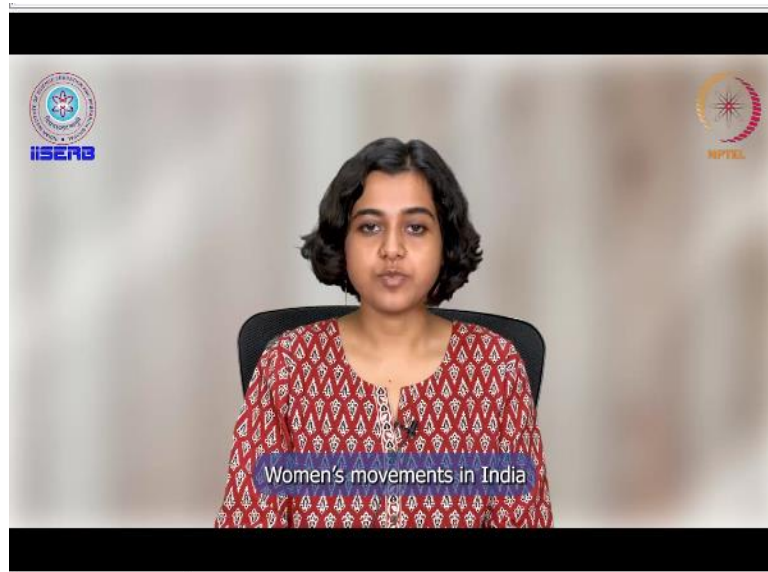


**Indian Feminisms Concepts and Issues**  
**Prof. Dr. Anandita Pan**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Science Education and Research-Bhopal**

**Lecture-07**  
**Identity, Difference, and Intersectionality-Part 1**

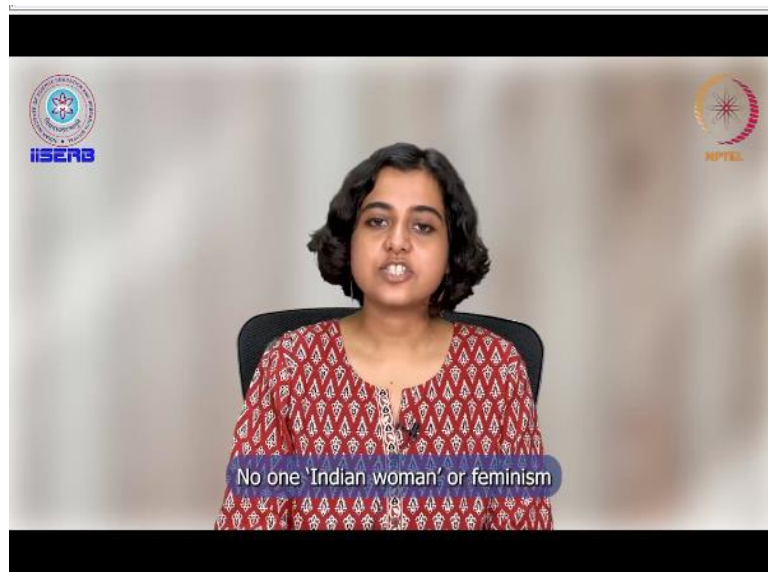
Hello everyone.

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In the lecture so far, we have understood a brief overview of women's movements in India.

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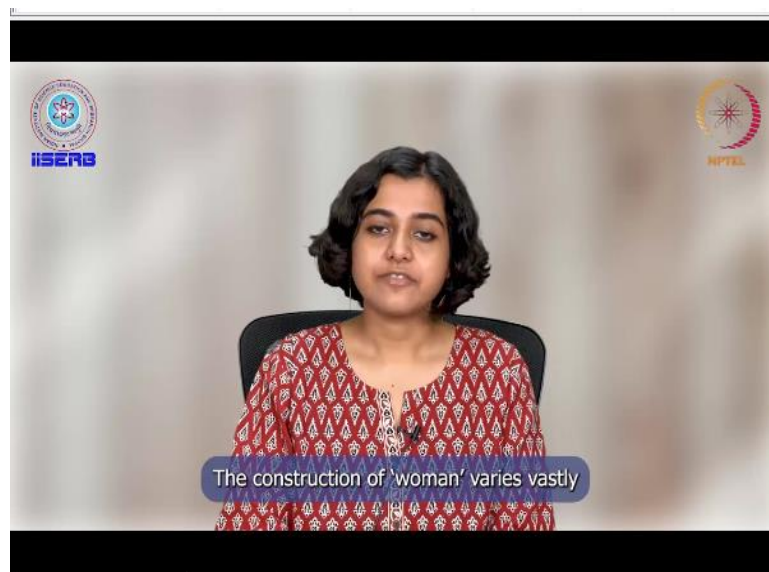


One of the biggest lessons learned was that there is no one women's movement in India and there is no one way of looking at it either. We have seen how concerns and issues pertaining to

women change from pre-independence period to post-independence era. If you want to brush up your memory on those aspects you can go ahead go back to those videos and go through them once again.

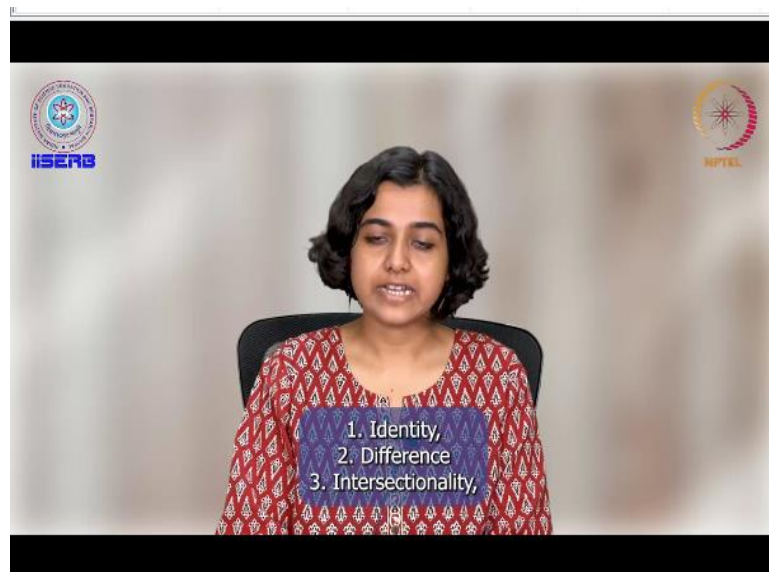
In the process of mapping a historical overview of Indian feminism we have seen that there is no one Indian woman or one feminism depending on their caste, class, religion, ethnicity etcetera the construction of women varies vastly.

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This lecture will address some of those concerns.

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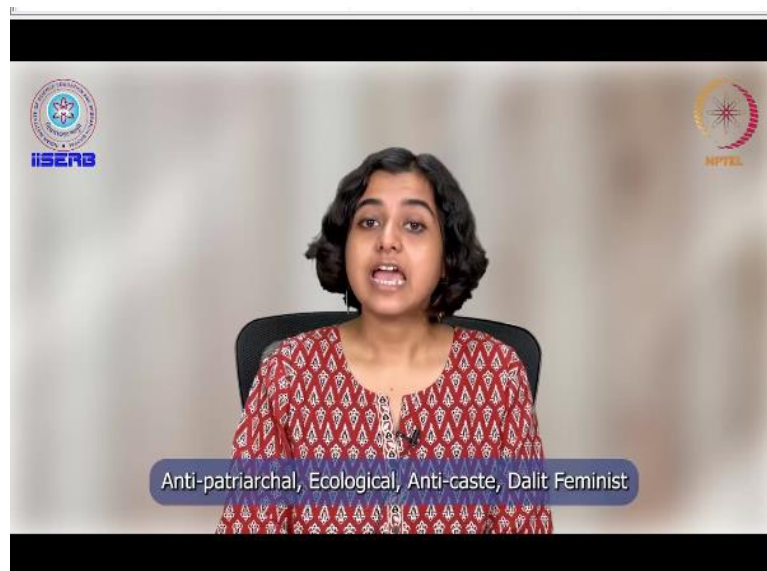


In this lecture we are going to talk about the issues of identity, difference and intersectionality to adequately address the heterogeneity of Indian women. We will explore how this

heterogeneity can be beneficial in understanding the different contours of gender identities and the specificities of oppression. We have to remember that these lessons were not learned only via Indian feminism but also in the western scenario as well.

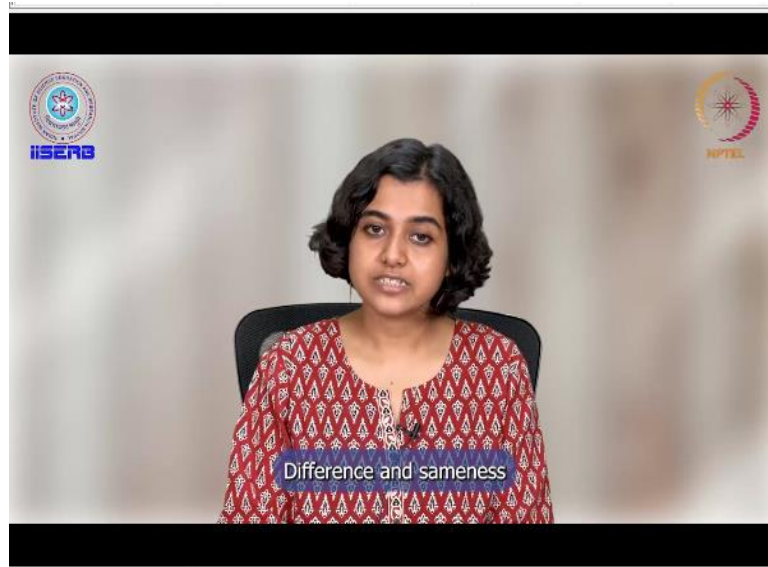
Such promise is necessary to build our ideas and critically examine the debates that permeate feminisms through their journeys. So, far we have also learned about different women's movements in India which either did not get included in mainstream feminist movement or were ignored. We learned that when 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.

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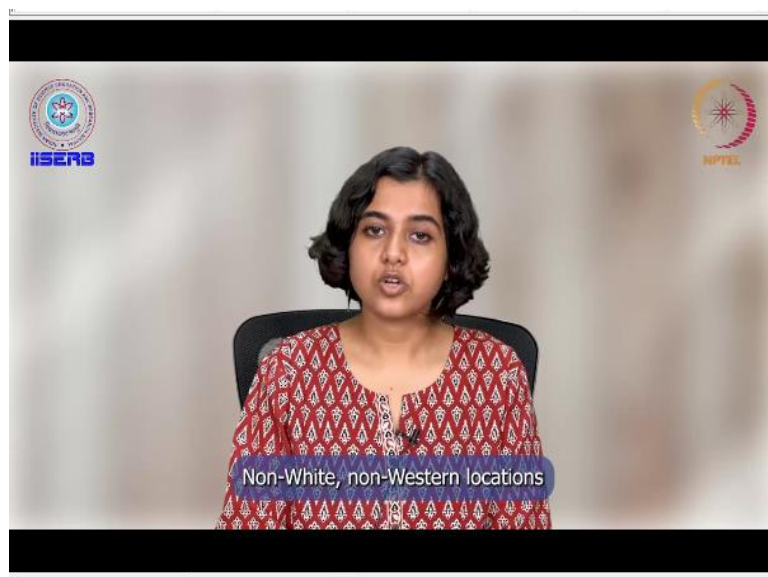
Anti-patriarchal, ecological, anti-caste, Dalit feminist and so on. In all these movements women of different communities and classes were participants and they also contributed significantly to highlight how gender functions along with other systems of oppression. The history of feminism has undergone a long trajectory where it gets written in terms of difference and sameness.

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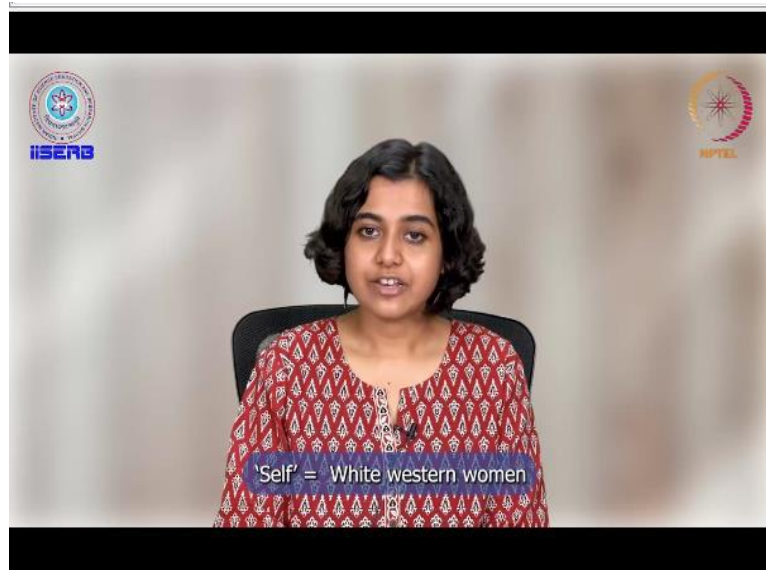
On the one hand feminist research has tried to create a unitary subject of feminism by catering to the similarity of experiences faced by women. This narrative of universalism has also been questioned.

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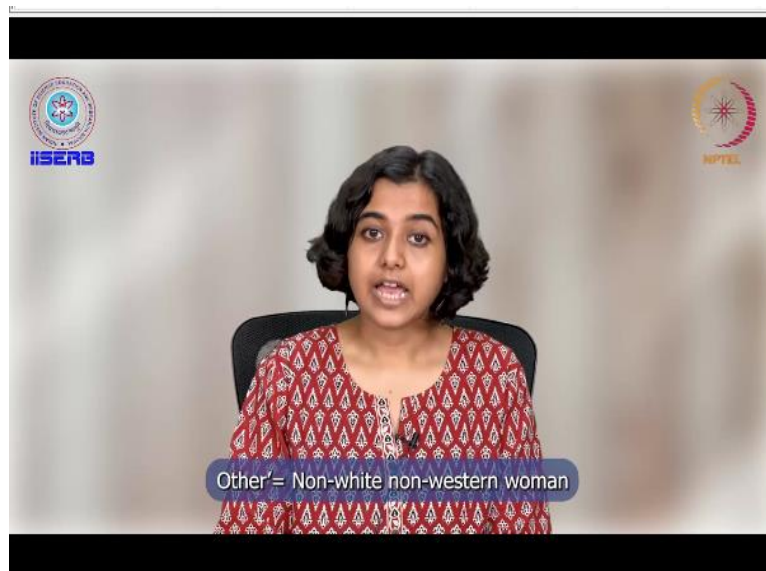
Feminisms which arise from non-white non-western locations have questioned the application of difference in the ways in which it endorses and also perpetuates the self-versus other binary. Difference in dominant terms means literally the divide between self and the other; how much or how far the other is different from the self. And depending on the speaker the identity of the self is also determined.

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For the longest period of time self-referred to the white western women.

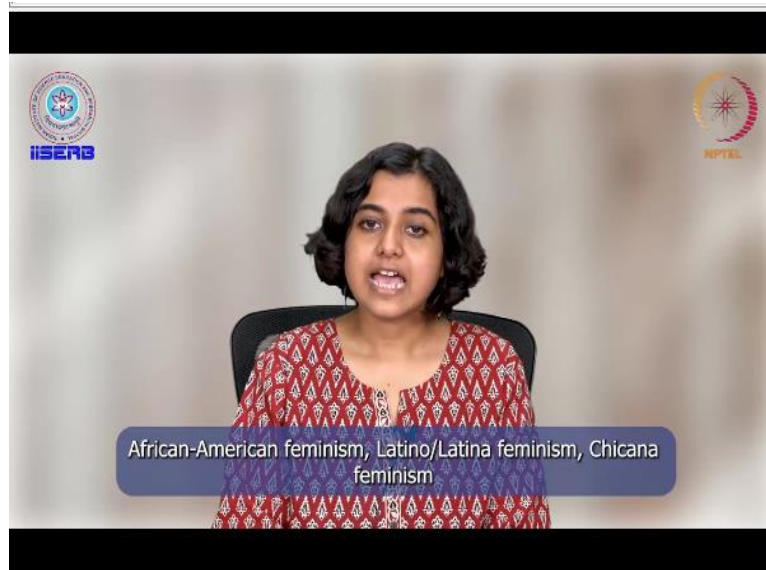
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And the other was non-white non-western woman. Such definition emphasizes on the essentialist demarcations between Western and Third World feminisms. But the question remains how do we talk about difference, should we think of it in separatist terms as creating divides and binaries or should we include the theory of difference in a manner that concerns or specific groups are also adequately addressed? An alternative way to incorporate the benefits of difference was provided by the non-white feminisms.

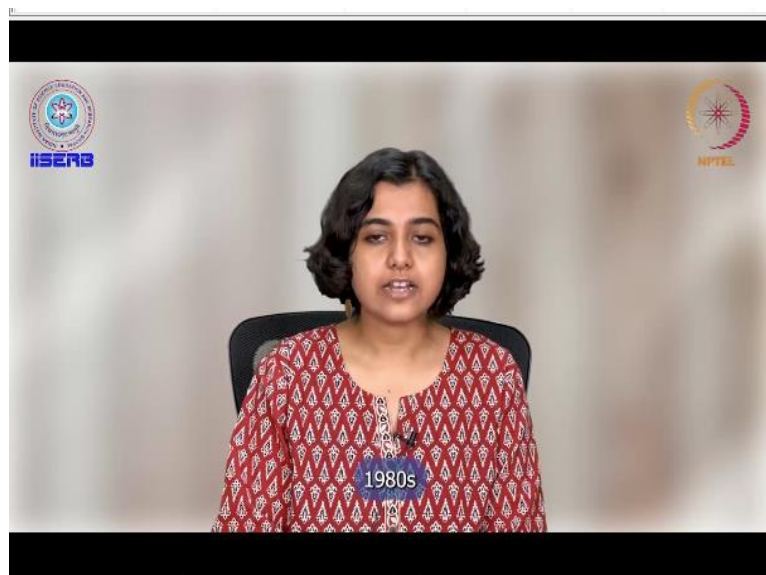
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With the rise of numerous feminism such as African-American feminism, Latino/Latina feminism, Chicana feminism and so on. The big umbrella term feminism not only received attacks for being white and Western. The question also arose as to who has the authority to represent or speak for a group of women. The concept of difference emerged in Western feminism in and around 1980s.

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When discontents were raised about treating gender as a generic category. It was realized that the concerns that are projected as universal and homogeneous were far removed from the realities of many women's lives. It revealed the power relations that created hierarchy among women. The exclusive and unitary focus on gender highlighted concerns of only a particular group of women and diverter attention from other structures and systems which crucially contributed in perpetuating the oppression of women.

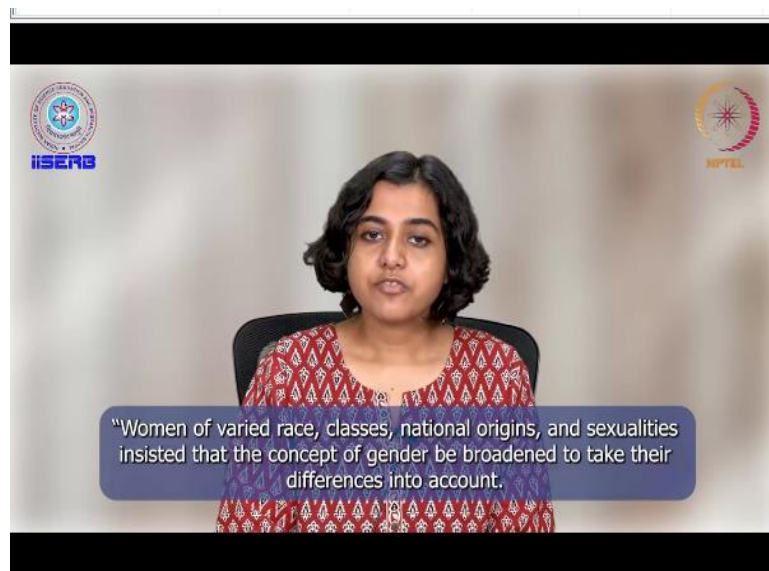
The conceptions about gender and oppression on women categorically ignored the marginalized women and its attempt to achieve a universal politics which resulted in privileging a single perspective.

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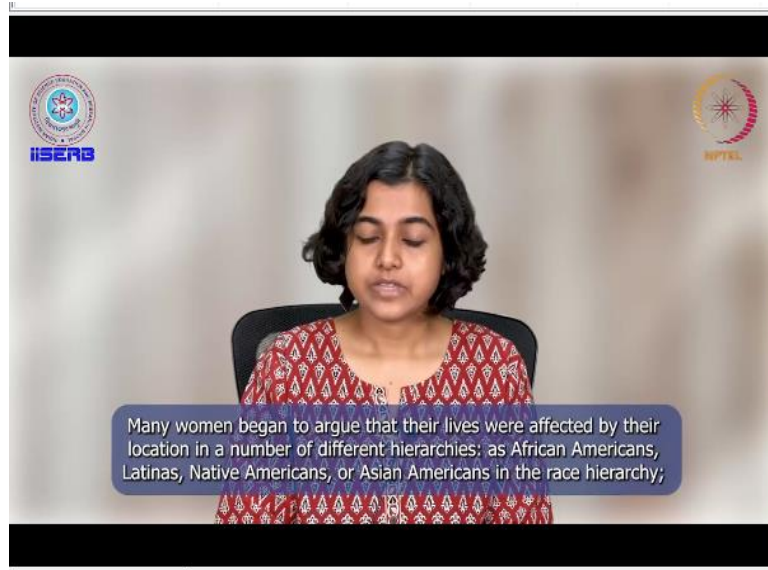
Maxine Baca-Zinn writes.

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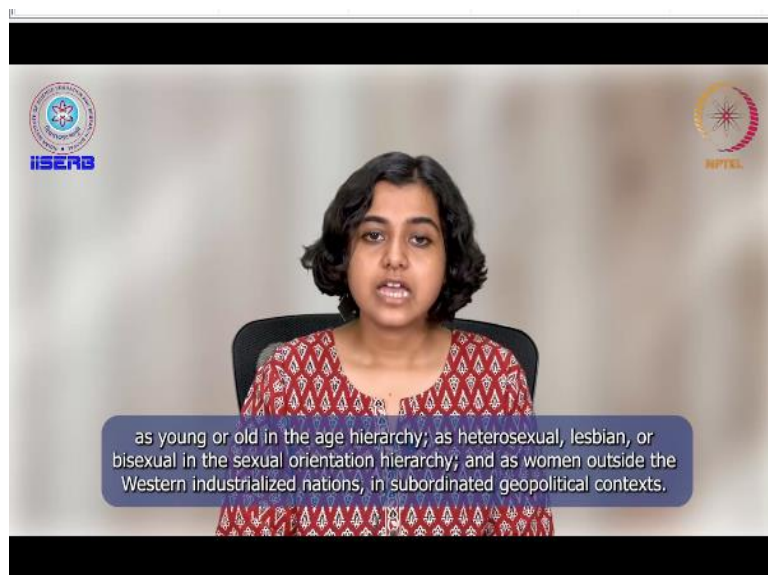
Women of varied races classes, national origins and sexualities insisted that the concept of gender be broadened to take their differences into account.

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Many women began to argue that their lives were affected by their locations in a number of different hierarchies: as African Americans, Latinas, Native Americans or Asian Americans in the race hierarchy.

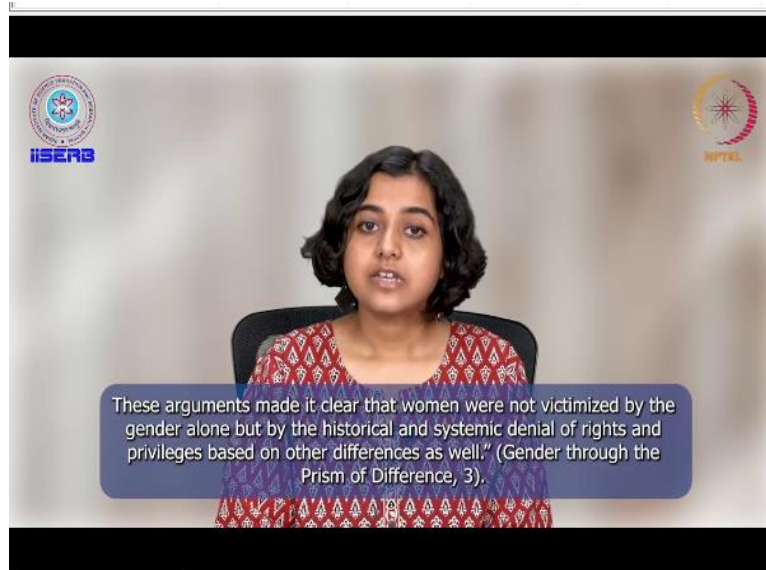
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As young or old in the age hierarchy; as heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual in the sexual orientation hierarchy and as women outside the Western industrialized nations in subordinated geopolitical contexts.

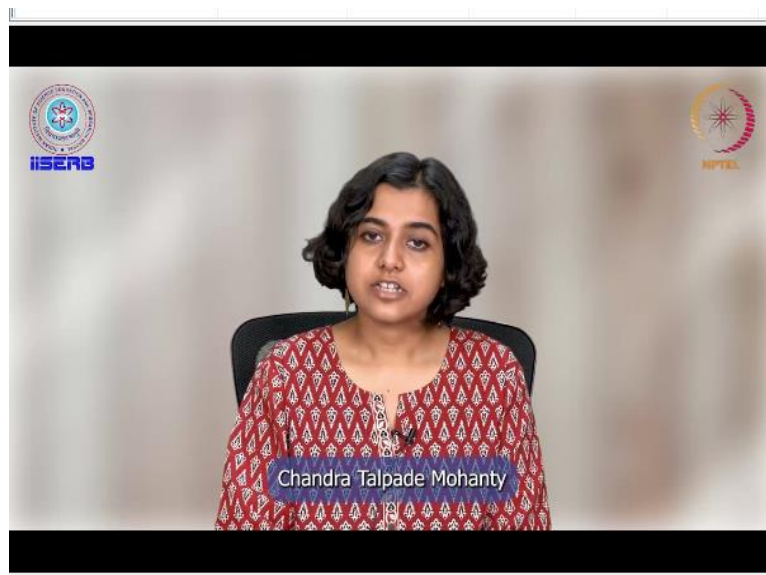
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These arguments made it clear that women were not victimized by the gender alone but by the historical and systemic denial of rights and privileges based on other difference as well. Recognizing difference therefore becomes crucial in interventionist politics such as feminism in order to avoid the influences and pitfalls of dominant structural models and make it a more effective politics.

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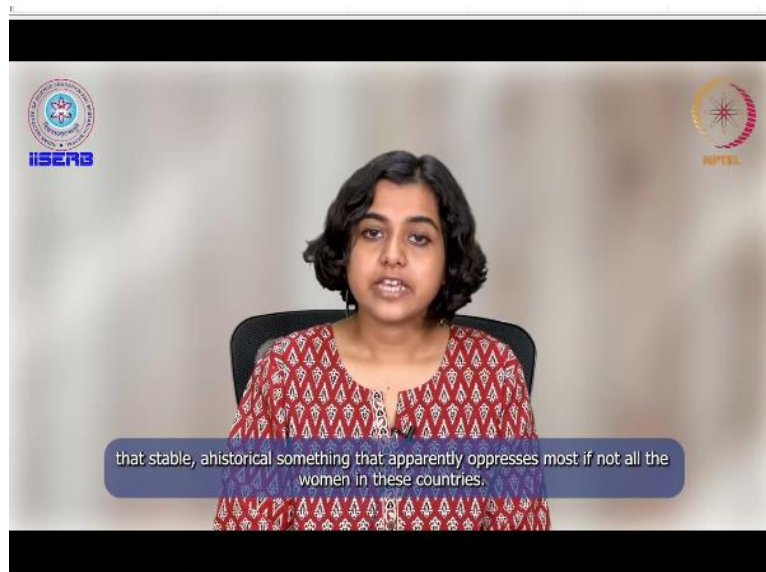
With reference to the first and third world feminisms Chandra Talpade Mohanty has pointed out that the colonial history creates a division between the first and the third worlds and contributes in the construction of a Western feminism which develops itself through a process of object formation of the third world women in order to acquire a subject position for itself. Let me explain how?

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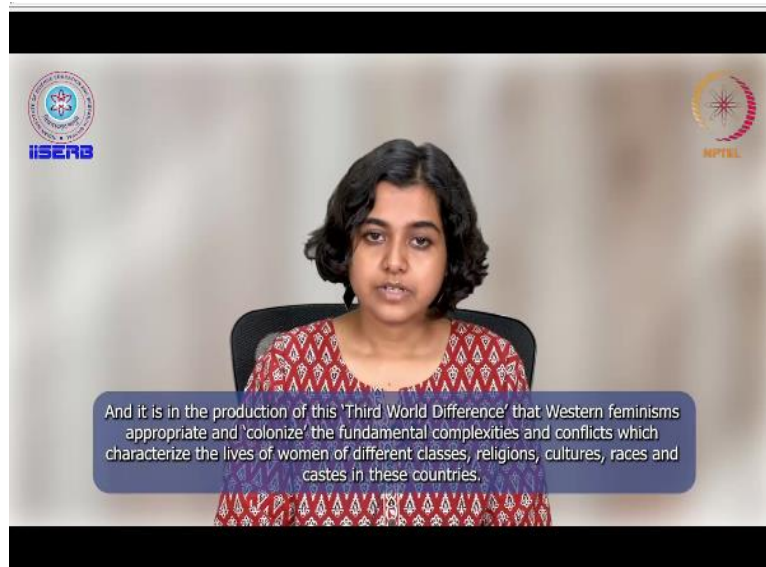
Mohanty writes an analysis of sexual difference in the form of a cross-culturally singular, monolithic notion of patriarchy or male dominance leads to the construction of a similarly reductive and homogeneous notion of what I call the third world difference.

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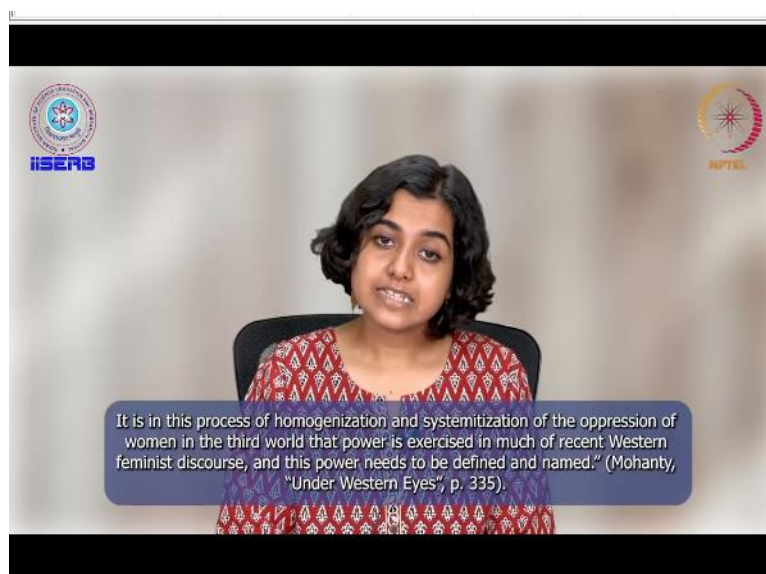
That stable a historical something that apparently oppresses most if not all women in these countries.

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And it is in the production of this third world difference that Western feminisms appropriate and colonize the fundamental complexities and conflicts which characterize the lives of women of different classes, religions, cultures, races and casts in these countries.

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It is in this process of homogenization and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world that power is exercised in much of recent western feminist discourse and this power needs to be defined and named. By claiming to have knowledge about especially the third world women Western feminism asserts its superiority as theory generator whereas the third world women remain evidence providers.

Such assumptions replicate the colonial binary of self but the self is Western feminism and flourishes at the expense of the other which is the third world feminism. Mohanty criticizes the

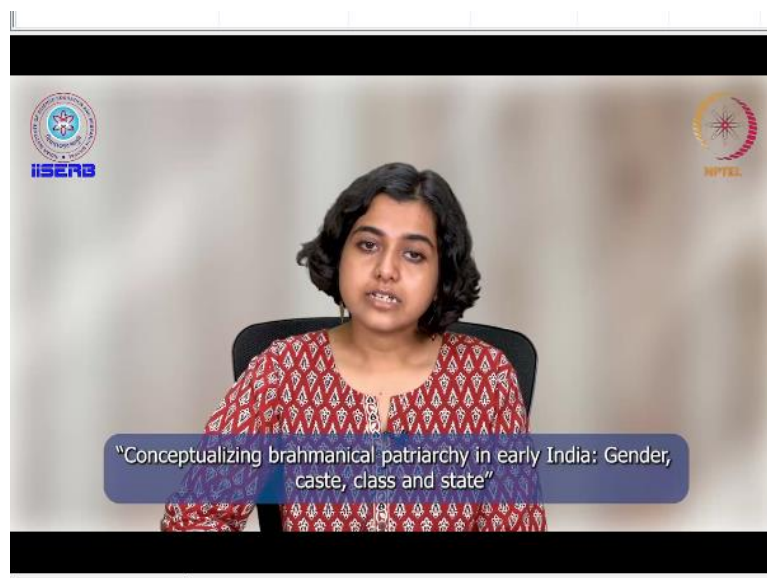
mythology is used by Western feminism to represent the third world women which often takes recourse to cultural reductionism and fixes the third world woman as a victimized static object.

Mohanty profounds that rather than seeing men and women as predefined creatures functioning in the social arena depending on their sexual division, the focus should be on how economy colonialism, religion, family and other institutions actively participate in the production and description of the gendered identities of men and women. For Mohanty therefore feminism should aim at an intersectional approach.

Such anxieties get written in the Indian scenario too. The idea of difference looms large in Indian feminism and has led to the formation of different positions as well as solidarities. For example, the social reformist movement in India propounded the narrative of progress by incorporating women as essential components of transformation. For this purpose, the reformist movement focused on two major evils that affect women.

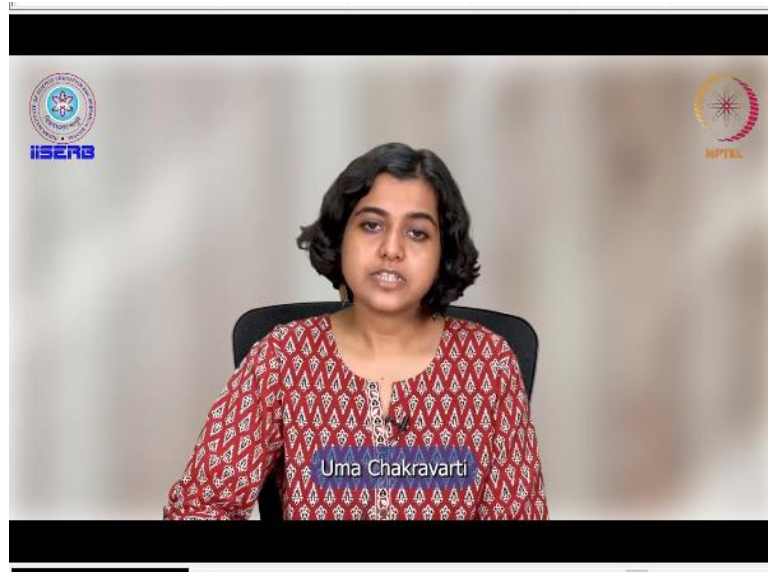
Namely the practice of sati and imposed widowhood. These evils however were rooted in casteist and sexiest ideologies and practices an aspect that remained unrecognized by the dominant reformist agendas.

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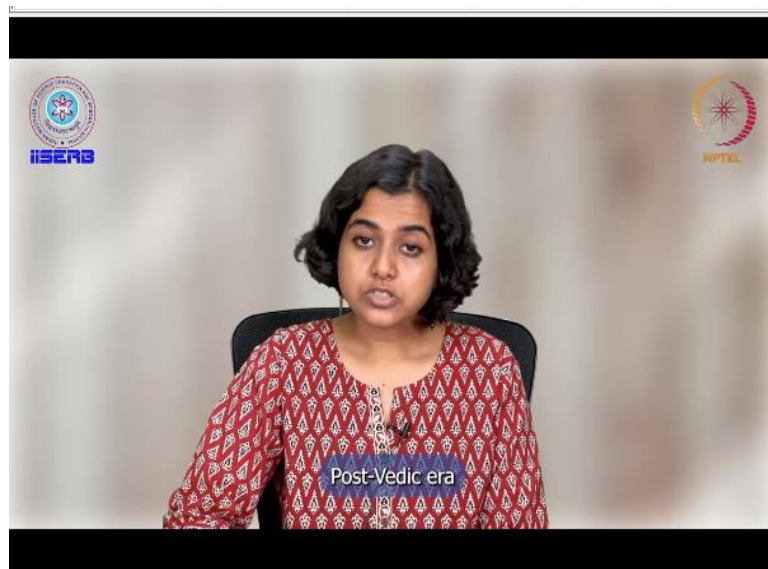
In her article conceptualizing Brahmanical patriarchy in early India gender, caste, class and state.

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Uma Chakravarti argues that Brahminical patriarchy in early India invested in constructing gender and caste roles by controlling the sexuality of the upper class upper caste wives. She connects the production with reproduction and mentions how in the prehistoric societies women's active participation in both production in other words hunting and reproduction such as childbirth gave them a position of veneration in society. That is, they were treated in equal terms with others.

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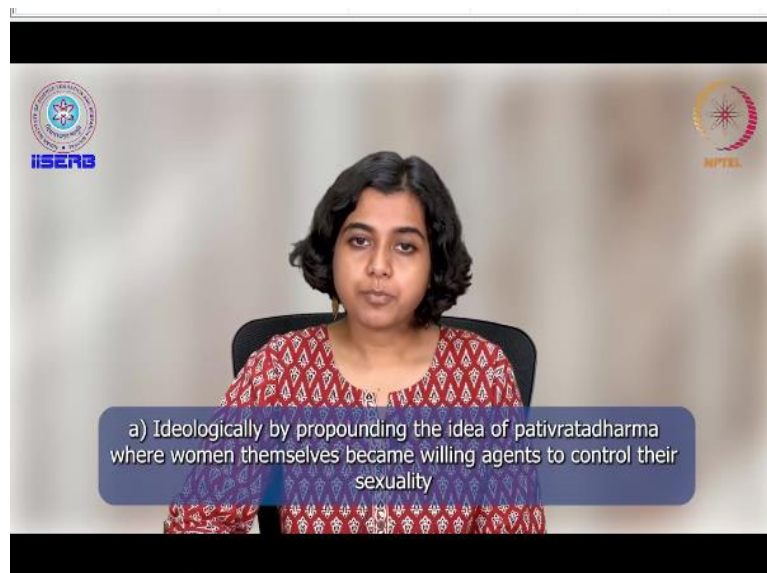
In the post vedic era however with the advent of agrarian culture upper class upper caste women's contribution in production became overshadowed by the importance given to the role in reproduction. Control over female sexuality became a crucial issue to be dealt with both within the family and in the state. This was the result of the Interlink between caste and gender.



The upper-class upper caste wife sexuality needed to be closely guarded so that the purity of the progeny is maintained. We have learned how Ambedkar pointed out that endogamy or marriage within caste sustains the caste system. Therefore, reproduction was closely related to the question of legitimate motherhood that retained caste purity and also simultaneously determined patrilineal success and put a control over female sexuality where a woman must follow only one man.

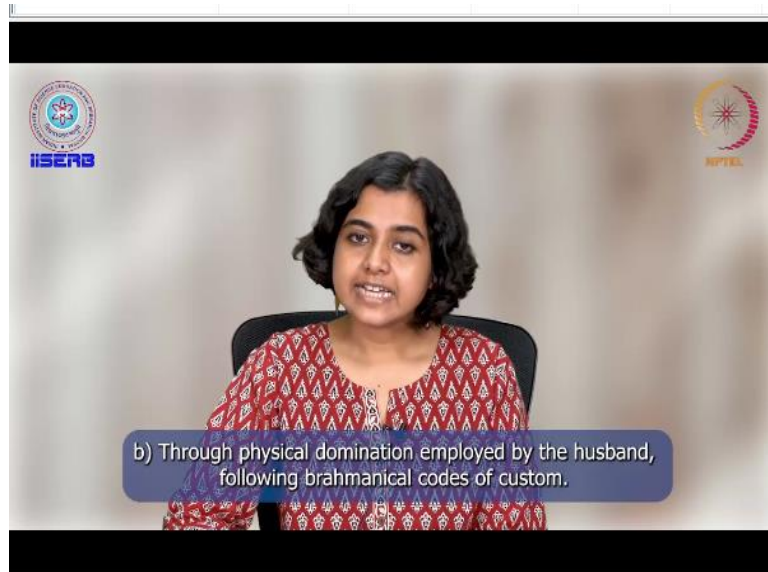
That is the husband to whom she is married by all legitimate means. So, we can see that endogamy had both ritualistic and material consequences because the father's property went to the son and to make sure that the son was indeed the progeny of the legally sanctioned father it was necessary to control the woman's sexuality. Such control was maintained in three forms.

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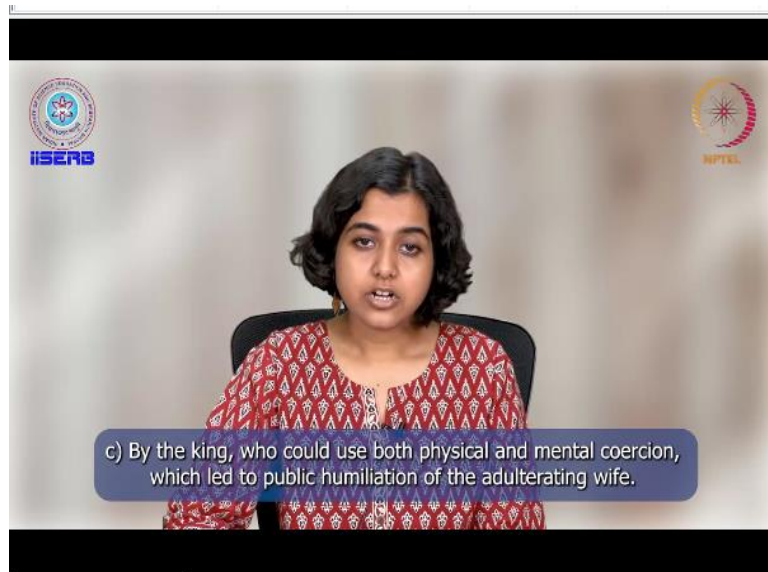
First ideologically by propounding the idea of pativrata dharma where women themselves became willing agents to control their sexuality.

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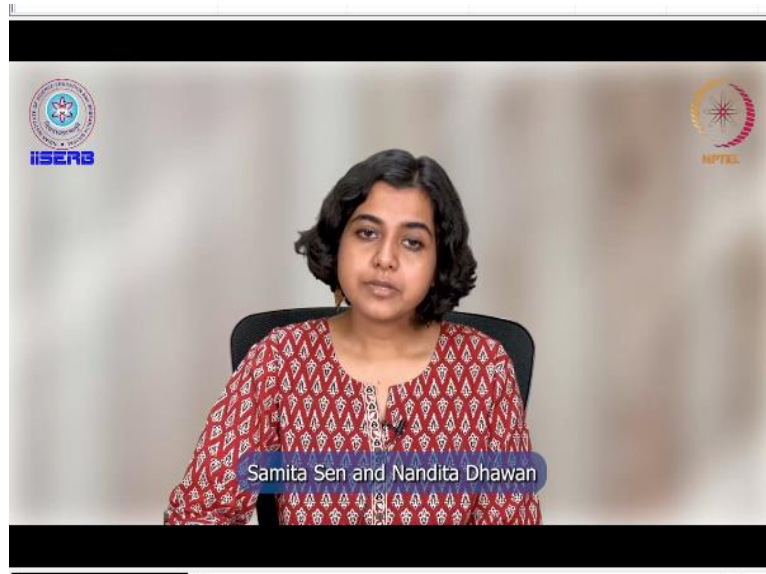
Second through physical domination employed by the husband following Brahmanical codes of custom.

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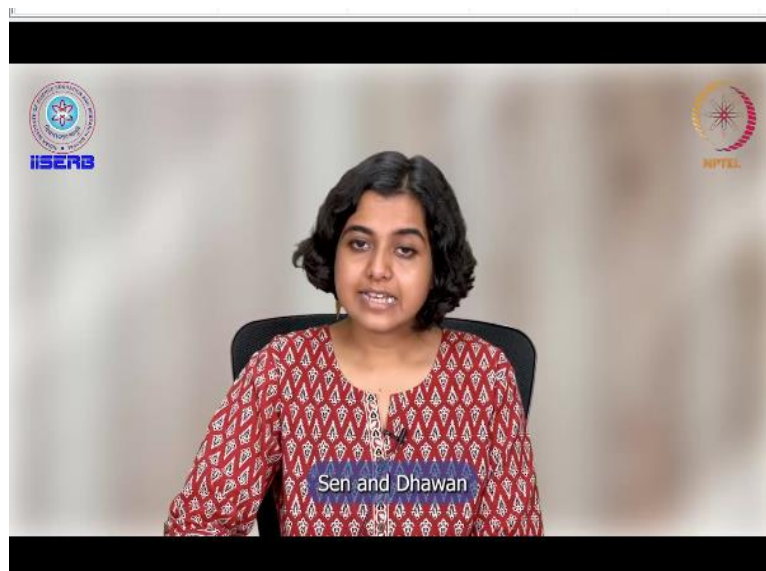
And third by the king who could use both physical and mental coercion which led to public humiliation of the adulterating wife.

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Samita Sen and Nandita Dhawan point out that with regards to the nationalist social reformation clear marks of Brahmanism and gender ideologies were visible. But caste was never invoked within its framework. The Narrative of social progress of women focused only on the upper class and upper caste women whose lives were prescribed by Brahmanical and patriarchal ideals of chastity, purity and devotion to husband. Consequently, patriarchy was interpreted as a traditional system oppressing the upper-class upper caste women.

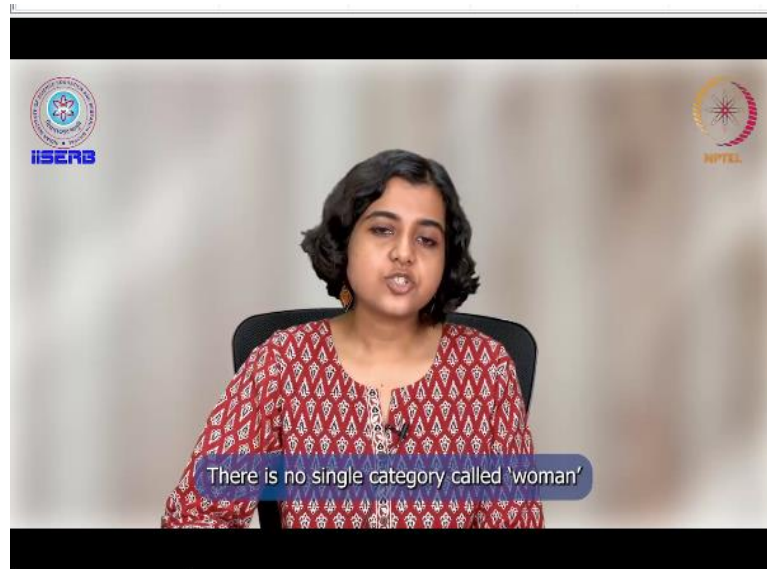
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Sen and Dhawan go on to argue the social reformation such as ideas of companion and marriage the removal of worst physical abuse against women, access to education, employment and finally induction into nationalistic politics benefited only the middle and upper class women. The legalization of Hindu widow remarriage deprived the widows of their property after marriage.

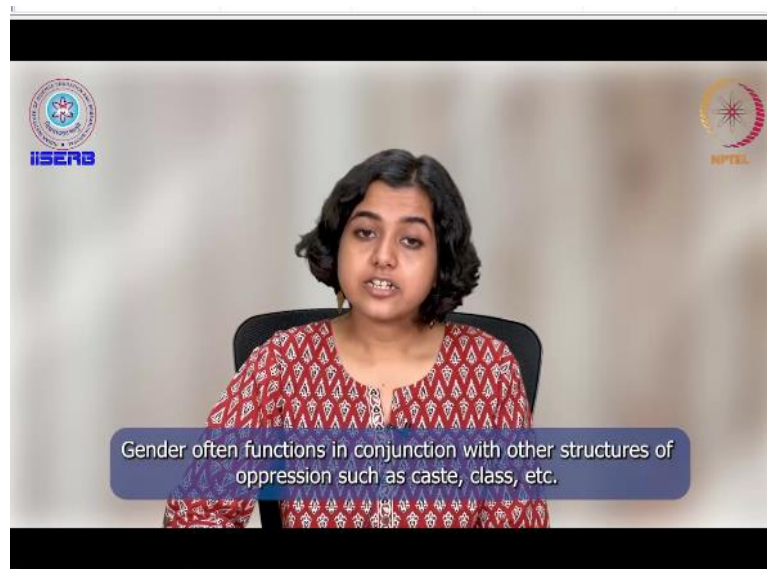
In certain lower caste communities where widows had unconditional rights of remarriage without compelling them to give up their property, this law caused enormous economic deprivation. This comparative reading highlights two things.

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First there is no one single category called woman.

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And second gender often functions in conjunction with other structures of oppression such as caste, class etcetera. This is where the idea of intersectionality comes in. Now let us summarize this lesson. In this lecture we learned that both in the West and in India the complexity of woman remains; it is not simple and correct to define woman as a single category solely affected by gender.

Depending on the position of the speaker and the issue the approach also changes vastly. We have seen how the policies regarding widow remarriage do not benefit all women. Women of some lower caste communities who were entitled to own property after their husband's death were severely deprived due to the implementation of such laws and this is where the idea of difference comes in.

Difference here does not mean separation or discrimination; difference here means the ability to identify how different groups are affected differently by patriarchal forms of oppression. It teaches us that not all women are affected similarly. The specificity is necessary to opt for a more holistic approach that would benefit a greater number of people. In the next lecture we will discuss the theory of intersectionality. Thank you.

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**References:**

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