

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives

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Lecture-45

Mapping and Marking Feminist Sociologies in India

Welcome back to the class. And today is the final class for the week in which we look into the influence of feminism on Indian sociology. We look at how, under various names like women studies or feminist studies, feminism has been able to make a huge influence and impact on the way in which Sociology was understood and practiced in India. We had a discussion about Sharmila's work, and on Sujatha Patel's essay yesterday. We also discussed Aparna Rayaprol's essay on feminist methodology and other aspects.

Today, I am introducing you to an edited work titled Reimagining Sociology in India, Feminist Perspectives, edited by Gita Chadha and M.T. Joseph. This work contains very interesting set of readings about various dimensions of this intersection between feminism and Sociology in India.

So, I thought it is maybe pertinent to discuss the introductory chapter written by the editors Gita Chadha and M.T. Joseph because it gives a very larger holistic view about the contents of the book and also it engages with a series of substantive issues that confronted Indian Sociology regarding gender history. The book was published in 2018 by Routledge publication and it is dedicated to two important scholars. One is Kamala Ganesh and the other Sharmila Rege.

Kamala Ganesh was a faculty of Bombay University, and both the editors belong to Bombay University as well. Sharmila Rege was a professor in Pune and she became one

of the very important voices of the feminist perspectives within Indian Sociology. So, just have a quick look at the content. There is an introduction by Gita Chadha and M.T. Joseph.

We will look at this chapter, Introduction Mapping and Marking Feminist Sociology in India. Also there is an interesting section of the part one, Reading and Writing Early Women in Sociology. It is a very important one because it looks at the important women sociologists in the early and formative years of the discipline. It is very important because many of these women sociologists do not find themselves a place in the current sociological understanding or are no longer included, recognised, debated, or discussed in comparison with a number of other people. So, there is an essay by Kushal Deb on Ratna Naidu and there is an essay by R.

Indira about Parvatamma. I mentioned that she was the first Dalit professor, a Sociology professor. She went to the UK, got trained under Professor Gluckman, and became a very influential scholar. But she is rarely discussed or debated today. And there is an essay by Veena Poonacha on Neeradesai and Kamala Ganesh has written an essay on early women sociologists in India.

So, these sections are important, and we do not have the time to go through each of these sections, but I am urging you to read these essays. Then, there are sections on pedagogies, mentoring, and living processes. Then, there is a third chapter, which is a third section on substantive transformation, erasures, intersections, and insertions. And they are all written by both senior scholars as well as relatively young scholars and emerging scholars. There is a chapter on gender, mental illness and everyday life.

There is a chapter on narratives in feminist Sociology of science, contextualising experience of women scientists in India by Renny Thomas. So, it is a very interesting volume and to anybody who is interested in understanding the trajectory of feminism and Sociology in India, this becomes an important work. So, let us get started with the introduction I will not go into detail because typical of any of these edited volumes, this introduction as well deals with a number of general themes and then it move to the

specific contributions, comments or summarises each of these scholars who have contributed their article. So, I may not go too detail into that. So, the essays in this volume engage with the historical, methodological, theoretical, pedagogical and substantive aspects of the intersection of feminisms and sociologies.

And here, you can see that the editors have used the term plural, feminisms and sociologies basically to argue out that there are multiple voices, multiple strands of theorisations within these two, divisions. They no longer represent the singular or homogenous or a single voice rather there are multiple voices. And now this volume lies in the seminar organised on Genders, Feminisms and Sociologies towards the State of Altered-ness in 2014 at Bombay University.

Bombay University is the first university in which Sociology as a discipline was established and it has a very rich legacy. Some of the most important people including, , Patrick Geddes and then A.

R. Desai and G.S. Ghurye were associated with Bombay University. So, that Bombay School or Bombay tradition is something very important, something that we say similar to that of a Lucknow School or Lucknow tradition. It has been influential from the 1920s onwards. So; it is almost 100 years legacy of Bombay University in terms of teaching and doing research in the field of Sociology. So, it is all about how they conducted the seminar, especially after getting realised that the very small proportion of women sociologists in the department, in particular and in Sociology fields in general.

They are taking the Department of Sociology at the University of Mumbai (hereafter referred to as MU) as a case in point; it also becomes evident that apart from numbers, the marginalisation and erasure of women sociologists in the discipline is an important concern. So, this is something that we came across yesterday: from the very beginning, the social, which is the subject matter of Sociology, has been seen as the world of man. And the mainstream Sociology was a malestream Sociology, as has been put by people. So, important sociologists looked at the society, the social, without the lens of gender and which provided them a picture where the women's roles and women were more or less absent with their contributions.

Kamala Ganesh was a faculty at Bombay University, and she took on family and kinship studies and other things. There is a quote by Kamala Ganesh that, despite radical political and epistemic potentials, social sciences and humanities in Indian universities were not gender sensitive. In my own department, research on women was not much forward in the 1970s.

There was a question mark about the seriousness and rigour. An unspoken assumption hovered in the air that women universities like SNDT were academically a notch lower than Bombay University. It talks about the pervasive sense of inferiority that was attached to that. Now, more generally, we recognise that, the small number of women, the systematic marginalisation and erasure of their work in and through the marking, making of male legacies and the general disabling experience of women sociologists were not features unique to the Mumbai department, but were prevalent across the country. We reckon this scenario could be the internal reason why feminist sociology is not taking root in Indian sociology.

So, as I mentioned yesterday in the previous class, Sociology is one of the most, reflective discipline. Reflective disciplines in the sense that its practitioners, the people who practice Sociology, systematically reflect on their involvement in the discipline and the trajectory of the discipline over a period in time. So, they will be able to see how skewed the discipline is being represented, what are the areas in which the discipline has been overrepresented, what are the areas, themes and the people who are neglected and and, renegade, relegated to, to oblivion. So as a result, there have been quite a lot of interesting discussions and debates about the way in which Sociology as a discipline has been practised. And so many books and volumes have been written, edited by, by a host of scholars, including Veena Das, Sujata Patel, Maitreyi Choudhary and Nandita Sundar.

A host of scholars have written volumes, Satish Deshpande etc., volumes about how Sociology has been practiced in the country and what is the Sociology of Sociology in India. Quite a lot of such criticisms are quite critical, talking about how certain

perspectives have been sidelined or how certain perspectives have been given undue importance, why certain perspectives and orientations are uncritically accepted, while certain other things are either directly or indirectly stifled. There are arguments about this disparity between the way Sociology is practiced in metropolis and then Sociology practiced in the peripheries. So, these debates are very vibrant in the sociological tradition. So, this marginalisation of women in Sociology is nothing new, or it is nothing peculiar to a particular university.

Building upon the work of Sharmila Rege, which aimed to develop a conversation between Sociology and feminism, the seminar sought to foreground concerns of feminist Sociology in India, mapping the methodological, theoretical and substantive intersections between the two. Rege, who forsook a career in Sociology to build the Women's Studies department at Pune University, tragically passed away in, 2013. Her premature death was seen as a great loss to Indian Sociology because she was a very incisive scholar who wrote extensively and who wrote about, very important themes like standpoint theory and Dalit women's questions. One of her essays on standpoint theory and Dalit women we will be taking up shortly. So, they talk about why this book has been, dedicated to these two people. Usually that is not done, Rege and Kamala Ganesh.

The main objective, they say, is to dwell in the archive of memories and records to map and mark the trajectories of early women sociologists and read them largely from a feminist perspective for their present-day relevance to sociologies. So, as I mentioned in the first part, it looks into four or five scholars, such as Ratna Naidu, Parvathamma and Neera Desai. So, it looks into the lives of early sociologists who may not be that known to the current generation and pay more detailed attention to the living processes of pedagogy from the micro everyday practices, identifying intersecting potentials of sociologies and feminisms to bring freshness in the spirit of learning and to attempt to examine how the substantive domains of science, health, environment, sexuality and law either have been or could be transformed by feminisms and sometimes vice versa leading to a foundational change in both. So, the third section is about how a feminist approach can be more productive when we look into substantive themes like law, health, environment, sexuality and science. So, these are the three major parts of this particular

book.

Yeah, reading and writing about early women sociologists is of more importance to us because it will be very interesting to see who are these important women scholars who were a part of the emergence of Sociology and its consolidation, including people who participated in it during the 50s, 60s, 70s and even before that. So, much like today, women sociologists and anthropologists of the early generation have arrived at the women's question either through their personal life experience of patriarchy in and outside the discipline or through engagement with social movements. They rarely arrive at it through the disciplinary necessity of Sociology or Anthropology. This is again a very important observation because, as a discipline, it never really challenged them through its inherent conceptual or theoretical argument because Sociology, to a large part of its life, was oblivious to the richness of gender questions and rather, it was seen as in the periphery. It is often the case with most sites of feminist epistemologies that seek to ask different questions in the discipline.

Since Sociology either explicitly or implicitly discouraged critical and theoretical engagement with these questions or reproduce patriarchal explanations and solutions to these concerns, two things happened. One, as Kamala Ganesh argues, most of the women adopted the dominant disciplinary discourses and two, when their unease with the discipline grew, they often took these questions outside of Sociology, either into social activism. So, there is elaboration about why and how many of these early women were also quite active in social movements and social activism because and that needs a sociological explanation itself and a historical explanation by Iravathi Karve or political commentary by Parvathamma. Further asking these concerns outside of Sociology led to a gradual and definite separation from the discipline as the formation of separate centers of women studies which were interdisciplinary. So, Ganesh maps the life and work of a small group of women sociologists in the second generation of Sociology in India to demonstrate these varied maps.

Giving equal attention to the personal and professional persona of the sociologists,

Ganesh attempts to read the three important principles of feminist practice in their work, location, reflexivity and intersectionality. Ganesh demonstrates how women sociologists of the early generation lived and worked within the contours of the discipline of Sociology, particularly within the dominant debates of each decade and chose to either push for the women question or remain silent on it. So, it is important because Kamala Ganesh is trying to make generalisations, certain observations about the lives of early sociologists who had to work in a very unfavorable situation regarding the gender question. Because the gender question is seen as taken for granted today or as has occupied some more prominent position today, it did not occupy a prominent position back then. It was seen as periphery, so most of the sociologists, even though they were women, were either forced to be silent on that, or they were co-opted into the larger patriarchal paradigm and then went and then had to go ahead with that.

Those who found this uncomfortable had to move out of the disciplinary boundary and then engage in social activism or as they say, the establishment of women's studies in this further led to the ghettoisation rather than making the discipline more receptive to this emerging frameworks whether it is from Subaltern Studies or Women's Studies or Dalit Studies. So, that is the important argument. There are instances, despite the disciplinary emphasis on the axis of traditional modernity and modernisation development on which theories of her times were built, Irawati Karve emphasised women within this. On the other hand, Parvathamma, perhaps due to her location as a Dalit and the dominant theories of caste which came from above, chose to bracket out the gender questions. So, it looks like a more substantive discussion about how these people, Neera Desai and Leela Dube, had to negotiate with these questions and how we really look at them now.

Another section is volunteerism outside of Sociology. So, as mentioned earlier, many of these scholars had to resort to volunteerism or social activism outside the academia. Many times, not as an extension of their academic activities but as a result of compulsion because the disciplinary boundary of Sociology was seen as more limiting and stifling rather than the outside world, which offered more possibilities for explanations and

elaborations. Another thing that became evident was that the women who practised Sociology were also steeped in volunteerism. One can argue that this was because of women's socialisation to extend themselves to community work and because of sociology's nature to be concerned with social change.

This interesting overlap of women's socialisation and the nature of Sociology pushed women to move to voluntary social work, though quite distant from philanthropy. In this context, Ganesh reads the work of Chandralekha Hate. Apart from seeing Hate's academic work as a representation of the pre-1970s framework in which women are seen as a unitary category, Ganesh highlights the significance of the Kudumba Sakhi. Even in present-day Mumbai, Hate's organisation, Kudumba Sakhi, has flourished as a unique venture that assists women in nurturing livelihood options in Mumbai. So, it talks about how many of these sociologists strongly engaged with the outside world and were part of movements and civil society organisations.

They set up their NGOs or the collective of women in doing that. Our readings push us in two directions. The move towards social work or activism can be read as outside of Sociology and yet indicates to us the impulse of action, transformation, and deeply embedded practice, for the objective canon of the discipline is unprepared but articulates the critical spirit and potential of the discipline. So, even though the discipline itself was incapable or unwilling to look into that, this outside world may really use the discipline's conceptual and theoretical potentials. We submit that while assessing the contribution of sociologists, particularly women sociologists who did not have easy access to the inside Sociology, these out of Sociology interventions must be taken on board.

The argument is that to evaluate the contributions of these early scholars, it is as important to look at their contributions outside Sociology as what they have done for the discipline within Sociology. Extending this idea out of Sociology, we would like to emphasise that women in Sociology often find themselves using alternative modes of writing than purely academic ones. A marked case in point is Irawati Karve's *Yuganta*. Irawati Karve was ahead of her time in many ways in her interdisciplinary approach to a subject, so this particular literary work is quite famous, and it is important to see why a

scholar and sociology professor like Irawati Karve ventured into such creative and literary works.

Now, regarding the question of intersectionality and standpoint, the scholars are raising some interesting questions. Intersectionality and important contribution of feminist epistemology to the social science is widely debated among feminist social scientists across the globe. Is it something that women of colour and women in postcolonial academia have always been practising, or is that something that Western academic feminists have newly lent? This is very interesting because from the 1990s, 1980s and 90s the standpoint theory became more famous by Sara Harding and other works. But the editors are asking a very important question: is not it what many of these Indian sociologists, especially feminist sociologists, have always been talking about?

Though they may not have used this term or terminologies, is not it exactly the same? or should we say that it was handed over to us by western scholars, and then we started using it? Chaudhury argues that in the politics of knowledge production at the international and global level through the mechanisms of citations and appropriation, women working from the third world are often marginalised. Much debated in the contemporary context, Ganesh takes this further back in the Indian context. The inclusion by early women sociologists of issues related to women using the idioms of colonial policy, reform and nationalist movements, as well as the latter village, community and region studies, must be read as attempts at early intersectionality in conjunction with those of caste, class, religion and region. So, they argue that they attempt to look into these positions as intersections of different categories of women and caste or women and rural life.

So, these things give you sharper perspectives on how to understand society. Discussing the work of another important woman in Sociology, C. Parvathamma, Ganesh says that though mostly silent on gender issues, her contribution to Sociology demonstrates a clear critical lens which questioned dominant viewpoints at that time.

There is an essay by Prof. R. Indira on Parvathamma in this volume and it is very

interesting because it chronicles how Parvathamma who was born in a very poor Dalit family had to struggle in her life and how other people helped her and how she came up, she went to the UK and then got a PhD, came back and and and then how she became a very important scholar, widely respected and even feared by her fellow sociologists at that particular time. It is also interesting to see how what positions she had regarding the Dalit question or women's question. And it is interesting to see that she was very much against this whole idea of reservation. She herself did not avail it and she was against that. She argued that it would have a very negative impact on society and other things. So, how do we read a scholar like that? A scholar who was born into a Dalit family went abroad, came back, and had to fight the upper caste Brahminical and patriarchal elements within the academia and yet took maybe, in the contemporary times, say, an unpopular position on the reservation. A very interesting section of questions. And she was a very strong critic of Srinivas saying that what Srinivas presented about Rampura village was a Brahminical view.

These women, whether it is Irawati Karve, Parvathama or Neera Desai, all represent interesting times, and it would be very fascinating to look at their work through the present concerns and debates. Ganesh argues that Parvathamma built her career on the professionalism of the time, which opposed identity and difference-based epistemologies and practice.

I would urge you to read that essay R. Indira's essay. It is a very interesting essay. Though Parvathamma's work can be seen as an early approach to caste, one can ask, was it intersectional? Did it herald the Dalit standpoint at all? If not, can we read one into that? Can we radicalise our readings further depending on our locations? For instance, if we ask a Dalit sociologist today to reread Parvathamma from a Dalit standpoint, we are sure another reading is possible. So, these works are amenable to multiple readings from contemporary times.

So, that is one of the important things. Another scholar, Ratna Naidu, also struggled to gain success in the academic profession. Kushal Deb's paper on Naidu documents that it was very difficult for her to get into the institutionalised academic positions in India,

despite and perhaps because of her higher studies abroad. So, it is also a reflection of a time when a woman came back from higher studies and how others saw her differently. These are more specifically about Ratna Naidu and you can read that. Speaking on her intellectual relevance today, it becomes clear that, as argued by Ganesh, Ratna Naidu, too, worked within the dominant and prevalent paradigm of her time. Yet Naidu's approach to the Sociology of religion, one could argue is an interdisciplinary one using psychoanalysis and psychology. The question asked by Uberoi is, why does Ratna Naidu not figure in the canon of Indian Sociology like male sociologists of her time? Was it because of her interest in theory, which was considered a male prerogative? Had she worked on women's issues, would she have been ghettoised or be, but be more accepted? Very fundamental, uncomfortable questions as it is.

The subsequent sections are about pedagogy and mentoring. It argues that pedagogy as we see as an important aspect of Sociology and feminism, both constituencies have dwelt extensively on the challenges of pedagogy. While a lot of this work comes from the macro pedagogic and knowledge making concerns of institutional limitations practiced within higher education, it talks about how syllabi and other things are an important role in that.

Maitreyee Chauhury argues that the pedagogy and the intellectual legacy of Sociology are part of one whole as you practice Sociology in classroom. She demonstrates how the classroom pushes us to devise new ways of looking at conceptual discourses. She argues the two tasks, pedagogic and conceptual are intertwined and necessarily impinges upon each other. And there is again a quote by Avijit Pathak, professor of Sociology at JNU, a very popular and very loved professor by almost every student of Sociology. He is also a very important scholar who speaks about the ethical moral dimensions about teaching and not to be carried away by the more recent troubling trends.

So, this critical sociological practice and pedagogy, the sociological consciousness that many of these founding fathers have spoken about that how that helps in the integration of Sociology of women with gender with that of general Sociology. Whether it may be the Marxist perspective emerging from the class or now the Dalit perspectives emerging

from the caste, both offer critical apparatus for the classroom as a site of critical transformation and transgression of both the discipline and society at large. So, these scholars talk about how classroom atmosphere, classroom space and new perspectives emerging from Dalit or feminist or sexuality can be used as very effective pedagogical tools to question the existing and widely taken for granted knowledges and to devise more interesting pedagogical practices and pedagogical frameworks. So, feminist pedagogies, Sharmila Rege's point, center on four common themes, an enduring connectedness to the living and the concrete, emphasis on participation and interaction, collaboration and cooperation and teaching with a vision. Connectedness to the living and concrete is not narrowly interpreted as applied knowledge but called for a historical perspective on knowledge which then invites students to personalise the domain of study through participation and sharing of life and experience.

This is a very important idea, especially when you teach Sociology; when you study Sociology, it is always important to connect the disciplines with one's own life, one's own lived experience, and one's biography. That is why it is also important to look at sociological perspectives from a personal perspective. Rege argues to extend Dubois's idea about passionate pedagogy, and Pujari, in this volume, extends Hook's idea of an engaged and transgressive pedagogy. There are discussions on that.

Then lived experience in the classroom. Speaking of classroom feminist pedagogies, we argue that knowledge making is participatory, non-hierarchical and based on lived experience, a very interesting yet highly debatable topic. Whether lived experience provides you an additional vantage point for theorisation or not. We will discuss that later. While the idea of lived experience as an analytic category of structures is not alien to Sociology, the category of lived experience as a central epistemic character is unique to feminism. The debate among feminists on this issue is complex. So, we will take up that later when we take up Gopal Guru's and Sundar Sarukkai's debate.

Mentoring and Care, another subtitle. Anurekha Chari Wagh asks the question, is there something about Sociology as a discipline that takes away from the engaged mentoring that feminists profess? Do women in Sociology face the complex struggle between being women and being sociologists? On the other hand, some of us are asking the question,

are we reproducing masculine cultures of academic practice even in women's study spaces? Despite feminist values of democracy and freedom, are we imparting only cultures of insecurities and anxieties? We would like to submit that, like all disciplines, women's studies also have fallen into the trap of legacy-making. Chari Wagh's paper marks a rather poignant moment in the relationship between Sociology and women's studies at Pune University. So, it asks this important question: whether feminist studies which claim certain values and certain moral positions, do they really adhere to that, or do they also slip into other values that are not desirable? Then, there are sections on substantive transformations, erasures, intersections and insertions.

The contours that emerge from these encounters in subfields of Sociology like Science and Health. So, these sections are about more substantive themes. There are specific arguments, specific sections about how the authors of this volume have looked into science, health and environment, and similar themes section, Renny Thomas's work on women scientists is here.

The last section concerns gender, masculinity, and sexuality; Pushpesh Kumar's and Vishal G. Jadhav's engagement with sexuality questions has complicated this whole gender narrative in more specific ways. So, that is a nutshell of this introduction. It is a lengthy introduction, which provides a larger orientation to the volume.

It raises some interesting questions. What I found most important, more challenging, or more fascinating is the section on the early women sociologists. There is a chapter that summarises all the women sociologists, but there are individual chapters dedicated to each of these women. So, that makes this volume very interesting because many of these women are forgotten or no longer in the domains of mainstream Sociology of contemporary India. So, we are winding up this class today and this particular section on feminism and Indian Sociology.

We will move to the tenth week. That is about questions related to Dalit Sociology and Indian Sociology in the coming class. See you then. Thank you.