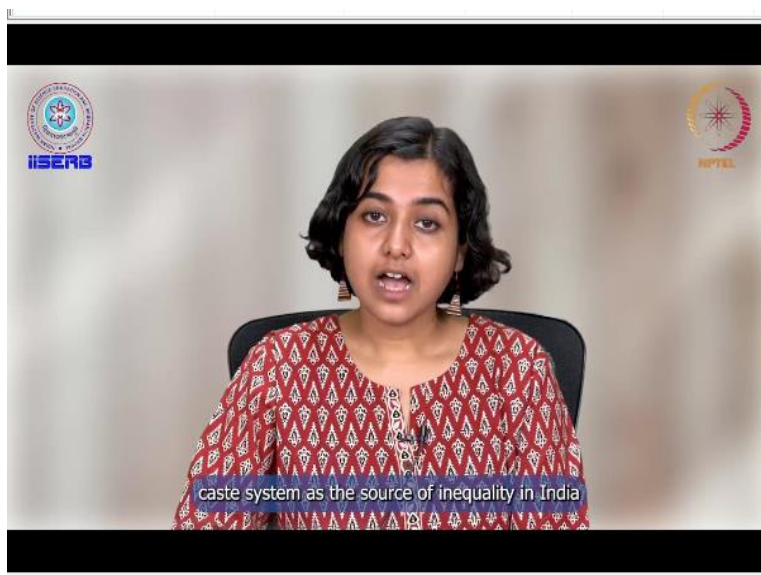
Among whom POW are progressive organization of women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 03:53)**



And MSSD or Mahila Samta Sainik Dal are notable. If you want to brush up your memory you can go back to the earlier video and take a look again. Now though the manifesto stressed the sexual oppression of women as did the POW it is analysis of women's oppression was radically different from the POWs. The MSSD or Mahila Samta Sainik Dal saw religion as a major agent in the oppression of women as well as Dalits.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:23)**



And the caste system as the source of inequality in India.

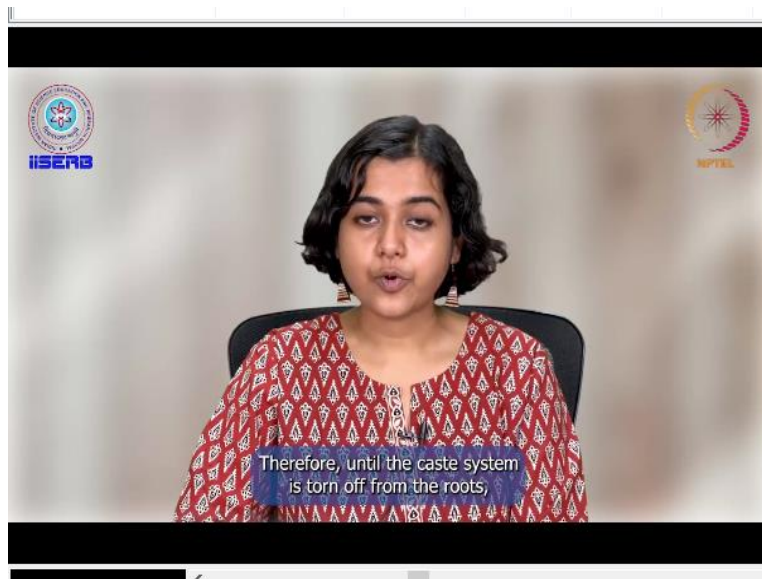
**(Refer Slide Time: 04:30)**





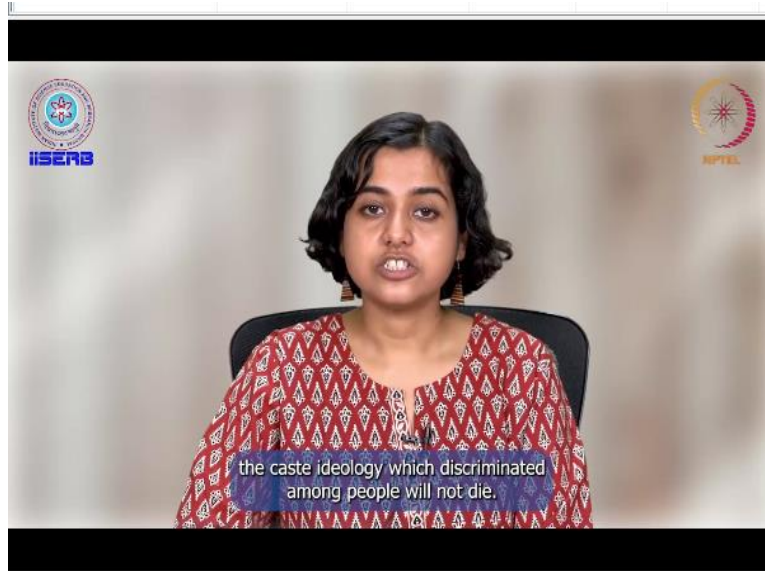
MSSD says people are labeled by their caste and crippled and enslaved.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:34)**



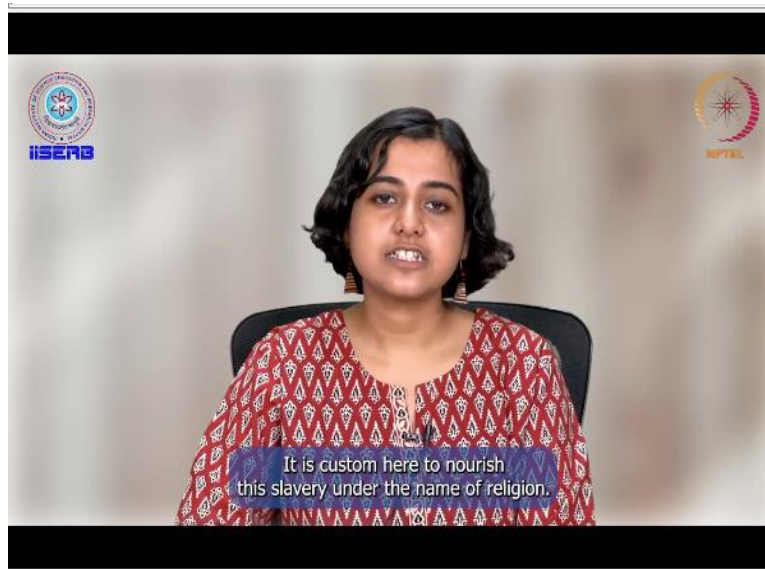
Therefore, until the caste system is torn up from the roots.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:38)**



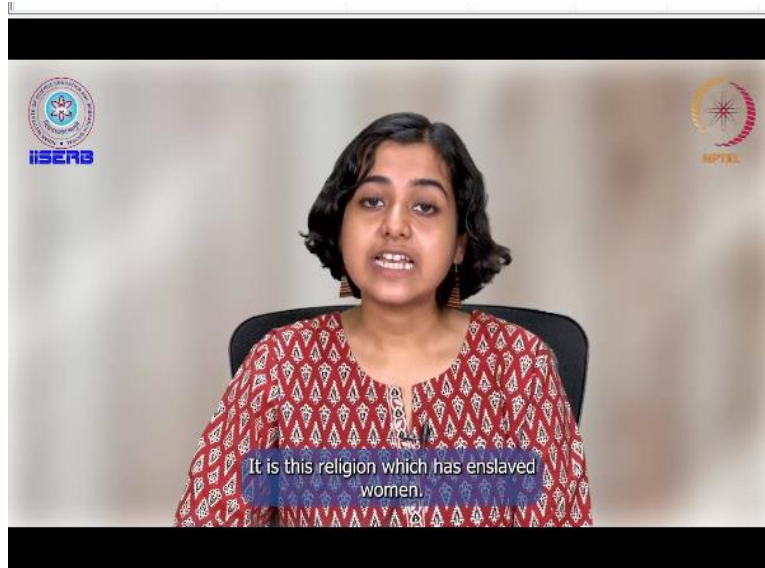
The caste ideology which discriminated among people will not die.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:42)**



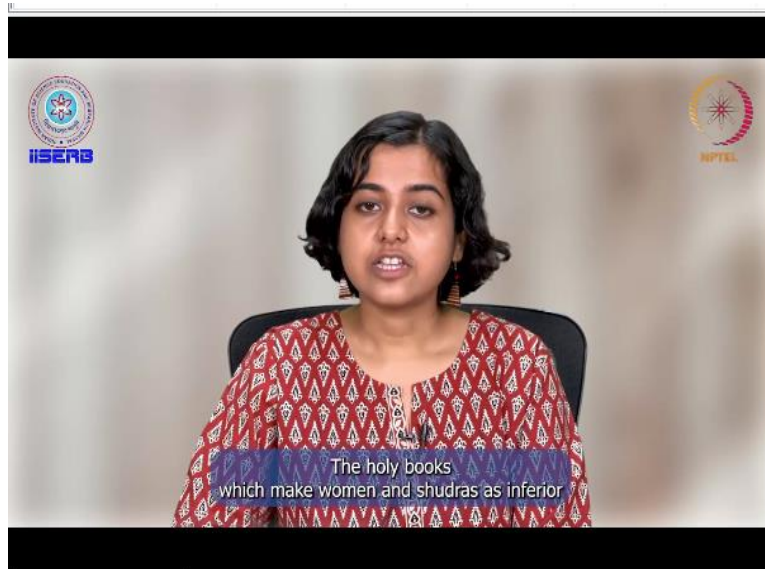
It is custom here to nourish the slavery under the name of religion.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:46)**



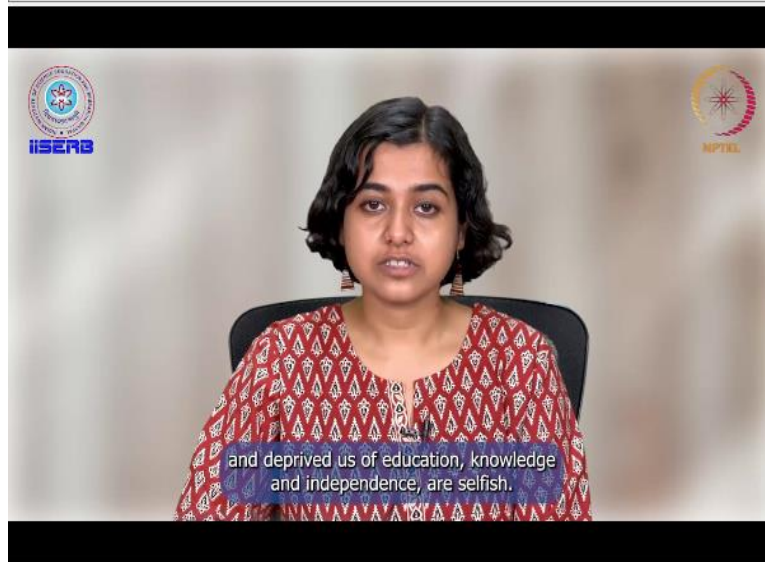
It is this religion which has enslaved women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:49)**



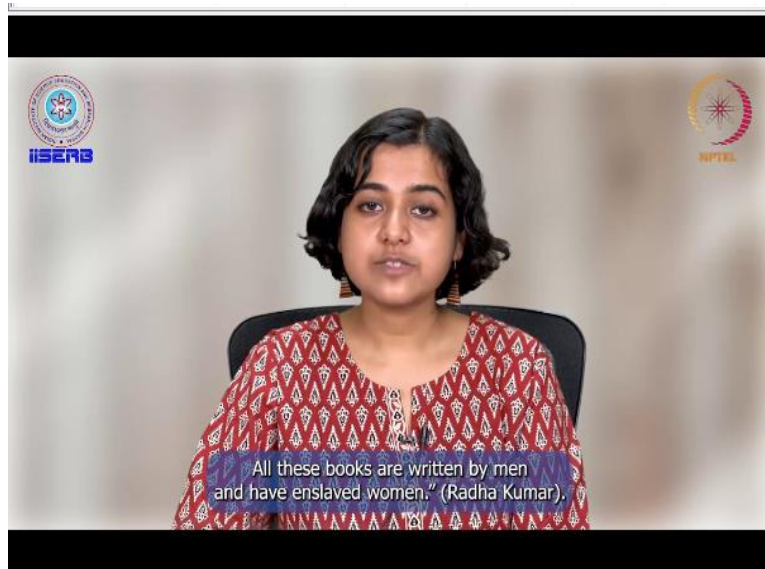
The holy books which make women and shudras inferior.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:54)**



And deprived us of education, knowledge and independence are selfish.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:59)**



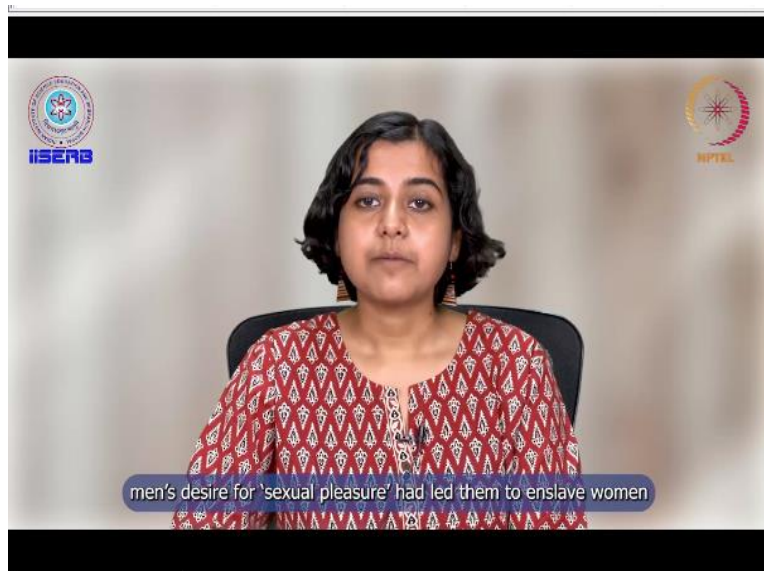
All these books are written by men and have enslaved women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:05)**



The POW for example felt that all forms of male domination were based on women's economic dependence on men.

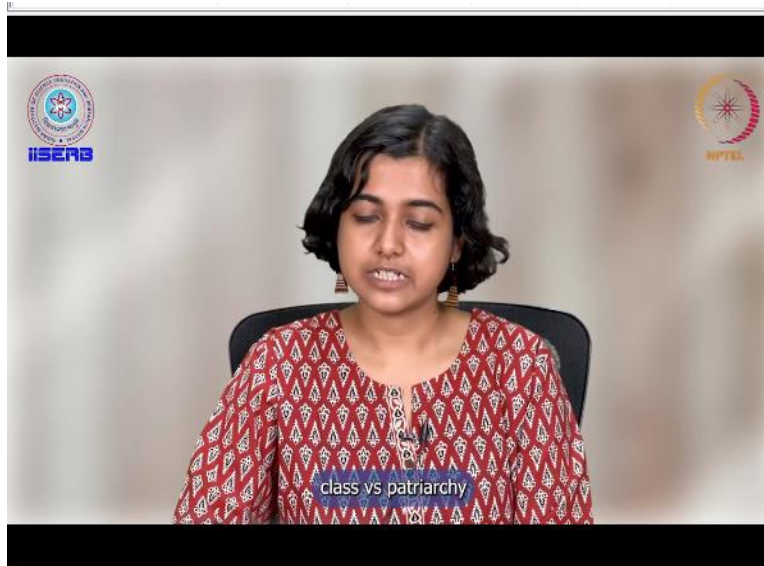
**(Refer Slide Time: 05:13)**



Whereas the MSSD felt that men's desire for sexual pleasure has led them to enslave women. The left-based feminist groups in the 1980s had depended largely on class versus patriarchy discourse.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:25)**

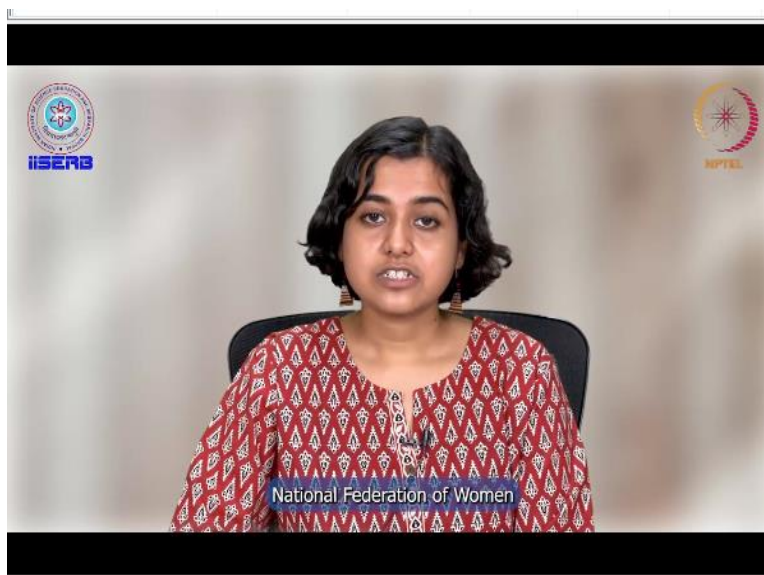




Mainstream feminism at this point was torn with the issues of violence on women.

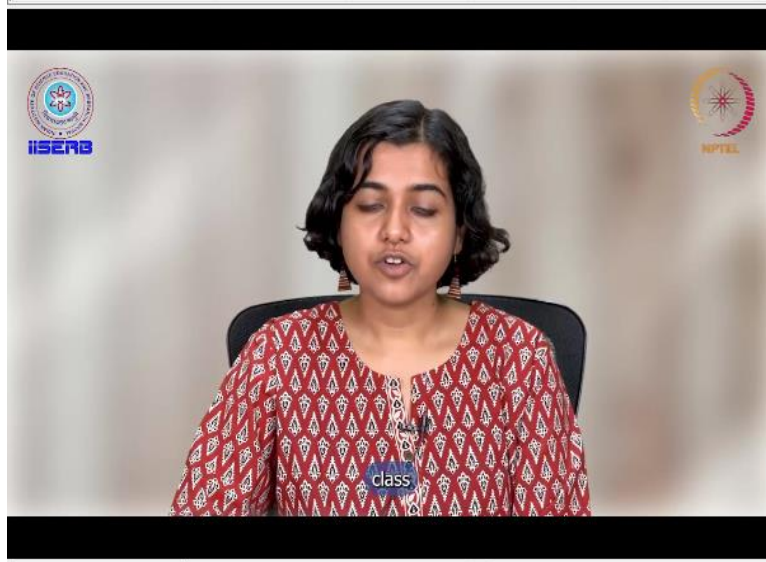
There was a succession of cases such as the Mathura rape case, the Bhanwari devi rape case and so on. These cases became important in feminist discussions with reference to violence. Bhanwari devi rape case created a huge approach among feminists and autonomous groups.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:53)**

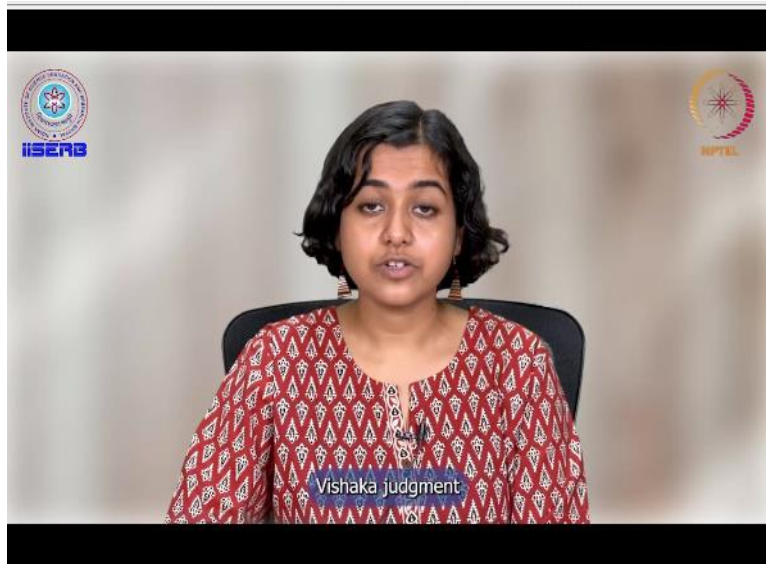


While the National Federation of Women looked at the rape in terms of class.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:56)**



**(Refer Slide Time: 06:00)**

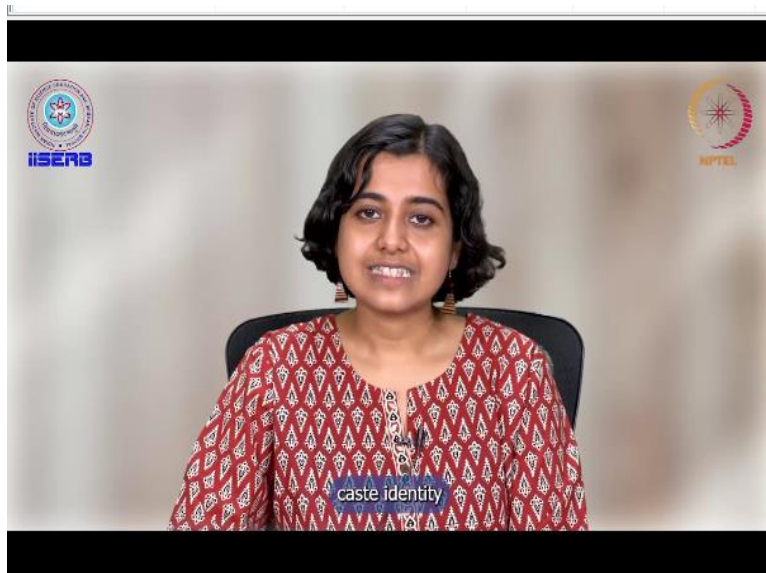


Especially in case of Bhanwari devi's case which led to the Vishakha judgment regarding women's safety rights at workplace and which we have discussed in an earlier lecture.

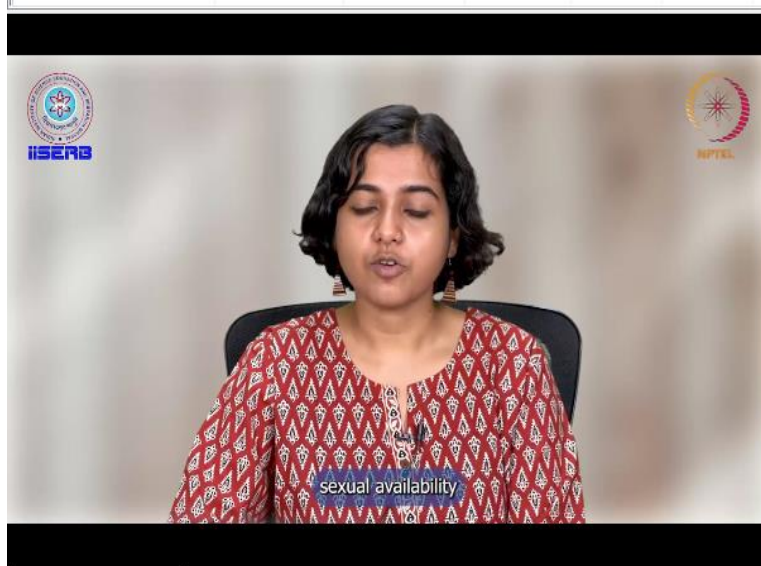
**(Refer Slide Time: 06:08)**



And also the right over body a major point that went missing is the caste identity.  
**(Refer Slide Time: 06:12)**

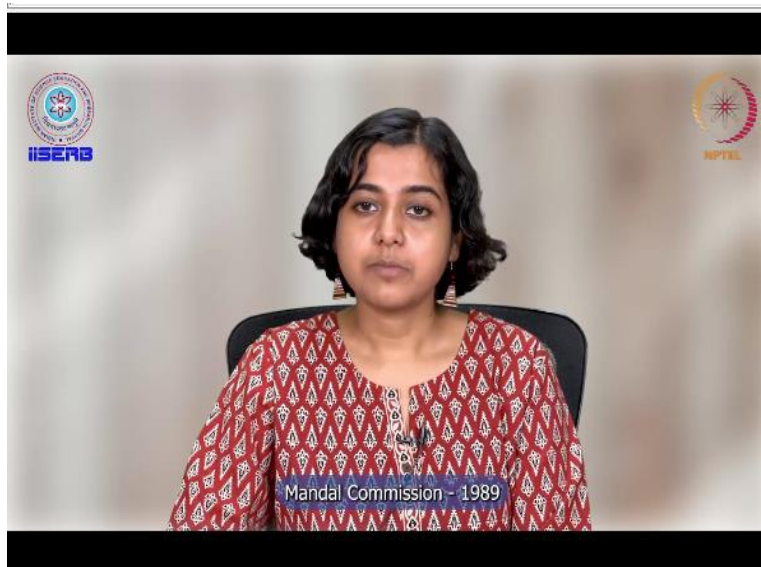


Dalit women on the other hand have pointed out how Dalit women's rape in public sphere is a way to undermine the masculinity of Dalit men.  
**(Refer Slide Time: 06:27)**



While simultaneously proving the sexual availability of the lower caste women who participate in social work outside their domestic sphere. We will discuss these cases in detail in the coming lectures.

**(Refer Slide Time: 06:46)**



A major event that broadcast right into the face of modern India was the recommendations of the Mandal Commission which were implemented by VP Singh in 1989. In protest to the reservation recommended by the Mandal Commission the Savarna Elite students and female students especially raised hue and cry about merit and employed husbands. Their active protests proved that every citizen of India is equally affected by the question of caste.

Hence taking the caste issue and posing it as responsibility of solely the lower caste or Dalit people was no longer a solution. The anti-Mandal protest drew attention to new ways in which caste is reproduced in urban India.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:27)**



The Women's Reservation Bill in 1993 further solidified this argument by pointing out the mainstream feminism's sovereignization of women and their ignorance towards caste and religion-based minorities. According to the Bill a random one-third of village council leader or Sarpanch positions in gram Panchayat are reserved for women. The fear raised by Dalit women and Dalit feminist's articulations regarding this Bill is that this reservation would simply put the educated upper-caste women advantage point.

Dalit women due to their lack of skill and education would automatically be discarded. So, the emancipation of women would thus fail to apply for all women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 08:17)**





Hence there has been a demand for a quota within quota which is a further reservation within the 33% reservation for OBC and Muslim women. It is in this backdrop that autonomous Dalit women's organizations emerged and in fact the 1990s is credited with the emergence of independent and autonomous Dalit women's organizations.

**(Refer Slide Time: 08:39)**



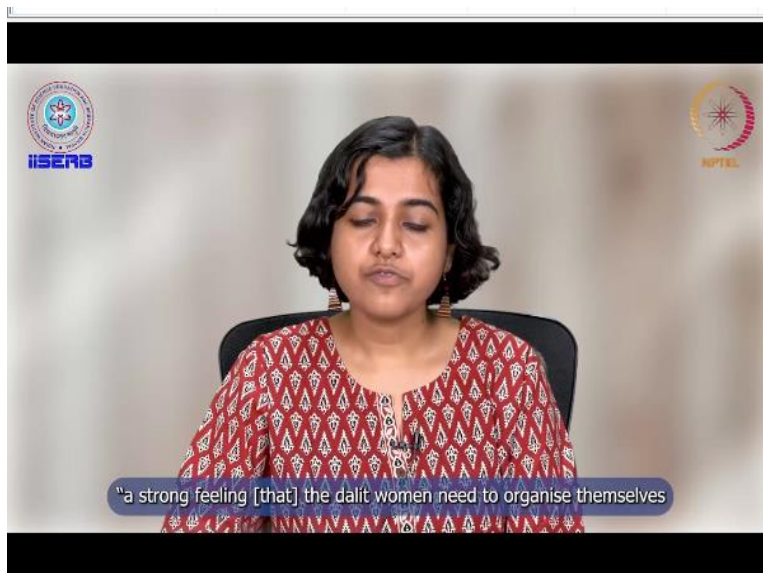
Such as the National Federation of Dalit Women or also known as NFDW which was established in 1995.

**(Refer Slide Time: 08:46)**

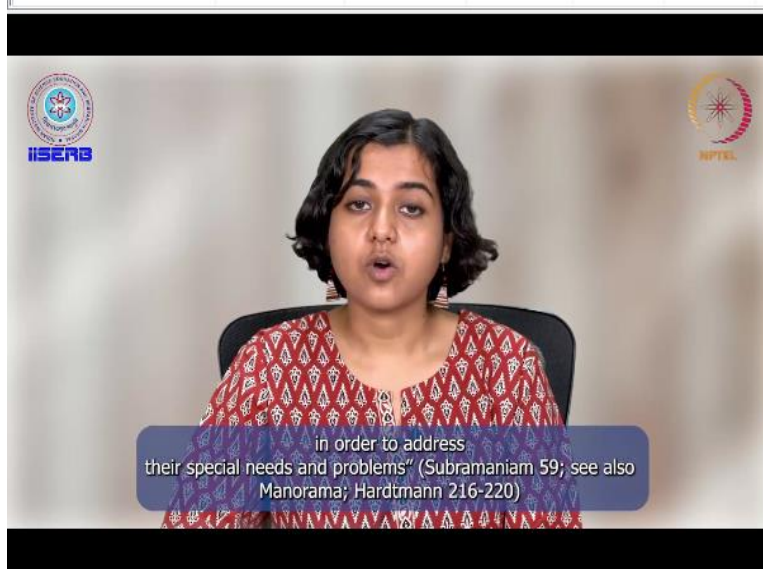


And the all India Dalit women's forum in 2006.

**(Refer Slide Time: 08:53)**

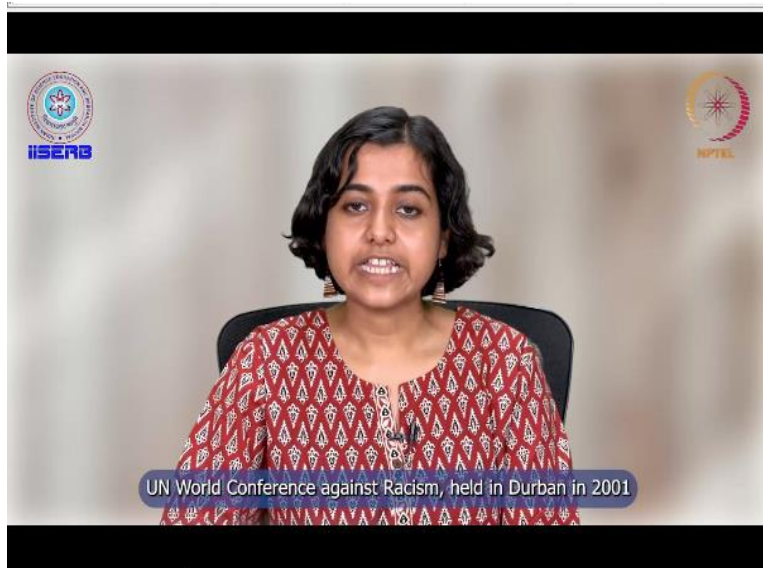


**(Refer Slide Time: 08:56)**



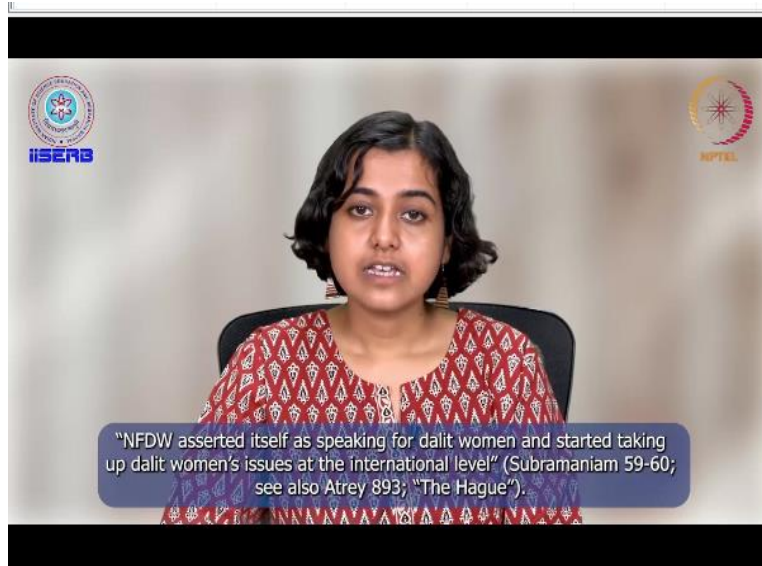
These organizations evolved out of a strong feeling that Dalit women need to organize themselves in order to address their special needs and problems.

**(Refer Slide Time: 09:03)**



NFDW's participation in the UN world conference against racism held in Durban in 2001 marked a watershed movement for Dalit women's organizations.

**(Refer Slide Time: 09:14)**

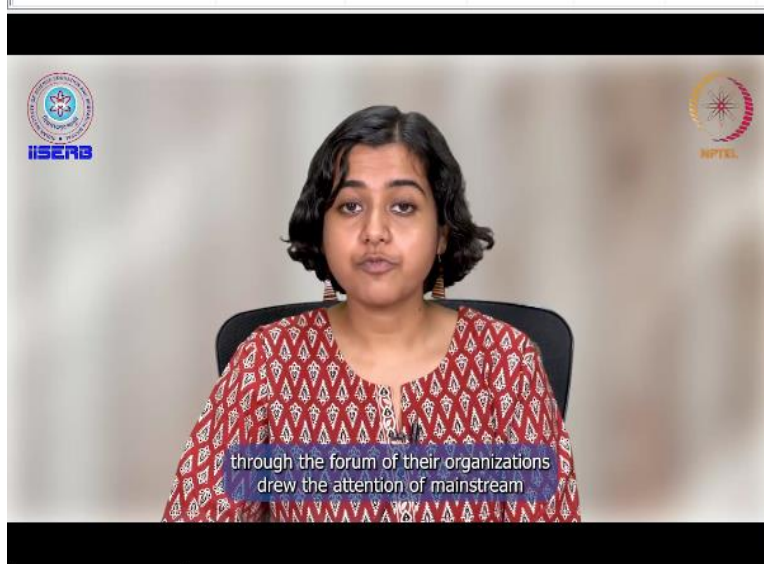


As Subramaniam writes the NFDW asserted itself as speaking for Dalit women and started taking up Dalit women's issues at the international level.

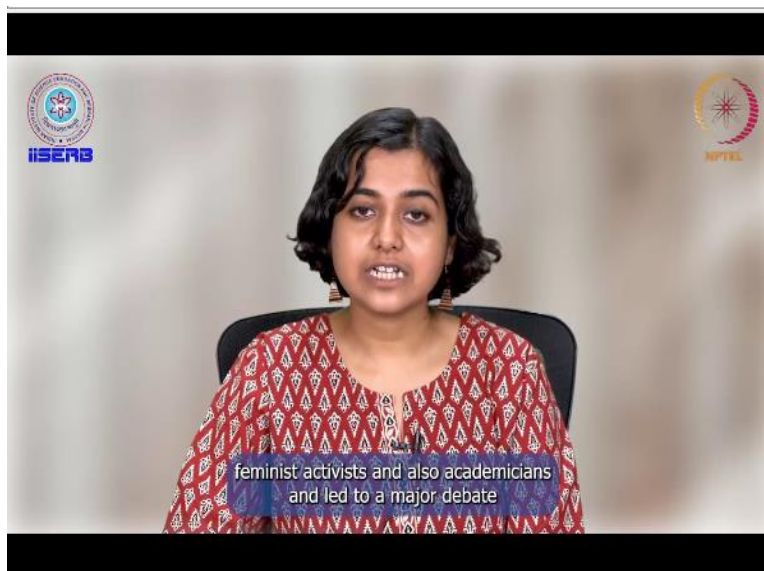
**(Refer Slide Time: 09:27)**



**(Refer Slide Time: 09:32)**

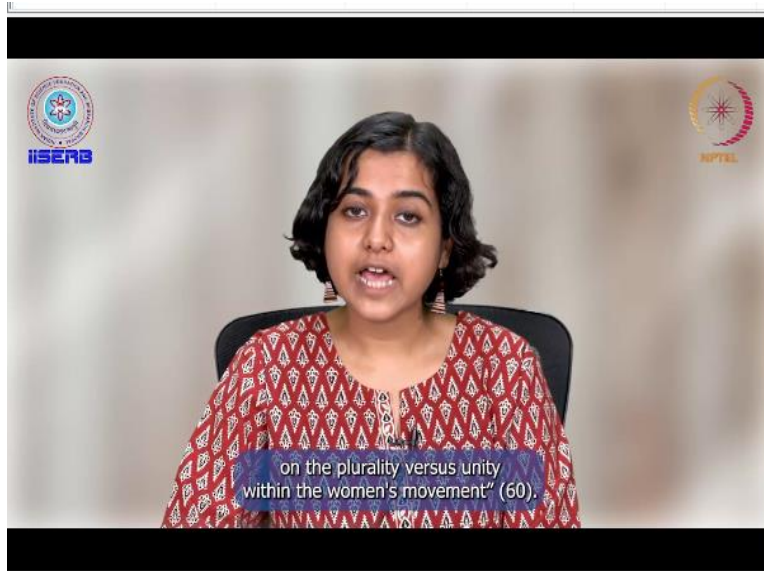


**(Refer Slide Time: 09:37)**



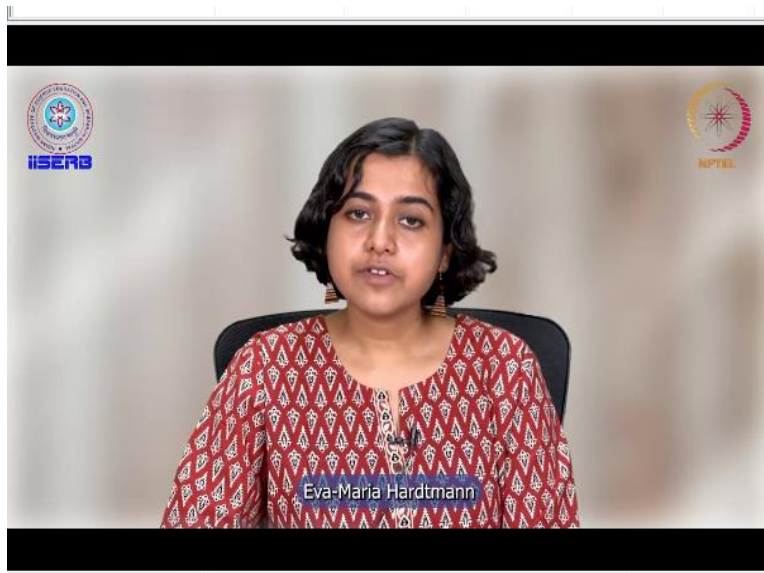
**(Refer Slide Time: 09:42)**



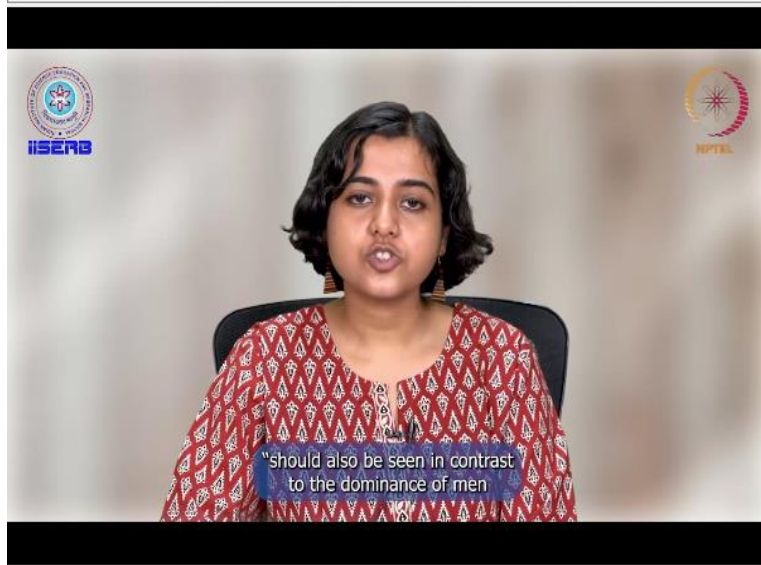


Subramanian points out that such assertion of the Dalit women's organization and experience through the forum of their choice due the attention of mainstream feminist activists and also academicians and led to a major debate on the plurality versus unity within the women's movement.

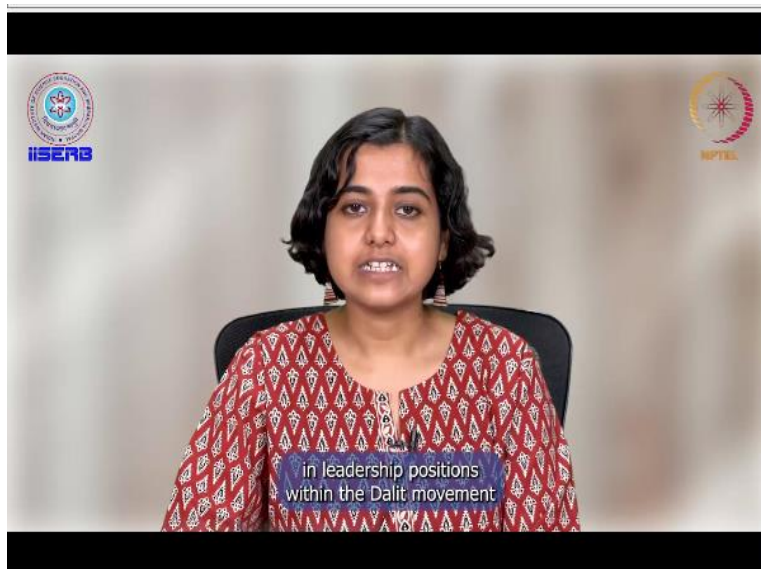
**(Refer Slide Time: 09:50)**



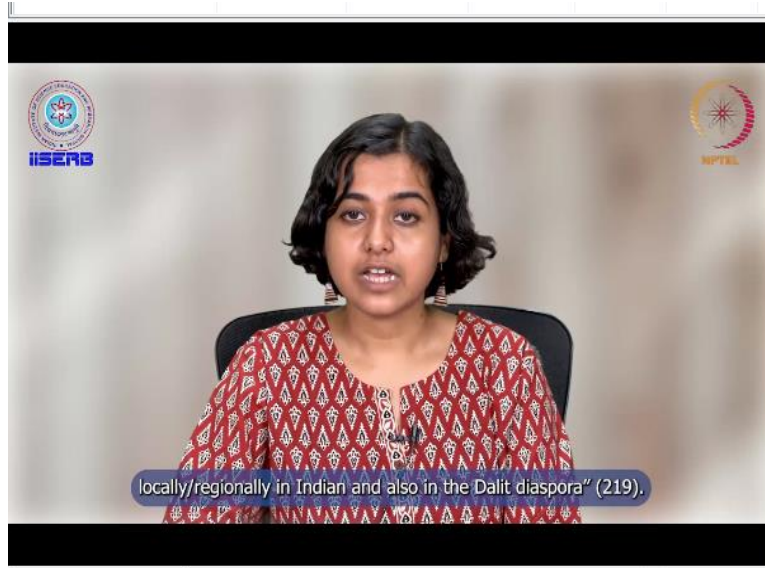
**(Refer Slide Time: 09:51)**



**(Refer Slide Time: 09:55)**

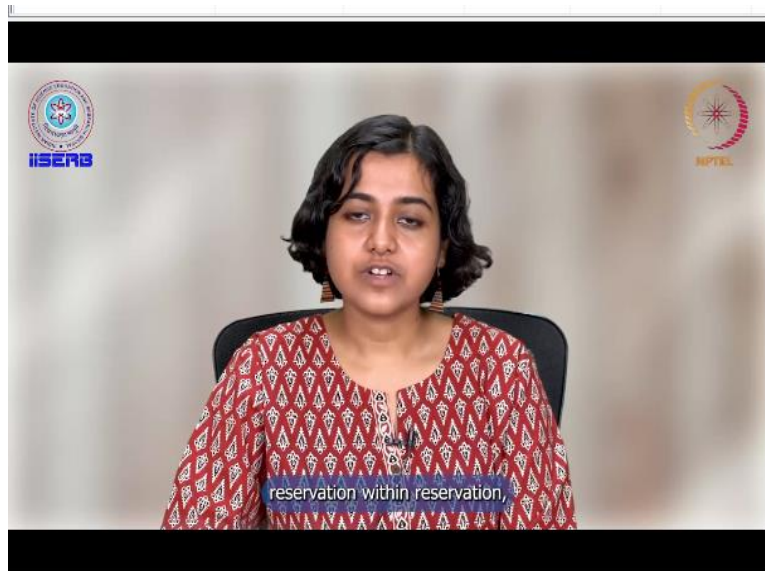


**(Refer Slide Time: 09:58)**

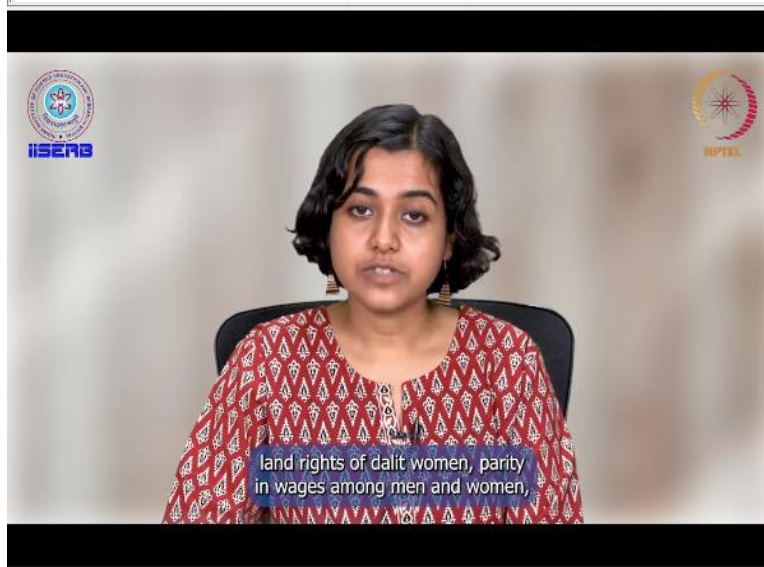


Eva-Maria Hardtmann notes that Dalit women's presence in Durban should also be seen in contrast to the dominance of men in leadership positions within the Dalit movement locally and regionally in Indian and also in the Dalit diaspora.

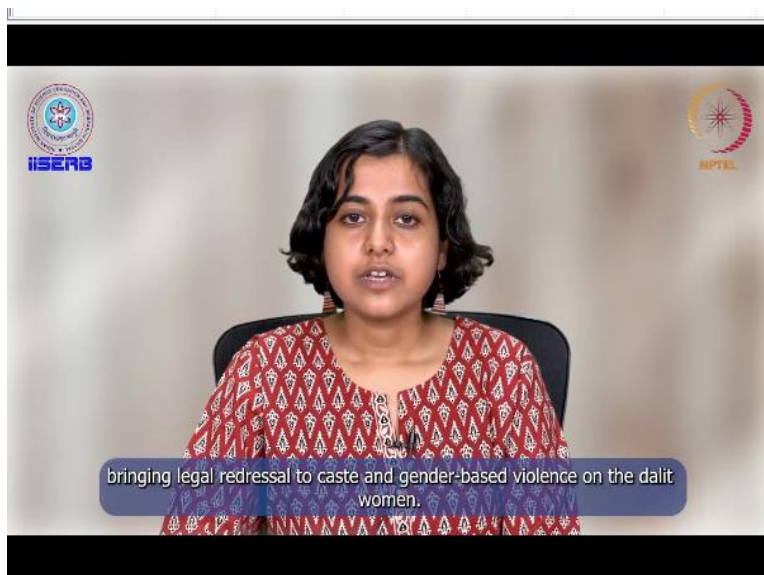
**(Refer Slide Time: 10:07)**



**(Refer Slide Time: 10:09)**

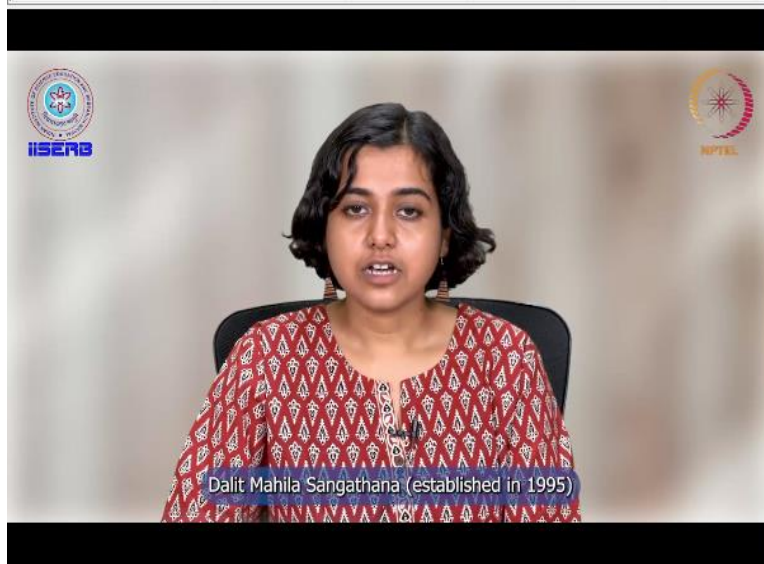


**(Refer Slide Time: 10:14)**



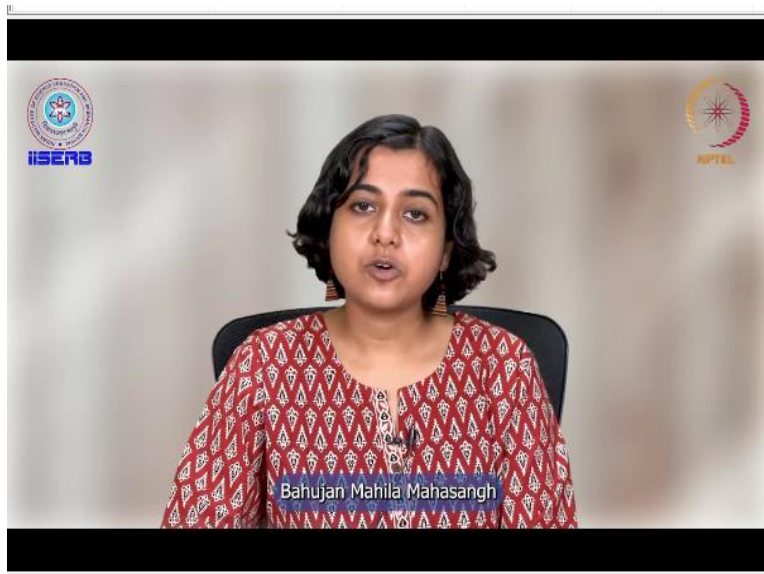
The NFDW put forth the issues of reservation within reservation land rights of Dalit women, parity in wages among men and women, bringing legal redressal to caste and gender-based violence on Dalit women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 10:21)**



The Dalit Mahila Sangathana also known as DMS established in 1995 criticized the manuwad tradition of the Dalit male activists.

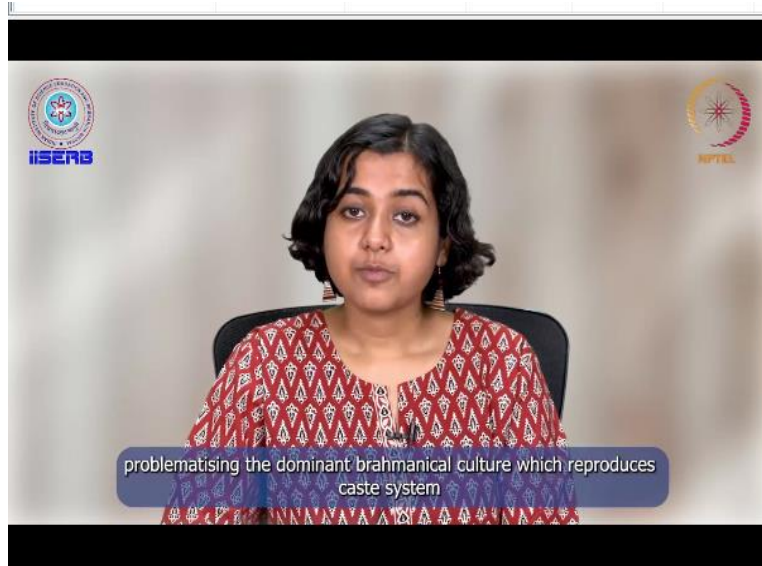
**(Refer Slide Time: 10:29)**



The Bahujan Mahila Mahasangh sought to combine political struggle with cultural revolution. Underlying these attempts were three major challenges.

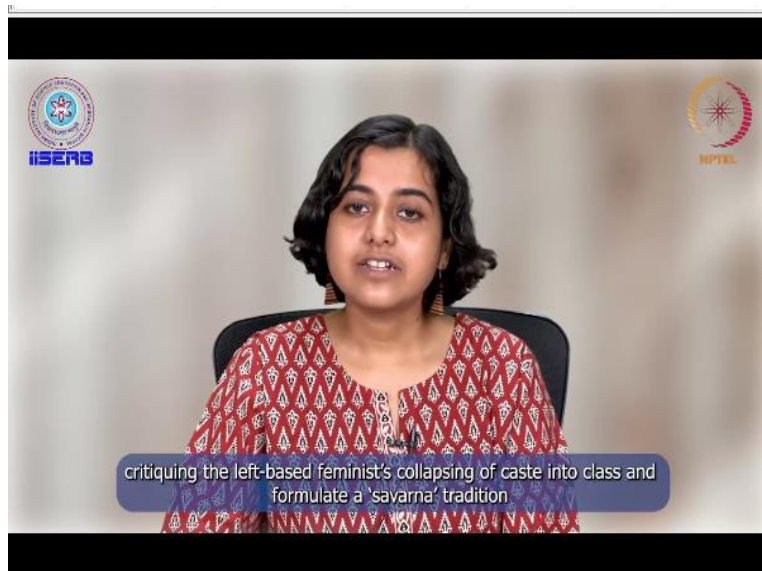
**(Refer Slide Time: 10:39)**





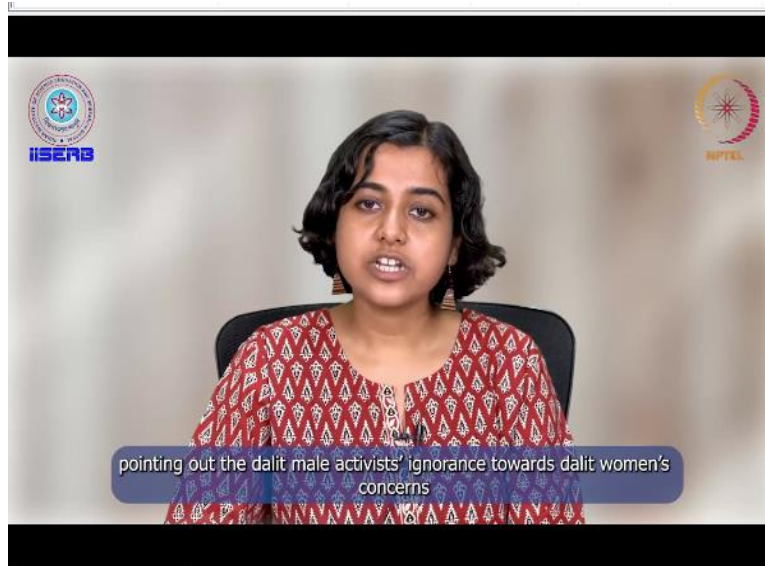
Problematizing the dominant Brahmanical culture which reproduces caste system.

**(Refer Slide Time: 10:44)**



Critiquing the left-based feminist collapsing of caste into class and formulate a Savarna tradition.

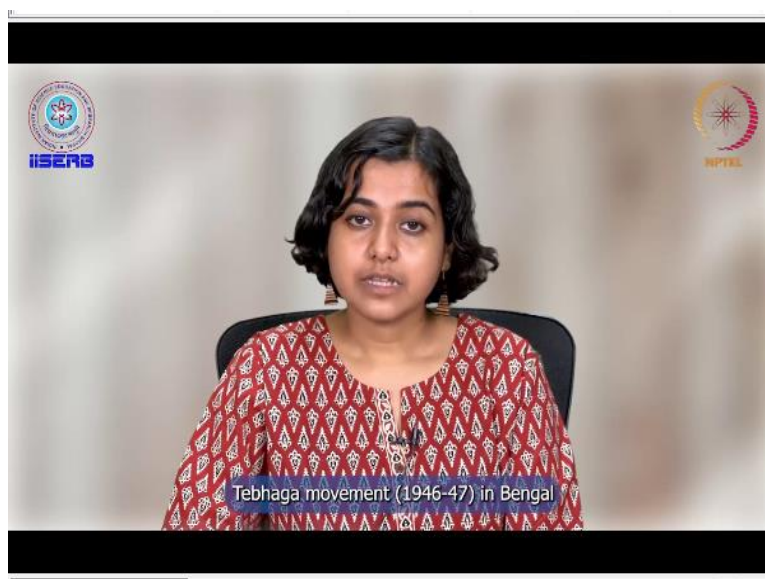
**(Refer Slide Time: 10:52)**



And pointing out the Dalit male activist ignorance towards Dalit women's concerns. Now while talking about Dalit women's activism in the previous lecture, I also mentioned anti-caste movements approach to Dalit women. Therefore, I think it is necessary to briefly talk about that in the current scenario as well. In an earlier lecture I have mentioned how feminism was deeply concerned about gender and labour.

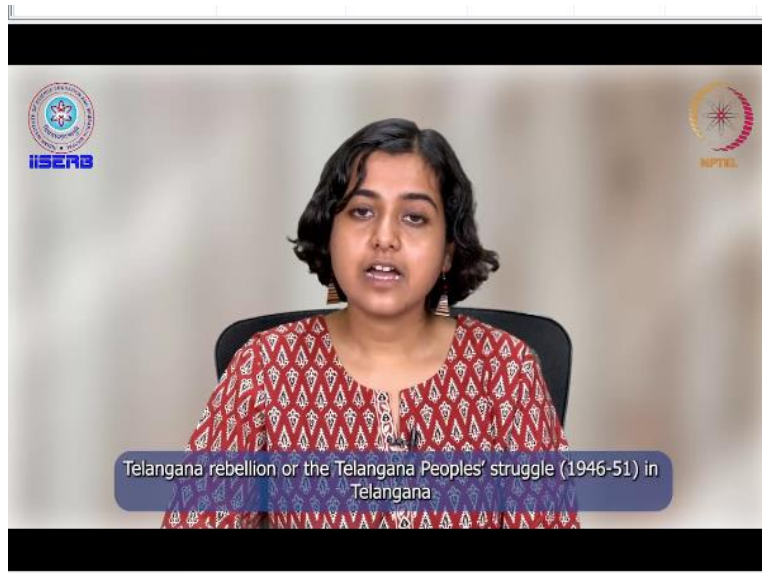
We have talked about productive and reproductive labour, age gap, Ela Bhatt organization SEWA etcetera. Now this left orientation impacted not just the women's movement but also cast.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:37)**



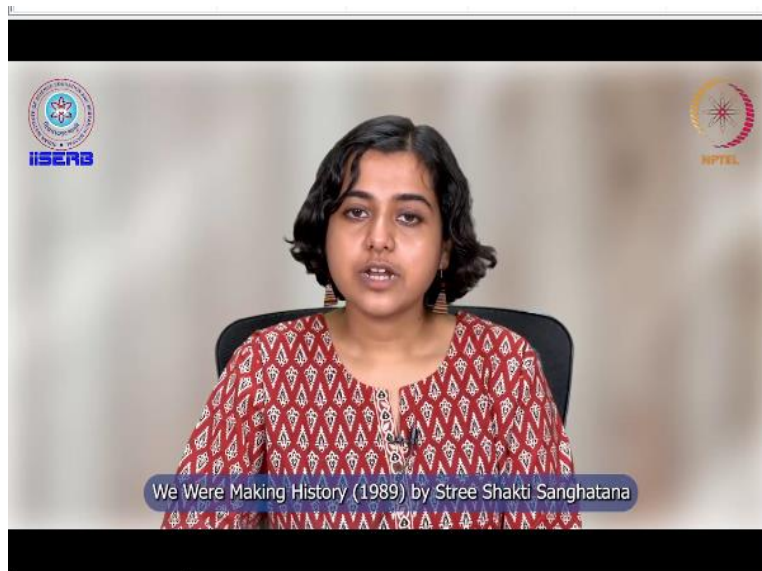
Two of such examples are the Tebhaga movement which happened from 1946 to 47 in Bengal.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:43)**



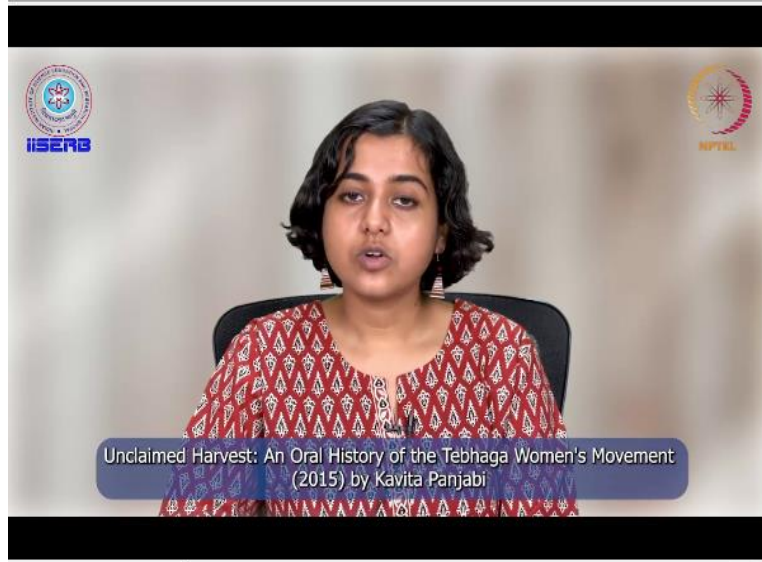
And the Telangana rebellion also known as the Telangana people struggle which happened in Telangana from 1946 to 1951. Now both these movements were present movements led by the left party. These movements however often ignored or erased the concerns of lower caste women.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:06)**



Two books which contributed significantly in this aspect are we are making history by Stree Shakti Sanghatana and unclaimed harvest.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:12)**



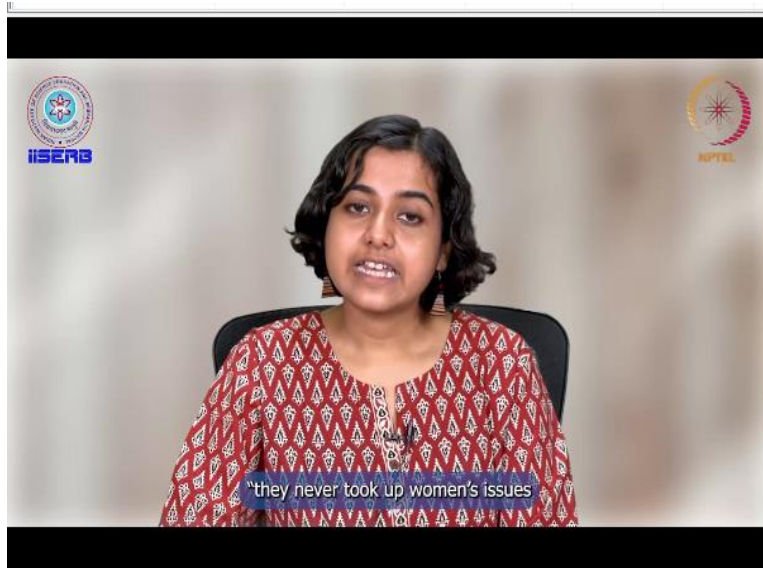
An Oral History of the Tebhaga women's movement by Kavita Punjabi. Both these books contain narratives by Dalit women who participated in those movements.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:25)**

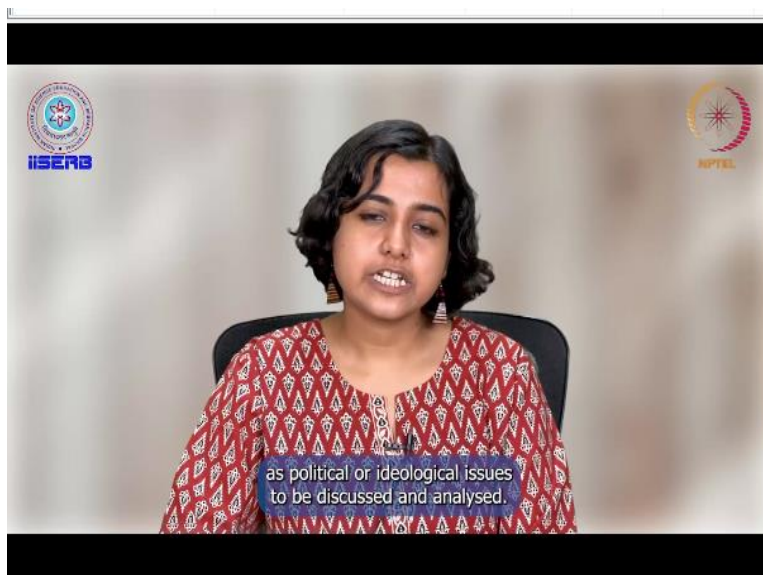


For instance, Sugunamma who participated in the Telangana rebellion mentions that although the party allowed women's entry.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:32)**



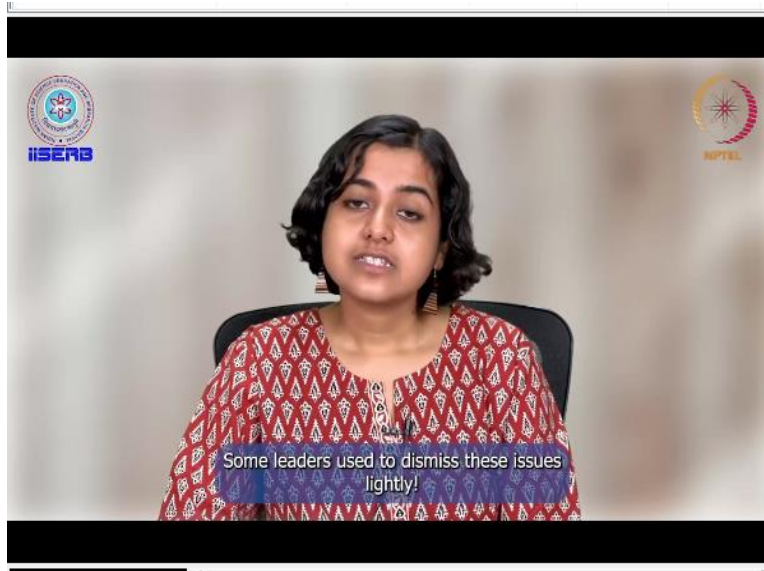
**(Refer Slide Time: 12:35)**



They never took up women's issues as political or ideological issues to be discussed and analyzed.

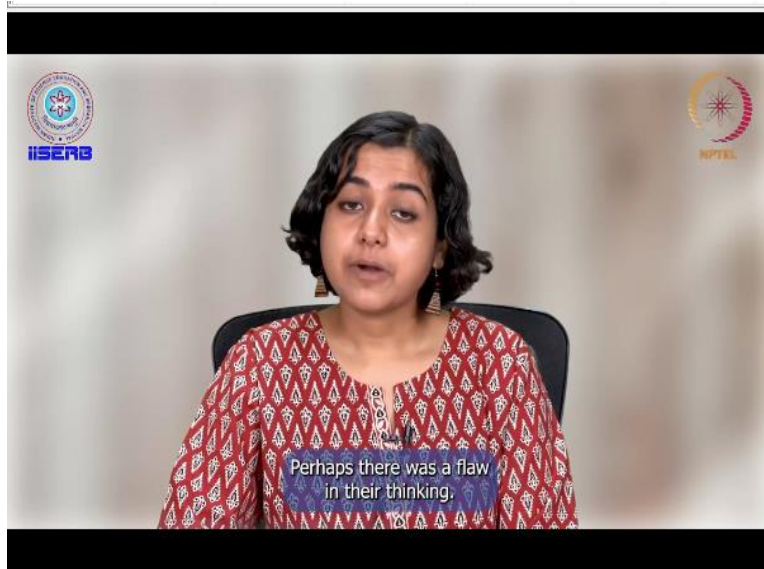
**(Refer Slide Time: 12:39)**





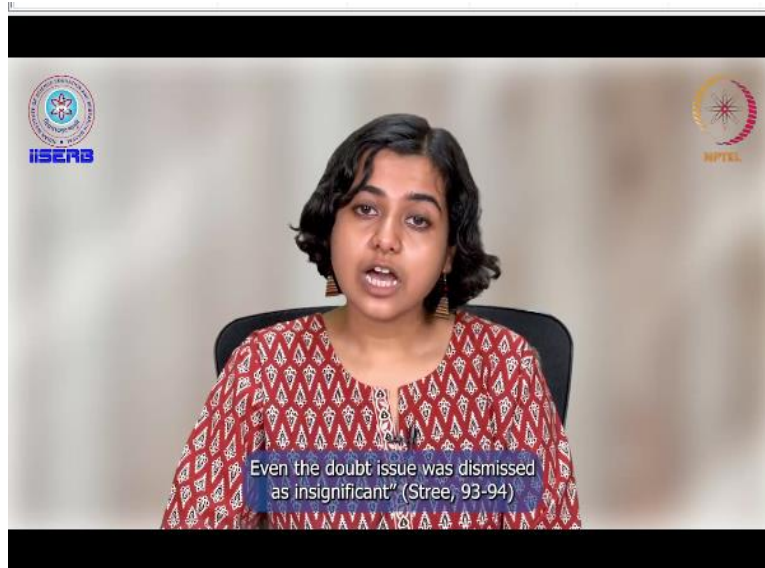
Some leaders used to dismiss these issues lightly.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:43)**



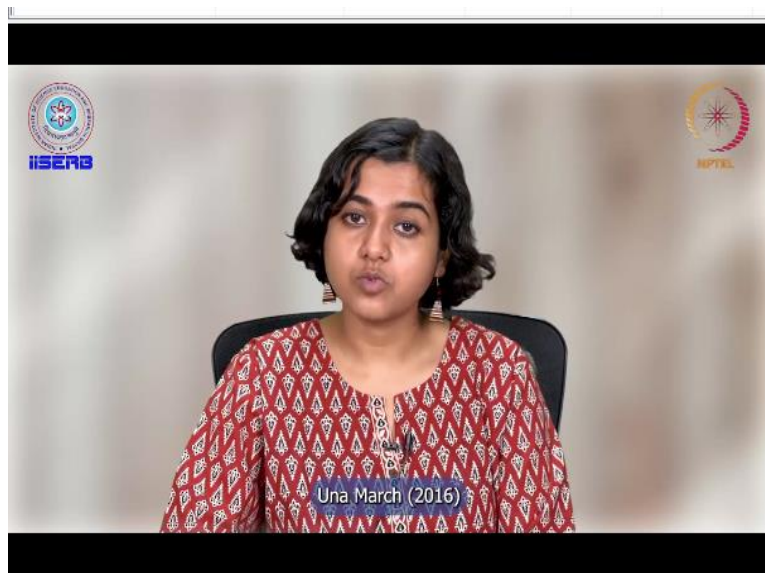
Perhaps there was a flaw in their thinking.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:46)**



Even the dowry issue was dismissed as insignificant. This shows the hypocrisy of left party which viewed caste only in a single axis format and erase gender. Interestingly such erasure continues to happen.

**(Refer Slide Time: 13:02)**



For example, in the recent Una March in 2016 which took place as a reaction to the public flogging of Dalits. Dalit women were not given any space on the stage to speak about their concerns. Now let us summarize today's lesson. Dalit women's movements highlight two things caste and gender are two interlinked matters and Dalit women are different from women and Dalit men. As a result of this understanding delete women's activism has attempted to revise and reformulate.

Mainstream Indian feminism by highlighting the Brahmanical patriarchal structures underlying the all the oppressive systems and emphasizing on the difference in experiences among women. It recognizes the various intersecting structures of oppression such as religion, state, caste, gender and so on. Dalit women's demand for self-assertion and identity as expressed in their literature and activism has led to a question as to whether only Dalit women can speak for themselves.

And this is a question we will take up very soon. In the next lecture we will look at other movements that grew parallel to the mainstream feminist movement. Thank you.

**(Refer Slide Time: 14:22)**



The slide features a white background with a blue geometric pattern at the bottom. It includes the IISERB logo on the left and the NPTEL logo on the right. The text is centered and lists several references.

**References:**

Atrey, Shreya. 2018. 'Women's Human Rights: From Progress to Transformation, An Intersectional Response to Martha Nussbaum', *Human Rights Quarterly* 40, 4 (Nov): 859-904.


Chakravarti, Uma. 2003. *Gendering Caste: Through a Feminist Lens*. Calcutta: Stree.

Hardtmann, Eva-Maria. 2009. *The Dalit Movement in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

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

Manorama, R. n.d. 'Background Information on Dalit Women in India'. Retrieved September 20, 2018, from [http://www.rightlivelivelihoodaward.org/fileadmin/Files/PDF/Literature\\_Recipients/Manorama/Background\\_Manorama.pdf](http://www.rightlivelivelihoodaward.org/fileadmin/Files/PDF/Literature_Recipients/Manorama/Background_Manorama.pdf)

**(Refer Slide Time: 14:31)**



The slide features a white background with a blue geometric pattern at the bottom. It includes the IISERB logo on the left and the NPTEL logo on the right. The text is centered and lists several references.

**References:**

Panjabi, Kavita. 2017. *Unclaimed Harvest: An Oral History of the Tobhaga Women's Movement*. New Delhi: Zubaan.

Stree Shakti Sanghatana. 1989. *We Were Making History: Life Stories of Women in the Telangana Peoples' Struggle*, K. Lalita et al., eds. New Delhi: Kali for Women.

Subramaniam, Mangala. 2006. *The Power of Women's Organizing: Gender, Caste, and Class in India*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

'The Hague Declaration on the Human Rights and Dignity of Dalit Women' (12 Nov). 2006. Retrieved September