

Political Feminism in India

An Analysis of Actors, Debates and Strategies

Dr Vibhuti Patel and Radhika Khajuria

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Executive Summary

- The last 50 years of feminist activism in India has managed to challenge the 5,000 years of patriarchal order. The main achievements were the deconstruction of violence against women, questioning of male domination within the family, kinship, religion, media and the State, in addition to a series of legal reforms. Understanding of privilege to reshape the world has been the distinct contribution of the feminist movement along with the focus on the marginalised.
- The feminist space in India is distinctive and builds upon a diversity of women's groups, political party networks, feminist and HIV/AIDS-related NGOs, non-funded feminist and queer groups and individuals, democratic rights groups, eco-feminists, non-feminists, research institutes and universities. Despite the broad experience, this space remains rather disunited.
- Currently, there is a backlash to feminism, as major insights of women's activism did not succeed in altering the fixed notions of gender roles and traditions. On the contrary, some of these have enjoyed a revival with marketisation and cultural traditionalism. There is a disconnect between theory and practice: study groups and human rights activists seem to work in silos, unlike in the 1970s when there was greater dialogue between the women's movement and women's studies.
- The gendering of citizenship requires us to question and challenge the fact that citizenship, a supposedly public identity, is produced and mediated by the supposedly private heterosexual patriarchal family. The 'personal' has become 'political' as it is completely submerged in power relations. Like any other structure of power, patriarchy too has an outside, which is what makes possible the different kinds of protests that constantly undermine it.
- Feminism today is the constant questioning of the world we perceive and the boundaries we encounter. The more we understand, the more we are able to build a narrative for change. There are innumerable new energies arising from different positions transforming the feminist field: new contestations of patriarchy, and new contestations of the normative feminism itself. It will be the interplay of fields that might change the system altogether.



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List of Abbreviations

AIDAN	All India Drug Action Network
AIIMS	All India Institute of Medical Sciences
AIWC	All India Women's Conference
AFSPA	Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEHAT	Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes
CSR	Child Sex Ratio
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women
FAOW	Forum Against Oppression of Women
GAD	Gender and Development
GOI	Government of India
GOs	Government Organisations
GR	Government Resolution
IAWS	Indian Association for Women's Studies
ICMR	Indian Council of Medical Research
IRR	Institute of Research in Reproduction
LGBT	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender
LSBs	Local self-government bodies
MASUM	Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NMA	Naga Mothers' Association
NASS	Nari Adhikar Sangram Samiti
NGOs	Non Government Organisations
OBCs	Other Backward Classes
PRIs	Panchayati Raj Institutions
PILs	Public Interest Litigations
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
PCPNDT Act	The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act
PWDV Act	The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act
UNFPA	United Nation Population Fund
UN	United Nations
UN-Habitat	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UGC	University Grants Commission
VAW	Violence Against Women
WID	Women in Development
WAD	Women and Development
WHHs	Women-Headed Households
WRB	Women's Reservation Bill
WRH	Women's Right to Housing
WS	Women's Studies
WHO	World Health Organization
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

Foreword

Why the notion of Political Feminism? Is it not the particular nature of feminism per se to form part of the Polis - the body of citizens - a collection of various interests striving for the better of all? Does not feminism represent just one of the many groups and movements in the political discourse that constitute our democracies? A feminist discourse which does not focus on the struggles of a political party, but which surely embraces the plurality of arguments, ideas and foremost visions on how to build a genuine and good society.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the oldest German political foundation, commits its work to the values of freedom, equality, democracy and social justice. In that context, it is with some concern that we noted the decline of this particular political nature of feminism and a growing technicality of the same. Reducing feminism to gender mainstreaming or linguistic gender washing neglects the broader context in which the recognition and dignity of the marginalised have to find their place. The NGO-isation of gender – as some put it – falls short of explaining why the structural imbalances still prevail. And it is a global phenomenon that not only women but also men and other genders feel more and more on the losing side of a system that is no longer or has never even been theirs.

Against this background, the FES has launched a project on Political Feminism to revive the debate on “the Political”; a debate about visions and ideas on how we want to build an inclusive society that keeps up to the promise of a better life. Considering Asia’s, not the least India’s, plurality and the history of women’s movements in the continent, it is only natural to recognise the diversity of feminisms’ ideas and groups that strive for recognition and their capabilities to form equal partners in our society. Alongside the traditional women’s movement, new groups have arisen, not all of them feminist but equally humanist in paving their ways to achieving social justice. The FES wants to build bridges between the “established” feminist activists and “new generation” feminists,

between staunch advocates of feminism and the “non-converts”, ranging from “elite feminists” to grassroots activists, integrating people regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.

Providing a common platform for exchange and analysis, the FES wants to widen the dialogue on social justice by including stakeholders from the feminist and social movements, from labour unions and the civil society to academics, progressive thinkers and opinion leaders. Learning from each other, accepting the differences and embracing the common goals, the FES hopes to contribute in creating a new narrative for social justice in Asia.

Every vision needs a starting point and it is with great pleasure that we present this paper that gives a comprehensive overview of *the story so far*. Acknowledging the enormous task of delivering an inclusive, yet brief, analysis of actors, debates and strategies of the feminist movement in India, we would like to thank Prof. Vibhuti Patel and Radhika Khajuria for their excellent work and efforts. We extend our gratitude to all our partners who have provided us with their expertise. With this country study on India, we want to contribute to the FES regional project on Political Feminism in Asia. We hope that this study provides valuable information and analysis for the way ahead.

Patrick Ruether, Damyanty Sridharan,
Mandvi Kulshreshtha for the FES India Office

April 2016

Acknowledgement

This paper is an attempt to document the journey that the Indian feminist movements have traversed in the past almost 70 years from the post-Independence period onwards. This journey has been in pursuit of equality and democracy and the struggle for the articulation of the feminist agency from a patriarchal social system. The key actors, strategies, alliances, and partnerships on issues of concern to the movement across the country and best practices have been highlighted to underscore the rich, multi-dimensional nature of this democratic, freedom and equality seeking, inspiring Indian Feminist Movement.

We have tried to capture how insurmountable challenges have been overcome; gains made which could form the basis for learning and building solidarity with varied groups, thereby pushing the boundaries and strategising for the future in these challenging tumultuous times. We hope that this Paper will form the basis for a deeper dialogue among young and old feminists, who are part of organisations and groups with varied stakeholders and constituencies that will enrich and further the attainment of the ideals and goals envisioned in the feminist struggles over the past four decades not only in India but also South Asia. So this is a journey in collective pursuit of freedom, equality, dignity and justice by highlighting the beauty of democratic solidarity of brave Indian people cutting across caste, class, religion and region.

We acknowledge, with heartfelt thanks, Dr Krishna Menon of Lady Shri Ram College, Dr Rachna Johari of Ambedkar University, and Dr Meenakshi Gopinath, Founding Director-WISCOMP, for their interviews and discussions that provided valuable insights on the dynamics of feminist movement in India.

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Historical Roots and Evolution of the Feminist Movement and Ideas

Historically, Indian women's role in the family, community and society at large was determined by an interplay of several forces such as caste and gender based division of work, class background, geographic location and ethnic origin of particular community/tribe. For example, women dominated by Aryan culture had a far more rigid control over sexuality, fertility and labour. Women in Dravidian culture had to face relatively less ferocious patriarchy. Over the last 5,000 years, Indian women's status has also been influenced by various religions—Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Religious reform movements between 12th century and 16th century, which also gave rise to liberation theology, namely Bhakti Movement and Sufism, brought women's concerns to the fore. Saint poetesses such as Mirabai, Lal Ded, Akka Mahadevi, and Bahinabai articulated women's aspirations of personal freedom and creative urge (Krishnaswamy, 1993).

The Genesis of Feminist Movement and Women's Organisations in India

In the 19th century, the male social reformers with the blessing of the British administrators, influenced by western liberal democratic values initiated the process of fight against female infanticide, widow burning, segregation of women from the public life, prostitution and begging by destitute women. They also organised public functions for widow remarriages. As a result, their relatives, neighbours, community leaders and organised religion boycotted them. In a way, it was a blessing in disguise because their isolation from petty politics gave them ample time and resources to interact with the power structures to bring about legal reforms and establish educational institutions, shelter homes, training centres for women from where the first generation of teachers, nurses and other skilled workers came out. (Desai, 1977)

Classified as the first-wave feminism, the phase was marked by the first generation of English educated women's struggles against child marriage, widow burning, female infanticide and efforts for education for women and their voting rights. It impacted only women from the upper caste and upper class. Enormous amount of literature of that time, produced by the Indian social

reformers in Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Malayalam, Tamil, and Bengali bears witness to their path-breaking efforts. The first generation of English educated empowered women became foremothers of the women's movement in the pre-independence period. Most of them channelised their energies in building pioneer women's organisations such as All India Women's Conference (AIWC), Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and Anjuman-I-Islam. The political agenda of AIWC was to fight against child marriage, mobilise public opinion in favour of voting rights for women, and impart basic skills (such as tailoring, embroidery, cookery, hair-styling, childcare, folk and classical music and dance, letter-writing, etc.) so that they become efficient homemakers. The cultural ambiance of the AIWC suited the needs and aspirations of the high-caste Hindu women. For all practical purposes, the YWCA was multi-religious in terms of its areas of activities and beneficiaries, though its decision-makers happened to be the Christian wives of politicians, bureaucrats, professionals and the managerial cadre, who were in close proximity to the British rulers. The YWCA provided vocational training courses to groom nurses, typists, secretaries and teachers, classes in bakery products, flower arrangement, as well as Western and Indian classical dance and music. Anjuman Trust was committed to the cause of women's education and skill formation with an idea to enable them to become home-based workers. They had to work within the matrix of the purdah (veil). Women office bearers of the YWCA had to face the outside world with nominal male protection. Many AIWC leaders had their male family members as facilitators. Women leaders from the Anjuman Trust interacted only with the Muslim community. Differences in eating habits, dress-code and language barriers prevented them from collaborative ventures though their leadership was from the economically better-off sections.

Non-violent means of protest actions under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi ensured massive participation of women in the national liberation movement. Women family members of the Congress leaders gave up purdah and participated in public functions, rallies, demonstrations and experienced prison life. Many families allowed women to take political risks, which

enabled them to eventually emerge as powerful leaders. Some of the highly educated women joined educational institutions, the diplomatic corps, public service boards, and public and private sector industries. The rest became enlightened home-makers with a strong commitment to educating their daughters. The journey that began with the 19th century social reform movement and culminated with the 20th century freedom movement, resulted in securing the constitutional guarantees of equality, freedom and equal opportunity for women, irrespective of their class, caste, creed, race and religion (Kasturi & Mazumdar, 1994).

Empowerment of Women in the Second Wave of Feminism

Empowerment of women is a process where women take control over their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, building self-confidence, solving problems and developing self-reliance. No one can empower another; only the individual can empower herself or himself to make choices or to speak out. Institutions within the State and civil society are supporting processes that can nurture self-empowerment of women through the collective efforts of the women's movement. With this perspective, let us understand the women's rights movement of the last quarter of the 20th century.

In the second wave of feminism that began in the mid-1970s, educated middle-class women were actively involved in different social movements of students, youth, workers, peasants, tribals, Dalits and civil liberties, and played a central role. They abhorred paternalism of benevolent males and upper class women's 'charitable' and 'philanthropic' social work and declared themselves as fighters for women's rights.

Women's rights movement in the post-1975 period brought to the fore a wide range of women's concerns. There had been various ideological shades in the women's movement co-existing till then. The earlier women's organisations were perceived to have an elitist bias by the newly formed autonomous women's groups. To them, these were privileged 'women from good families' that did some philanthropic, social work activities for common, poor, miserable women, which perpetuated iniquitous relations and did not transcend the existing social order. Feminists also averred that the conventional women's organisations abided by the rules of caste

system in their personal lives and were generally oriented towards maintaining the status quo.

In the last four decades, women from marginalised sections - Dalit and tribal, industrial workers and agricultural labourers, poor women in urban and rural areas - have mobilised against violence against women in the community and in the family, witch-hunting of women-headed households, mass rapes of tribal and Dalit women, dowry murders, domestic violence and alcoholism, and crimes in the name of honour. The members of the new autonomous women's groups believe in fighting against all forms of sexual oppression and consider women as an oppressed sex. They believe, like casteism and communalism, sexism is one of the most effective weapons used by the ruling class to divide masses. Hence, they believe in fighting against the caste system, religious chauvinism and sexism, simultaneously (Rege, 2006). In their personal lives too they practice non-discriminatory attitudes towards people of different religions, castes and classes. The Indian feminists believe that economic independence of women is a minimum necessary condition for women's liberation but it is not enough. One has to fight for women's rights in the socio-cultural, educational, and political fields to achieve total liberation. Many of those members of women's rights groups call themselves feminists (Bhasin, 2002). They do not like the term 'social worker' for themselves (Menon, 2011). Those who believe that 'legal provisions can change women's position' are known as liberal feminists. Those who consider men as responsible for the plight of women are known as radical feminists. And those who situate women's oppression in the overall socio-economic and cultural reality are known as socialist feminists. Socialist feminists believe in establishing linkages between the women's movement and broader socio-political movement by working in collaboration with various types of mass organisations such as trade unions, democratic rights organisations and issue-based united fronts. They think that women's demands have to be fought on a day-to-day basis. Then only new ethos, new ideologies, new morality and new egalitarian relations between men and women can be evolved (Patel, 2010). Dalit feminists such as Urmila Pawar, Kumud Pawade and Baby Kamble (Maharashtra), Cynthia Stephen and Ruth Manorama (Karnataka), Bama and Meena Kandaswamy (Tamil Nadu) have become quite influential nationally and internationally in the last

two decades (Rege, 2006). Dalit feminism analyses Dalit women's oppression as a triple jeopardy of oppression by double patriarchies- "discreet" patriarchy of Dalit men and an "overlapping" patriarchy of the upper caste men and women- as well as poverty. It argues for envisioning of contemporary feminist politics by incorporating an ideological position of plural standpoints (Menon, 2012). Dalit womanism has also emerged as a trend among many Dalit scholars who find feminism as inadequate to represent their needs and aspirations (Stephen, 2009).

The main concerns of women's organisations during the second wave of feminism were:

- Men outnumber women in India, unlike in most other countries
- Majority of women go through life in a state of nutritional stress-they are anaemic and malnourished. Girls and women face nutritional discrimination within the family, eating last and least
- The average Indian woman has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health
- Literacy rate is lower in women as compared to men and far fewer girls than boys go to school in India. Even when girls are enrolled, many of them drop out of school
- Women's work is undervalued and unrecognised. They work longer hours than men and do the major share of household and community work, which is unpaid and invisible
- Once 'women's work' is professionalised, there is practically a monopoly on it by men. For example, professional chefs are still largely men. The sexual division of labour ensures that women always end up as having to prioritise unpaid domestic work over paid work. There is no 'natural' biological difference that lies behind the sexual division of labour, but certain ideological assumptions
- Women generally earn far lower wages than men doing the same work, despite the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. In no state do women and men earn equal wages in agriculture. Majority of women workers are in the unorganised sector and they barely manage to get subsistence wages
- Women are under-represented in governance and decision-making positions: in Parliament, the Cabinet, in High Courts and the Supreme Court

- Women are legally discriminated against in land and property rights. Most do not own property in their own names and do not get a share of parental property
- Women face violence inside and outside the family throughout their lives. Casteism, communalism and ethnic chauvinism institutionalise violence against Dalit, religious minority and tribal women
- Women who don't adhere to heterosexual and endogamous marriage get punished severely by family, community and the criminal legal system.

Feminist Leadership and Its Strategies

The genesis of the new women's liberation movement lay in the radicalisation of Indian politics in the late sixties. The rebellious mood of the youth, poor peasants, marginal farmers, educated Dalit and tribal men and women and the industrial working classes found its expression in the formation of innumerable special interest groups that addressed the needs and demands of the local masses. Macro political processes were also finding major shifts in their rhetoric as the protest movements of the subaltern masses had taken militant paths guided by different political ideologies. The official communist parties faced a major political challenge in the form of the Naxalbari movement in Kerala, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Punjab. A mass upheaval by the middle-class in Gujarat (popularly known as Nav Nirman movement) against corruption, price rise, unemployment, speculation, hoarding and black marketeering in 1974 was replicated in Bihar in the name of Sampurna Kranti movement under the leadership of a Gandhian leader, Jayaprakash Narayan. An unprecedented strike by railway workers that year gave proof of the political power of the collective strength of the working class. Tribal people's struggles against destructive development that served the interests of the kulaks (affluent landlords), moneylenders, contractors, bootleggers and indigenous industrialists thriving on the barbaric means of surplus extraction started in Chhattisgarh, Singhbhum, Bhojpur, Srikakulam, Chandrapur, Dhulia, and in the pockets of the North Eastern states. In response to the 1974 drought that paralysed normal agricultural activities, the tribal masses in Dhule region of Maharashtra demanded an employment guarantee scheme. This historic demand revolutionised the thinking of the development workers about responsibility of the State during an economic crisis (Patel, 1985).

In the Himalayan valleys, under the leadership of Gandhian community workers, the struggle against arbitrary felling of trees (that led to deforestation and massive scarcity of fuel, fodder, water and seasonal fruits besides devastating landslides in villages after villages) began. Women evolved a creative method to protect the trees from the axes of contractors' henchmen. This movement was popularly known as Chipko because women hugged the trees when their adversaries made ferocious efforts at cutting them down.

In Maharashtra, women activists and women intellectuals involved in progressive movements took initiative in forming a united front called Anti-price rise Women's Committee and organised direct action against the culprits who created a man-made shortage of essential goods. Thousands of poor and lower middle class women joined the struggle under the leadership of seasoned and able women from the Left and socialist background. Mrinal Gore, Ahilya Ranganekar, Manju Gandhi and Tara Reddy made their special mark in the eyes of the masses as a result of their unique ability to reach out to women of different class backgrounds. Their intellectual self-sufficiency, ability to relate micro issues to macro political reality, simple lifestyle and non-bossy nature made them ideal role models for the younger generation of women's liberation activists of all political hues. Around the same time, a conference of the Women's Liberation Movement Coordination Committee was organised in Pune. This had an even larger socio-political and cultural base as everyone from young educated women, professionals, writers and teachers to industrial working class women, unorganised sector women workers, temple prostitutes and tribal women participated in the deliberations and highlighted their demands.

Stree Mukti Sangatana in Bombay (now Mumbai) and Progressive Organisation of Women in Hyderabad were formed in 1974. In Delhi, new leadership among women evolved from the radical students' movement and the democratic rights movement. These were independent, self-determining and democratic movements, which questioned all hierarchical structures. Individual women in different political groupings all over India were feeling discontented about patriarchal biases in their organisations but they came out openly against it only after the Emergency ended. In India, young people of

that time had not participated in the dreams of the nationalist movement. Faced with multiple crises - economic, social and political, along with corruption, drought, inflation, unemployment and pauperisation of the rural poor - the disenchanting youth responded with protest. Widespread, open discontent was expressed in action and consolidation of the action developed into powerful organisations throughout the country. These movements raised a number of diverse issues - land rights, wages, employment, security at workplace, availability of water, destruction of nature, oppression and exploitation of the Dalits and the working masses. Many women participated in these struggles with enthusiasm, responsibility and creativity (Patel, 2002).

The UN Declaration of 1975 as an International Women's Year coincided with the Emergency rule in India. By the time it was lifted in 1977, several women's groups had emerged around democratic rights issues. The press swung into "action" after the imposed silence of nearly two years. Atrocities committed against women during the Emergency were openly documented and reported. These atrocities found a resonance with most women's own experiences of life within the family, on the streets, at the workplace and in political groups. The culmination of this process took place in 1980 when many women's groups took to the street to protest. During the 1980s, the issue of women's oppression was depicted not only in discussion forums, seminars and 'serious' articles but also in the popular media. Women, who had identified the sources of their problems and indignity on their own, began to acquire a language, an organisational platform, a collective identity and legitimacy that they did not have earlier.

The Status of Women in India Committee appointed by the Government Of India released a voluminous report called *Towards Equality* in 1974. This report was prepared by scholars with an interdisciplinary perspective and was presented in the Parliament, where it received a tremendous response from the decision-making bodies, the State apparatus and the print media. Shocking descriptions of Indian women's reality, which manifested in declining sex ratio, very high rate of female mortality and morbidity, marginalisation of women in the economy and discriminatory personal laws were some of the major highlights of the report. However, the report

failed to throw light on violence against women in the civil society and by the custodians of law and order. The major achievement of the report lay in the policy decision taken by the principal research body viz., the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), to provide financial support to scholars committed to the women's cause, to conduct research into problems faced by women in poverty groups.

Emergence of Autonomous Women' Organisations in India

Between 1977 and 1979 new women's groups emerged in cities like Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Ahmedabad, Patna, and Madras. They organised protest actions against dowry murders, beauty contests, sexist portrayal of women in the media, pornographic films and literature imported from abroad, introduction of virginity tests by the U.K. immigration authorities, custodial rapes and the pitiable condition of women in prisons. These groups were multicultural in their composition and worldview. As a result, their political agenda reflected the contemporaneous handling of the complex reality of women constructed by the interplay of class, caste, religion, ethnicity and globalisation. The spokespersons of these groups had an advantage of high level of ideological investment and the experience of the radical movements of the late Sixties. Their collective wisdom was the backbone of the movement. Their newsletters, magazines and booklets in regional languages as well as in English provided creative ways of handling Indian women's problems. Launching of *Manushi* in January 1979 was a qualitative leap in this direction. The need to study women's issues in academic institutions and to conduct research based on experiential material and affirmative action was beginning to be discussed among Indian women's studies scholars by the early Eighties. The discourse on this subject has proved to be a fruitful exercise for activists, academics, researchers, policy planners and the United Nations (UN) system. The apex body of higher learning, the University Grants Commission (UGC) defined Women's Studies (WS) as a discipline that involved research, documentation, teaching, training and action. It is understood that women have a subordinate status in our society so the knowledge base created by WS should be used for empowerment of women (Patel, 2009).

Dialogue between Women's Studies and Women's Movements

It was in the early 1980s that WS centres, functioning autonomously or within the university system, started accepting empirical and experiential evidence from the women's movement. It was a time when participatory research, action research and subaltern studies were gaining ground in the field of social sciences as well as among the social work institutions and non-government organisations (NGOs) focusing on specialised fields. This process indirectly facilitated the interaction of WS and the women's movement. A wide range of issues concerning women were extensively discussed with tremendous technical details in the first national conference on Perspective for Women's Liberation Movement in India in December 1980. In terms of alternative cultural inputs, this conference was a trendsetter as it included songs, ballads, skits, jokes, vocabulary, plural lifestyles and multilingual dialogues. The conference made it possible for women from totally divergent political moorings to come together for a democratic discourse. Four months later, in the first National Conference of Women's Studies in April 1981, at SNDT Women's University, a wide variety of issues were discussed by activists, researchers, academicians, administrators and policy-makers. These included the developmental process which bypassed women, the gender bias in textbooks, sexism in the media, gender blindness in science and technology, health needs of women and violence against women- rape, domestic violence and prostitution. The general consensus among the participants (both women and men) was that WS was pro-women and not neutral. It was seen that WS would build a knowledge base for empowering women by pressing for change at policy level and in curriculum development, by criticising gender blindness as well as gender-bias within mainstream academia, by creating alternative analytical tools and visions, and by advocacy for women's developmental needs in the economy and in society. This conference established a new trend by which, gradually, women activists were invited, as resource persons and participants, to academic seminars, consultations and training workshops (John, 2006).

Research and Action

During the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985) for quite some time researches on women and action on

women were moving in parallel. After the Eighties, the chasm between the researcher and the activist widened, as funds started pouring into women's research. Many women activists worked for established research institutions on a subcontract and freelance basis for below subsistence wages because the funding was used mainly for institution building and for the perks of the decision-makers in the institutions. The government through its ministries, such as Labour and Employment, Rural Development and Social Welfare, and the UN system sponsored studies initially for the academics, which might have resulted in a hierarchical situation. Simultaneously, with the growth of grassroots work and autonomous women's groups organising campaigns and lobbying for political action, a necessity to study the problem with participatory perspective arose. Foreign funders started supporting such actions or activists which resulted in debates on whether one should take foreign funding or not? It was believed to have implications of unequal power dimensions, apart from the fact that research priorities might be determined by the funders.

Another dimension of this issue concerns the role of the researcher. If women's studies are about understanding as well as action, then commitment to social change is essential. Women's oppressive reality isn't to be merely studied in a classroom but has to be eliminated. The logic of adopting innovative techniques like life history, autobiography, and experiential data is that it provides self-awareness and motivation for change. Articulation of one's experiences in terms of oppression or growing identity, on the one hand, indicates a changed situation wherein a woman is able to frankly and honestly express her inner tribulations and a critique of the most private relationship. On the other hand, this realisation, someday, ought to lead to action for changing this relationship. It could come more rapidly if there is support available through the women's movement. Of course, there are various levels of action, but activity and empathy are of prime significance in women's studies.

As a result of the collective endeavour of WS scholars and women activists, two important documents providing insights into the enormity of Indian women's problems came into existence. They are: *Shramshakti: Report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women and Women in the Informal Sector* and *National Perspective*

Plan for Women (1988-2000). These documents provided political agenda for the mainstream political bodies and the women's organisations.

Methods of Functioning of the New Autonomous Women's Groups

Most of the women who took initiative in formation of the new women's groups were extremely averse to authoritarian structures within the family, educational and religious institutions and society at large, as all of them did not allow women critical thinking and a space to grow as independent, cerebral and politically conscious human beings. Hence, they were very clear in their approach that they would encourage each and every member of the group to articulate her thoughts and establish intimate working relationships based on the collective decision-making processes. Initially, this method proved very effective in creating new cadre of women who were intellectually enlightened, politically articulate, well-informed and supportive of each other within their small groups as there were no male political bosses to curb their initiative and make them rot only in routine activities of fund-raising, translating, typing, posting, cleaning and cooking for the members of their political groups. Such groups in Madras (now Chennai), Bangalore, Hyderabad, Bombay, Pune and Delhi brought out documents, position papers, manifestoes, pamphlets and reproduced a whole lot of documents on the women's liberation movements in other countries containing debates which had a direct bearing on the local situation. They had tremendous urge to reach out to more and more like-minded women. Whereas their meetings were brimming with new ideas, powerful polemics on epistemological issues, at the same time they reflected a deep concern for the immediate problems of women. They believed that women's issues needed to be taken up on a day-to-day basis and patriarchal power needed to be challenged in both 'personal' and 'political' spheres of life. They simultaneously started support work for individual women, solidarity work for mass movements and united front work on an issue-to-issue basis. But at the same time they were committed to maintaining their own political autonomy and organisational identity. These groups kept in touch with each other by circulating their leaflets in English and regional languages, mimeographed documents and letters. They functioned purely on an informal basis

and organised meetings in the homes of one of the members or sympathisers. Between 1977 and 1980, only in Maharashtra, a new culture of exclusively women's workshops, women's conferences and women's gatherings, in which women of politically diverse views were invited, was found. As these gatherings were multi-class and multi-caste (within the matrix of Brahminical Hinduism), women pursuing different occupations—from agricultural labourers, beedi workers, industrial working class women to students, teachers, journalists, writers, researchers and white collar employees – shared their experiences and put forward their demands.

Proliferation of the Autonomous Women's Groups

Nationwide anti-rape campaigns in 1980 resulted in the emergence and proliferation of autonomous women's organisations in several cities and towns of India. These groups, such as Forum Against Oppression of Women (Mumbai), Saheli (Delhi), Stree Shakti Sangatana (Hyderabad) and Vimochana (Bangalore), managed to get tremendous publicity in print as well as audio-visual media because at that time 'violence against women' was the most sensational and the newest issue. Family members, especially fathers and brothers of the women victims of violence flooded the women's groups. Later on, the women victims started approaching these groups on their own. While doing agitations and propaganda work against a series of rape cases in custodial situation, domestic violence and dowry harassment, these groups realised that to work on a sustained basis and take care of the rehabilitative aspects, it was important to evolve institutional structures for support to the women victims of violence based on feminist principles of solidarity (mutual counselling) and sisterhood. The criminal legal system in India made it inevitable for these groups to establish rapport with the police for an immediate redressal to the women victims of violence. The condition of women in remand homes and in shelters for deserted/separated/destitute women was so repugnant and barbaric that they could not be trusted to provide rehabilitation. In fact, many women who suffered at their hands approached the new women's groups. The women activists had to deal with an attitude of victim-baiting and double standards of sexual morality, sexist remarks, unsavoury humour from police personnel, the legal apparatus and public hospitals. At each and every step, they encountered class, caste and communal biases. These resulted in confrontations between the women's

groups and the established institutions. But in the course of time, they realised that it was necessary to suggest concrete alternatives in terms of legal reforms, method of interventions and staff training for attitudinal changes. For public education, literature written in convincing style was a must; audio-visual material for reaching out to more people was also deemed necessary. Professional bodies and educational institutions were approaching these groups for understanding the women's question. In these contexts, special interest groups focusing on agitprop, media-monitoring, resource material for raising consciousness, creation of cultural alternatives, publications, research and documentation, bookstalls and legal aid work came into existence during the Eighties and got consolidated in the 1990s. They played complementary roles in each other's development.

Issues Taken Up by the New Women's Groups

Campaign for ending Violence against Women

The movement got momentum with the campaign against the Supreme Court's judgment against Mathura, a teenage tribal girl who was gang-raped by policemen at night, in a police station in Chandrapur district of Maharashtra in 1972. After eight years of legal battle in the Session's Court, the High Court and the Supreme Court by her sympathetic lawyer Ad. Vasudha Dhagamwar, Mathura lost everything – her status, her self-esteem and her credibility. The Apex Court declared that Mathura was not raped by the men in uniform but Mathura being a woman of 'an easy virtue' gave a wilful consent for sexual intercourse. Dhagamwar and her three colleagues in the legal profession wrote an open letter challenging the Supreme Court's verdict in an extremely poignant and logically convincing style. This letter was widely publicised in the print media. Two major points concerning this issue were: the reopening of the Mathura Rape Case and amendments in the rape laws that not only had a narrow definition of rape but also put the burden of proof on the woman. Several women's groups were formed to fight for these demands (Kumar, 1997). They circulated petitions to collect signatures, conducted study circles where experienced lawyers spoke, organised rallies, sit-ins, demonstrations in front of the offices of the concerned authorities, prepared poster exhibitions, plays, skits, songs, slogans against violence against women, wrote letters to the editors and articles in different newspapers and magazines for the first time on women's problems. (Forum Against Oppression of Women/FAOW, 1985)

Initially, they concentrated on women-specific issues such as wife-battery and dowry murders, rape and eve teasing, pornographic films, plays and literature on harassment of women at workplace. Militant actions, social boycott, gherao of tormentors, raiding of the matrimonial homes for retrieval of dowry had to be resorted to because of the antipathy/lethargy of the state apparatus. From these experiences of direct action the activists gained an understanding of the power relations operating within modern families (working class, middle class and upper class), different religious communities and various caste organisations (Patel, 1985).

Fight Against Unjust Family Laws

"Constitutional guarantees of equality and non-discrimination are confounded by discriminatory personal laws that institutionalise gender inequality," avers feminist lawyer Adv. Indira Jaising (2005). While providing support to women facing problems concerning marriage, divorce, maintenance, alimony, property rights, custody of child/children and guardianship rights, the activists realised that the existing personal laws and most of the customary laws were discriminating against women. Hindu daughters were deprived of coparcenary rights in parental property as per the codes of Mitakshara. Christian women could not get divorce on the grounds of adultery committed by the husband; it had to be coupled with cruelty, bestiality and sodomy. On the other hand, Christian husbands could simply declare their wives as adulteresses and divorce them. These antiquated laws were enacted in the Colonial period to serve the interests of the British bureaucrats who had their legally wedded wives in England and were cohabiting with the Indian (in their language 'native') women. Parsi daughters who married non-Parsi men lost their property rights and non-Parsi wives of Parsi husbands got only half the share in the husband's property as per the Parsi Personal Law. The sharia subjugated Muslim women by imposing *purdah*, allowing polygamy and unilateral divorce by man to his wife/wives and by depriving divorced Muslim women of maintenance rights. The underlying philosophy of all these personal laws was that: women are not equal to men. They are governed by the patriarchal ideology. Irrespective of their religious backgrounds, these personal laws perpetuate patrilineage, patrilocality, double standards of sexual morality for men and women and perceive women as dependent on men. Therefore, all personal laws on marriage, inheritance and guardianship of children discriminate against women in some form or the other.

Individual women from different communities have challenged the constitutional validity of the discriminatory aspects of the personal laws in the Supreme Court. An increasing number of educated working women and housewives from all religious backgrounds have been approaching secular women's organisations. The main problems they face from their

natal families are forced marriage, murderous attacks in cases of inter-caste, inter-class and inter-religious marriages and property disputes while they encounter issues like adultery, bigamy, polygamy, divorce, custody of child/children, property, incest, etc., in their marital homes. As the issue of personal laws is intertwined with religious identities, the secular women's movement had to face tremendous hostility from the elites of the different communities, mass organisations, patriarchal secular lobby and the parliamentary parties cashing in on block votes. Individual women (divorced, deserted, single and married under duress) have been questioning discrimination in the customary laws. Tribal women in Maharashtra and Bihar have filed petitions demanding land rights in the Supreme Court. Several women's groups (Saheli, Vimochana and FAOW) and human rights lawyers' teams (Lawyers Collective and Indian Social Institute) have prepared drafts containing technical details of gender just and secular family laws.

Legislative Reforms

During the last 30 years, laws concerning violence against women and girls have come into existence. India was the first to enact the Family Courts Act, 1984. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence (PWDV) Act, 2005, was enacted following pressure exercised by the women's movement to safeguard the interests of survivors of domestic violence. The PWDV Act has broadened the definition of domestic violence to include violence against women and senior citizens (abuse of "mentally unfit" certificate), incest and rape by family members, and relatives forcing women and girls into prostitution. The marked features of the Act are: recognition of the right to residence, provision for the appointment of Protection Officers and the recognition of service providers, trainings for Protection Officers and judges, awareness creation, and budgetary allocation for legal, counselling and other support services.

From the very beginning legal reforms have been a topmost priority of the women's movement. Women's organisations campaigned for reforms in the rape law (1980) and the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961. For thirty years, a sustained movement for the protection of women from domestic violence resulted in an Act in 2005. Similarly, struggle against pre-birth elimination of girls resulted (Patel, 1988) in the enactment of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques

(PCPNDT) Act, 1994, that was subsequently amended and called The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act, 2002. Public Interest Litigations to deal with sexual harassment at workplace filed by the NGOs resulted in the Supreme Court directive for dealing with sexual harassment cases. The Vishaka Guidelines in 1997 superseded in 2013 by The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act. Presently, there is a need for a common legislation to deal with cross-country trafficking of women and girls for sex trade and organ transplant.

Many cases of violence against women (VAW) also get resolved in the neighbourhood committees, community organisations and Lok Adalats (people's courts). The women's movement has emphasised that VAW is a manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women. If women are empowered by the community and they have systemic support, the balance can be tilted in favour of gender justice.

As a result of the efforts made by feminist economists, the Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005, was enacted that provided for equal rights to daughters in coparcenary property.

During last four decades, the feminists have filed a series of Public Interest Litigations (PILs) challenging discrimination, injustice and violence against women, on issues such as domestic workers rights, witch-hunting of single women, harmful contraceptives, displacement in the name of development, dowry murders, crimes in the name of honour, livelihood rights of forest dwellers, land rights, and so on.

Reproductive Rights of Women

When it comes to reproductive rights of women, most of the efforts of women's groups in India have been directed against excesses committed in the name of family planning programmes. Now, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and the Institute of Research in Reproduction (IRR) have shown a readiness to discuss scientific, medico-legal and operational dimensions of bio-medical researches conducted on human subjects. The United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA) (1998) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have drawn

guidelines related to population policies so that the focus shifts from targeting women for population control to women's reproductive rights (Sen, Germain and Chen, 1994). Ethical guidelines for bio-medical research have been formulated as well. Yet, in the hinterlands, poor women have continued to be the main targets of the abusive sterilisation operations and unsafe injectable and oral contraceptives. Recent researches on adolescent girls and abortion have highlighted the problem of teenage pregnancies, trafficking of young girls for sex trade and the complicity of the criminal justice system. The campaign against sex determination resulted in a central legislation banning amniocentesis, chorionic villus sampling (CVS) and sex pre-selection techniques for femicide (Patel, 1988). But much is needed to be done to make the legislation effective in the real life. CEHAT (Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes) and the Lawyers Collective have jointly supported a petition (a PIL in the Supreme Court) filed by Dr Sabu George for effective implementation of the PCPNDT Act (Patel, 2009).

Declining Child Sex Ratio

The sex ratio (the number of women per 1000 men) is a critical indicator of both social attitudes towards women as well as the changing dimensions of social denominators with regard to gender and development. It was *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India* that first drew attention to this startling reality. The Committee's findings had pointed to two extremely significant trends – the declining work participation rate and the declining sex ratio, both of which were critical indicators to assess women's status. Over the years, the report has enabled women activists, scholars and policy-makers to engage with the wider linkages of these emerging social trends. However, the problem of declining sex ratio has become worse as well as more complex and, in fact, reached alarming proportions in certain states. Concern with regard to this has been voiced on international platforms and through UN agencies. Studies have highlighted the multiple dimensions of the problem. These also point to the enormous and growing scope for such sex selection, given the advancement in technologies which facilitate pre-birth selection through assisted reproductive technologies and practices that find favour in the midst of abiding patriarchal norms and mind sets.

Activists have continuously pointed to the total lack of political will displayed with regard to the implementation of the PCPNDT Act and its provisions and delay in the issue of notifications and guidelines. These allow for complicity between retrogressive social beliefs and modern day practices and find complacent allies in the large and diverse community of medical as well as pre-natal diagnostic practitioners. There continue to be divergent patterns with regard to sex ratio and related trends at the regional level, even as there is a tendency for more and more districts and states to draw closer to an all India pattern which is becoming more universal along and across certain regional divides. Over the decades, the sex ratio declined sharply, starting from 972 in 1901 to a low of 927 in 1991. Thereafter, there has been a steady increase, reaching 948 in 2011.

Examination of the data points to the following trends: the state-wise comparison of child sex ratio (CSR/ the number of females per thousand males in the age group 0–6 years), from 1991 to 2011 shows that the gap has widened and deepened, spreading over the entire northern and western regions in 2011 as compared to only Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and parts of Gujarat that had very poor CSR in 2001. The North East states have recorded some of the best CSRs in the country. However, a comparison of the statistics from 2001 and 2011 for each state in the region reveals that things are not so good in Manipur, Nagaland and parts of Arunachal Pradesh. Prof. Mary E. John of the Centre for Women's Development Studies presented the findings of a joint study in different states of India (John, Kaur, Palriwala, Raju and Sagar, 2008) which addressed the basic question of why families agree/choose to go for sex selection that manifests itself as son preference and daughter aversion. She drew attention to the need to look at the concrete factors which influence decision making, rather than simply attributing the phenomenon to the accepted notions of cultural stereotypes which frame cultural values, mind sets and the attitude of mothers/families in ways which are broadly seen to be traditional. More disturbing was the fact that the otherwise apparently modern and progressive decisions, such as of educating the girl child, advancing the age of marriage, etc., were being taken with an underlying purpose of giving away the girl in a "good marriage", which necessitated allocating resources for dowry and the accompanying marriage expenses. It was clear that even when overt

forms of discrimination were not there, sex selection was being practiced. The small family norm translated into “at least one boy and at the most one girl”. John posited that there appears to be a connection between neo-liberalism, falling workforce participation rates of women and the declining sex ratio. New Reproductive Technologies and ways of Assisted Reproduction had opened up newer possibilities of sex selection and pre-selection, she said.

However, the positive news is that the number of girls missing at birth due to the practice of gender biased sex selection was 3.3 lakh girls per year for the period 2007-12. This reflects a decline from an average of 5.8 lakh girls missing at birth per year in the preceding six years. The period between 2004 and 2006 witnessed the first visible signs of change¹; this decline in the number of girls missing at birth since 2004 has to be understood against the backdrop of the legal, policy and programmatic measures taken to address gender biased sex selection and community dynamics in response to its consequences. There has been a shift towards arresting the gender imbalance in sex ratios in a few states. In addition to the implementation of the PCPNDT Act, a comprehensive set of efforts to build value of girls, counter gender discriminatory attitudes and create awareness on the adverse consequences of such discriminatory practices has helped. India has strong public policies to increase gender equity, vigorous media campaigns and legislation. The growing visibility of gender biased sex selection in the media is an indicator of the enhanced attention and increased volume of discourse around the issue. The outreach of the issue has included intensive engagement with a range of stakeholders, including policy-makers, administrators, the judiciary, medical community, media and community leaders. (UNFPA, 2015).

Anti-Arrack/Alcohol Movement

Since the mid-Seventies, tribal women in different parts of the country - Andhra Pradesh, Manipur, Maharashtra - have been fighting against the sale of alcohol that induces alcoholism among men, resulting in devastation of families and domestic violence against women and

children. In Andhra Pradesh, the anti-arrack movement was strong in 1992-93 and it spread to other states at different levels. More than 40,000 women uniting and blocking the arrack (low cost liquor) auction in Andhra Pradesh was a historic chapter in the women's movement. In Maharashtra, elected women representatives in local self-government institutions and urban and rural local self-government bodies (LSBs) have forced the state government to declare their block/village 'alcohol free zones' if 50 per cent of women in the area vote against the sale and distribution of alcohol by show of hands in public meeting of the village council.

Campaign for 33 per cent Reservation for Women in the Parliament and Legislature

Since the late 1990s Indian feminists have been campaigning for reservations for women in the Legislative Council/Assembly and the lower as well as upper houses of the Parliament. The Women's Reservation Bill (WRB) that proposes to reserve 33 per cent seats in Parliament for women has been pending for well over a decade, and what is holding it up is assumed to be the opposition of patriarchal forces. But while the proponents of the measure base their claims on the idea of gender justice, those who oppose it cannot simply be categorised as patriarchal, for it comes from a particular caste location, which includes women, that expresses the legitimate apprehension that a blanket reservation of 33 per cent for women (the current proposal being debated) would simply replace 'lower'-caste men with 'upper'-caste women. Today, an immediate conversion of one-third of the existing seats into reserved seats for women is likely to bring into the fray largely those women who already have the cultural and political capital to contest elections and, in an extremely unequal society like India, these are bound to be elite women. Thus, the argument against the current form of the Bill is a claim that reservations for women should take into account other disempowered identities among women—essentially, the 'quotas within quotas' position that says that there should be a further reservation within the 33 per cent for OBCs (Other Backward Classes) and Muslim women. The 22.7 per cent reservation for Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe (SC/ST) women is a constitutional requirement

¹ “How many girls are missing at birth in India? Trends in sex Ration at Birth (2001-2012),” UNFPA, July 2015.

that would come into operation automatically. In other words, the sharp opposition to the Bill cannot simply be dismissed as anti-women. All the support for women's reservation does not come from strongly anti-patriarchal sources. These are the very parties which consistently refuse to field women candidates, and which have hardly any women in decision-making positions unless they have the right kind of family background. It is the patriarchal operation of these very parties –from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and all the others in between– for sixty-five years that has made reservation for women necessary in the first place.

The Experience of Reservation for Women in LSBs Since 1992

Studies in several states (for instance, Gujarat, Karnataka, and West Bengal) have confirmed that while there has been a positive impact on the lives of the elected women themselves, by and large, reservations for women have strengthened the entrenched power of the dominant caste groups of the area. That is, men of less dominant castes have been replaced by women of the dominant castes in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) (Patel, 2009). Therefore, it seems that a blanket reservation for women brings to power women of dominant groups and castes in society. It may be noted that the opposition to the legislation is not on account of the fact that the category of citizen is universal and should remain 'unmarked' by any other identity, that its universalism should not be fractured by introducing gender identity. Rather, the opposition to it is in the form of insisting that more identities and differences (caste/community) be inserted into that of gender—the 'quotas within quotas' position.

Women In Political Parties

Since 2001, at least 14 political parties with a women-oriented political agenda have emerged across India, according to an analysis of an official list of political parties from April 2001 to January 2015. Five of these parties have contested either a general election or a state assembly election in the past 15 years, according to statistical reports of elections to the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Despite a low success rate (with 100 per cent security deposit forfeited in all cases), most of these parties have survived, and the trend of registration of women's issues-based parties has increased over the

years, in a country where women comprise no more than 11.4 per cent of the parliament.

Every Bit of Electoral Progress Counts

For women, India is an electorally dismal landscape. For the 543-seat Lok Sabha, only 668 female candidates were fielded in 2014, which is 8.1 per cent of all candidates. No more than 62 female candidates won, which means 9.3 per cent of the women who contested were successful; 525 female candidates forfeited their deposits.

The percentage of women in Parliament, as we have mentioned earlier, is 11.4 per cent, much lower than the international average of 22 per cent, putting India at a lowly 111th rank among 145 nations of the world, as per statistics provided by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and UN Women.

Across India's political landscape, the outlook towards women is uniformly bleak. The BJP, which won 282 of the 543 Lok Sabha seats in the 2014 general elections, fielded only 38 women out of 428 candidates, or 8.9 per cent. The Indian National Congress party had 60 women out of 464 candidates, or 12.9 per cent.

The female candidates for the Left parties, the Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist), were 8.9 per cent and 11.8 per cent, respectively. Women made up no more than 5.4 per cent and 11.1 per cent of the candidates fielded by the other two national parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party and Nationalist Congress Party, respectively.

National parties accounted for only 21.9 per cent of the total women contesting the polls. Ironically, a majority of these parties supported the Women's Reservation Bill 2009 in the Rajya Sabha, which guarantees a reservation of 33 per cent seats in legislative bodies for women.

As Prof. Zoya Hasan has suggested in the introduction to her edited volume, *Party and Party Politics in India*, political parties may have "played a critical role in the democratic process, especially in drawing historically-disadvantaged sections of society into the political system". Yet, what Amrita Basu has observed in her report, *Women, Political Parties and Social Movements in South Asia* in 2005, still holds true. "There isn't much

to report on parties' success in organising women," wrote Basu, "Most political parties are male dominated and neglect women and women's interests. Whereas women have played very visible and important roles at the higher echelons of power as heads of state, and at the grassroots level in social movements, they have been under-represented in political parties."

The fact that 93.6 per cent of female candidates were unable to save their deposit from being forfeited in the 2014 general elections suggests that neither political parties nor the electorate are prepared to seriously consider women as their representatives. Nonetheless, the rise, however small, of women-oriented parties is encouraging.

Equal representation, though, is no guarantee for better representation of female agendas in mainstream politics. As Basu has observed, citing Shirin M. Rai, Professor of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick, "Those women who have played leading roles in political parties have rarely addressed women's interests and questions of gender inequality."

Women and Land Rights

Women's right to land and housing has been a major concern of the women's movement in India. Women have historically managed the unpaid care economy and fulfilled the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, family care, collection of fuel, fodder, water, kitchen gardening, poultry and animal husbandry, and provided food and nutritional security. As women's contribution to the economy and society at large remains unrecognised, largely underpaid and mostly unpaid, the need for women to be able to secure land and property has become even more critical (Patel, 2002).

Similar to the cross-cutting nature of women's human rights issues, their land and housing rights intersect with other problems, such as discriminatory inheritance patterns, disinheritance through will, agriculture and development issues, use of forest-based resources, gender-based violence, the appropriation and privatisation of communal and indigenous lands, as well as gendered control over economic resources and the right to work (Agarwal, 1996). The interdependence of women's human rights highlights the importance of women being able to claim their rights to adequate

housing and land in order to lessen the threat of discrimination, different forms of violence, denial of political participation, and other violations of their economic rights (Velayudhan, 2009).

During 1980s, rural women in Bodh Gaya, Bihar, waged a heroic battle under guidance of Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini against the Mahant (chief priest) of Shankar Math who had usurped 12,000 acres of land. Monks of the Math (a Hindu religious institution with attached properties) used to behave like feudal lords and many lecherous monks also used to sexually exploit poor women agricultural workers. They raised slogans such as "one who cultivates the land is the owner of the land" and "one who ploughs, sows and harvests is the owner of the land". Along with mass mobilisation, they also filed a PIL. After a long-drawn struggle, in 1989, the Supreme Court gave a historic judgment and decreed that the land under control of the Math should be distributed among the agricultural labourers. The state and district administration consulted only men. Only in Katora and Kusha-Beeja villages some women managed to get land in their names after consistent mass mobilisation. Landownership to women resulted in reduction of wife-beating, alcoholism and mortgage and sale of land. While in Kusha, the land was given to daughters, in Mastipur, the daughters-in-law inherited land.

Meanwhile, PILs filed by Bhuribai and Dhagibai, tribal agricultural women workers in Dhule district of Maharashtra, and by Laro Janco in Singbhum district, West Bengal, in 1985, backed by strong ground level land struggles and movements of women invited the attention of policy-makers to the burning issue of land rights. But, in the absence of a gender sensitive administration, when it comes to dealing with land allocation, inheritance and dispute settlements prejudice against women persists among officers who don't allow them to benefit from land and housing rights. When it comes to women's development, both NGOs and Government Organisations (GOs) focus on employment generation rather than ownership and control over land, shop or house.

During the 1980s, when feminist activists joined the National Campaign for Housing Rights, an umbrella organisation fighting for 'housing for all', they were

acceptable as mobilisers, translators and foot-soldiers. However, as soon as they started demanding land and housing rights for women, they were shunned. For the campaigners the only category that was meaningful was 'poor', not 'women'.

Since 1990, the Shetkari Sanghatana has persuaded hundreds of families in their areas of influence in rural Maharashtra to implement joint registration of land and house in the name of both husband and wife. In 2006, MASUM (Mahila Sarvangeen Utkarsh Mandal), an NGO in Pune, launched a campaign for joint registration of property as per Government Resolution (GR) passed in November 2003. Within a year, it managed to achieve joint property registration for 95 per cent of households in 80 villages of Purandar block in the Pune district. In 2002, Janu, a tribal woman leader from Wayanad district in Kerala, exposed patriarchal biases in the land reforms implemented in her state. In Gujarat, women's organisations have formed a coalition to pressurise the state to ensure land rights for women. As land struggles intensify, an increasing number of incidents of witch-hunting of female headed households, managed by widows, single, divorced and deserted women, have been reported in Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Jharkhand. The intention behind this move is driven by the greed to grab their land.

Women's Movement for Housing Rights

When women's groups started providing support to women in distress, it was relatively easier to find jobs and ensure school admission for their children. The most difficult task was to get an accommodation for the female victims of violence, desertion, rejection from natal or marital family and cheating by their relatives. Women's right to housing is linked with their right in property, land and inheritance. As primary users of housing, women's stake and requirements are the highest. For them, a home isn't just a space that provides shelter; it is a place of employment, a place for social interaction, a place for childcare and a refuge from social instability and sexual violence. Moreover, housing does not mean only four walls and a roof; housing rights also means access to basic amenities that come along with the house – water, electricity, ground, roads, market, school, health centre, transport and employment, i.e. a supporting social environment.

Special Needs of Women-Headed Households (WHHs)

In the peaceful areas of India, one-tenth of the households are headed by divorced, deserted and single women, while over 30 per cent households are headed by women in the conflict prone areas. In WHHs, the women shoulder main economic responsibilities including house hunting. Even if they have the money, they face hurdles while looking out for a rented place or a house on an ownership basis. Nearly one-third of households worldwide are now headed by women; in certain parts of Africa and Latin America, as many as 45 percent are headed by women. The WHHs tend to be poorer than male-headed households.

Women's Rights to Stay in the Parental and Matrimonial Home

In the last two decades, many women have filed petitions in the High Courts and the Supreme Court demanding a wife's right to live in the matrimonial home and a daughter's right to stay in the ancestral home. Till the recent amendment in the Hindu Code, as per the Mitakshara laws only sons were allowed coparcenary rights over the ancestral property as they were considered karta (manager of joint family and joint family properties). In 1985, Lata Mittal, a young woman, filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court, challenging Mitakshara laws applicable to Hindu daughters who are deprived of right to stay in the ancestral home. Additionally, the PWDV Act, 2005, has ensured a woman's right to stay in her matrimonial and parental home.

The discourse on women's right to shelter has crystallised into two positions:

- i) Women's Right to Housing (WRH) independent of male ownership and control –because women's land-use priorities are different from that of men. The Ekal Nari Shakti Sangathan, an association of single women in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh, supports this position.
- ii) Joint Titles: The majority of poor masses can manage to build just one house. Therefore, a separate house for women is a non-issue. So the focus should be on registering joint titles for landed property. MASUM in Pune and Shetkari Sanghatana in Nashik have followed this position.

The Development Agenda of Feminists

The United Nations declared 1975 as the International Women's Year with special focus on Equality, Development and Peace. It was under pressure from the feminists in the post-colonial countries that the UN had to define the indicators of development. Post-colonial feminists had challenged the conventional indicators of development that focused on urbanisation, higher education, mobility of labour, technological development, modernisation, infrastructural development, industrialisation, mechanisation in agricultural, white revolution, green revolution, blue revolution, and so on. The development dialogue in the last 32 years - from 1975 to the present - has resulted in the intellectual scrutiny of the following through the gender lens:

- Critique of the trickle-down theory
- Marginalisation thesis popularised by the UN as WID (Women in Development)
- The 'Integration of Women' approach known as Women and Development (WAD)
- Development Alternatives with Women (DAWN) at Nairobi Conference, 1985
- Gender and Development (GAD) - Women in Decision Making Process, 1990
- Adoption of CEDAW- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- Human Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure, 1995
- Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), 2000
- Women Empowerment Policy, Government of India (GOI), 2001
- Gender mainstreaming in planning, policy-making and programme implementation.

With the official recognition of subordinate status of women in economic, social, educational, political and cultural spheres by all nation states, two approaches became popular with regard to women in development process (Rustagi, 2004). The first one was an instrumentalist approach influenced by a Human Resource Development philosophy that supported investment in women so that their efficiency and productivity would increase along with their economic and social status. As against this, the second approach was guided by the Human Development concept that

emphasised the quality of life or well-being aspect of investment in women. In this approach, the attainment of education, health, nutrition and better quality of life is considered to be an end in itself. Both approaches are interlinked (Sen, 1999).

Gender and the Process of Economic Development

The incorporation of subsistence economies into 'modern' market economies has brought into question the traditional gender-based division of labour as an organising principle in the rural and urban sector because of the basic injustice it perpetuates. Women end up doing the least skilled work and are underpaid or are expected to contribute to survival needs of the family without any corresponding benefits. Ester Boserup (1970), in her pioneering work, brought to fore African women's crucial contribution towards food security and explained the political economy of polygamy in Africa that allowed men to concentrate and centralise economic resources through unpaid and backbreaking labour of women and children in the subsistence economy that did not have much animal resources or mechanisation for cultivation of land.

Third Wave Feminism

The current stage of feminism is considered to be the third wave of feminism whose ideological moorings are in the post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality. They critique male-female binaries that are seen by them as artificial constructs created to maintain the power of dominant groups. Proponents of third-wave feminism claim that it allows women to define feminism for themselves by incorporating their own identities into the belief system of what feminism is and what it can become through one's own perspective. The third wave essentially covers perspectives from those marginalised or excluded from previous 'waves' of feminism - Dalit women, tribal women and women of colour, women from the post-colonial countries, young women, differently-abled women, women from ethnic and religious minorities and women with alternate sexuality. This wave has deepened the discourse of discontent. The third wave acknowledges the benefits of second wave feminism and provides the world-view of a young feminist from the Global South.

Critique of Neo-liberal Economic Policies

While the diversity in the social fabric of India has historically seen continuities and contestations, interactions between different social segments have increasingly come to be mediated through socio-economic processes, where the needs and principles of a marketised economy prevail. This has been apparent all the more since the 1990s. While the years after independence saw significant attempts to negotiate these rights in different spheres with the aim of keeping alive the guiding principles as laid out in the Constitution current policy frameworks and paradigms of development pose serious challenges to these efforts.

Critique of Environmental Policies and Action for Livelihood Concerns

The economics of gender and development sees a connection between the exploitation and degradation of the natural world and the subordination and oppression of women. Ecofeminism emerged in the mid-1970s alongside second wave feminism and the green movement. Ecofeminism brings together elements of the feminist and green movements even as it offers a challenge to both. It takes from the green movement concern about the impact of human activities on the non-human world, and from feminism the view of humanity as gendered in ways that subordinate, exploit and oppress women. It is both an activist and an academic movement which sees critical connections between the domination of nature and the exploitation of women. Ecofeminist activism grew during the 1980s and 1990s among women from the anti-nuclear, environmental and women's rights movements (Shiva, 1988).

Livelihood concerns of women, such as fuel, fodder, water, animal care, agriculture, kitchen gardening, food security and food sovereignty have been taken up by feminists not only at the policy levels but also in terms of mobilising women and creating successful models involving rural and tribal women's collectives. Take, for instance, Navdanya in Uttarakhand, the Annadana Soil and Seed Savers Network in Bangalore and Asha Kachru's efforts in organising women farmers near Hyderabad.

Ecofeminists say 'no more waiting'... "We are in a state of emergency and must do something about it now... around the world, economies, cultures and natural resources are plundered, so that 20 per cent of the world's population (privileged North Americans and Europeans) can continue to consume 80 per cent of its resources in the name of progress." (Mies and Shiva, 1993)

They further declare, "Our aim is to go beyond this narrow perspective and to express our diversity and, in different ways, address the inherent inequalities in world structures which permit the North to dominate the South, men to dominate women, and the frenetic plunder of ever more resources for ever more unequally distributed economic gain to dominate nature...Everywhere, women were the first to protest against environmental destruction. It became clear to us, activists in the ecology movements, that science and technology were not gender neutral. As with many other women, we began to see that the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature (shaped by reductionist modern science since the 16th century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women which prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, were closely connected." (Mies and Shiva, 1993)

Sexual Harassment at the Workplace

Sexual harassment at the workplace has been one of the central concerns of the women's movement in India since the 1980s. After 30 years of consistent effort, women have managed to get The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, and rules for the same are awaited so that the Act can be implemented.

During the 1990s, the most controversial and brutal gang rape at the workplace involved a Rajasthan state government employee, who tried to prevent child marriage as part of her duties as a worker of the Women Development Programme of the Rajasthan government. The feudal patriarchs who were enraged by her (in their words: "a lowly woman from a poor and potter community") 'guts' decided to teach her a lesson and raped her repeatedly in public view. After an extremely

humiliating legal battle in the Rajasthan High Court the rape survivor did not get justice and the rapists – “educated and upper caste affluent men” – were allowed to go free. This enraged a women’s rights group called Vishaka and it filed a PIL in the Supreme Court (Combat Law, 2003).

In 1997, the Apex Court passed a landmark judgment in the Vishaka case punishing Bhanwari Devi’s rapists and laying down guidelines to be followed by establishments in dealing with complaints about sexual harassment. The court stated that these guidelines were to be implemented until legislation is passed to deal with the issue. The moving force behind these guidelines was the intervention of several feminist NGOs and women’s groups that came together after the rape of Bhanwari Devi, who was violated as ‘punishment’ for carrying out government-sanctioned work. In the years since these guidelines were created, several universities have come up with carefully-formulated sexual harassment codes, as have some NGOs and some private sector employers. The codes put in place by the latter two are uneven in character, depending on the presence of feminists with a perspective on sexual harassment within the organisation. Where such a perspective is lacking, the committees and policy become just another employer-generated disciplinary mechanism against employees, especially since, in most of such cases, there are no trade unions.

University policies (for instance, at Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, and North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong) have tended to arise from existing democratic politics in the university community. The Supreme Court guidelines acted as a catalyst to focus the energies of progressive political groupings on campuses and of individual teachers and students towards the formulation of appropriate codes and implementation mechanisms. In an academic environment, the definition of sexual harassment would have to be different from other kinds of workplaces.

An Improvement in the Societal Role of Educated Women, But A Glass Ceiling Remains

There are improved education and employment opportunities for middle and upper class women. Women are entering traditional male bastions and massive occupational diversification has taken place in the upper echelons of power structures as well as in professions such as doctors, lawyers, chartered accountants, architects, engineers and scientists. General awareness about women’s entitlements has increased among the State and non-State actors. Highly educated women are climbing the upper echelons of power structures in the administration, judiciary, the corporate world, politics and educational institutions. A statistical profile of women in India provides a yearly account of women’s advancement in the spheres of education, employment, political participation, positions in the criminal justice system and entry into decision-making bodies. This has also generated tremendous anxiety among Indian men that manifests in violence against women and misogyny in everyday life.

Movers and Shakers

Women’s rights groups, activists, civil society organisations, independent researchers, including academia such as WS departments across the country, are currently the main actors promoting women’s concerns. At the same time, there are strong biases based on class, caste, religion and ethnicity that marginalise women from the historically neglected and deprived sections of society. Patterns of exclusions draw their strength and sustenance from long histories of social and economic inequalities, discrimination, and marginalisation. With increasing vulnerabilities in the economic sphere and mounting tensions with regard to the rights of diverse communities and ethnicities, the inequalities based on caste and class hierarchies have gotten exacerbated. These also determine people’s abilities to garner their citizenship rights. Given the uneven and unequal nature of development and a lack of respect for federal democratic principles in the modes of governance adopted, the negotiation of these rights has itself come to be seen as problematic.

Challenges Ahead

The list of challenges faced by women in contemporary Indian society is indeed long. In a nation which promises to carry forward diversity in faith, languages, and ways of living, increasingly, there is greater aggression in defining 'correct' behaviour that acquires special characteristics with reference to women. There is an attempt to present a homogenised notion of the nation, nationhood as well as of Indian womanhood. While political formations actively propagate such strident assertions with moral overtones, the media and the market play their part in defining these. Such homogenised 'mainstream' articulations seek to marginalise and delegitimise pluralistic discourses, thereby exacerbating exclusions and denials in both the cultural and the political domain. The exclusion and marginalisation of women appears to be a common pattern cutting across religions, communities and regions, posing challenges at both the individual and societal level.

These concerns cannot be perceived in isolation from the State, its policies and the changing terms of interface between the State and its citizens. The withdrawal of the State from the public sphere in favour of the private sphere in recent decades also marks a departure from fundamental concerns of well-being. The reduction in investment in social and public goods in the name of reducing fiscal deficits has seriously affected educational institutions, as well as citizens' ability to garner their rights. The retreat from universal commitments, accompanied by the withdrawal of subsidies and support has resulted in a rising burden on the poor, especially women. There has been a change in the character of the judiciary even as gender biases prevail. The increasing use of military and para-military forces against citizens and people's movements has posed intense conflict in the pursuit of democratic goals.

In recent years, as the discussion on VAW has acquired greater visibility, there is a realisation that this violence is enacted and embedded in the wider context of growing inequalities, social hierarchies and gender based prejudices. Further, there is evidence today to show that in the two decades since the initiation of the 'new' economic policy and imposition of a monolithic market-driven model of development, the challenge of

ensuring the well-being and quality of life for the masses has become greater. This is visible in various indices of development. Gender gaps have widened and social inequalities, including those premised on historically determined exclusions, have deepened in numerous ways. These inequalities are manifested in inter- and intra-regional divisions, caste and community-based divides, and inequality reflected in ownership and access to resources, especially land, housing, food and water. This is specifically true for gender-based hierarchies, for example, with regard to labour, wage disparities, rural-peri-urban-urban livelihood and employment patterns and the feminisation of poverty. There is a persistence of caste, tribe and community based disparities, of discriminatory attitudes towards issues of disability and, towards expressions of non-normative sexual orientations. Overall, the structural barriers to attaining a human and 'humane' life appear to have become more rigid.

Since 2012, in particular, there have been nationwide protests and intense discussion on the context, forms and scale of gender-based violence, including, more specifically, sexual violence. These debates, perhaps the most intense and widespread in recent history encompassed vastly different sections of society, movements and organisations and sought to address the multiple sites of violence extending across regions, social classes and communities. All these point to the fact that women are directly in the line of fire in the current scenario.

The women's movement, over the last several decades, has engaged in debates on these issues from its myriad locations. While studying the impact of globalisation, it has critically engaged with processes of policy formation to argue that these need to be democratised along with the content of policies. While numerous struggles envision a polity and society with a meaningful citizenship, feminists are having a fresh look at experiences from the field, rethinking several of the old questions and seeking new alliances in the face of emerging challenges.

Women are major participants in the new struggles of the day; they are challenging new forms of patriarchies

and seeking to forge broader alliances and building alternatives. It is not just from the State that women encounter conflict and confrontation. It is there even within the family, caste, religious and ethnic groups, within professional institutions, in regional struggles, and other spaces. They experience conflict as part of collectives from forces outside and also from within them. They are targets of sexual violence within the family, in caste and communal conflicts and in situations of State repression. Social change and radical political movements sometimes provide the locus for challenging traditional gender roles and norms; simultaneously, however, newer forms of marginalisation are being engendered. The State is increasingly complicit with these processes of marginalisation present today more in its repressive, extractive and appropriative roles than the ameliorative one of providing constitutional guarantees (Chakravarti, 2003). It is based on such an understanding of the State that the women's movements approach law recognising its repressive role, but going beyond this, as a site of possible reform as well. For the marginalised, the law opens up new vistas through the language of rights, compensatory jurisprudence and legal certification, while also exhorting vigilance to issues such as patronage of vested interests, dominance of customary justice, and other reactionary processes (Dietrich, 1992). The State, market, and family mediate the arrangements of women's labour within the larger domain of work. Recent restructuring of markets and developments in technology have contributed towards the marginalisation of labour, with a disproportionate impact on women (Elson and Pearson, 1997).

One result has been the increasing presence of women in streams of migration. Another has been the interlocking of markets in land, water, labour, marriage, education and health, which serve to perpetuate, even deepen, inequalities of gender. On the obverse, women workers have contributed greatly to innovations in strategies of collectivisation and negotiation, providing new meanings to ideologies of contract and legitimacy of consent.

Feminist discourses have begun to understand the significance of the body as a cultural construct and as a site of disciplining. A complex interplay of power configures the body; those that are hungry, impaired, not healthy, considered fat, or altered by technology are an ever-present challenge to the dominant tropes

of naturalisation. The body is also central to questions of gender. Women's relationships to their bodies are extended as they continually form, negotiate, re-build and survive relationships they have with people, locations and ideologies.

The most potent challenge is posed by women at the margins of the hetero-normative family, conventional conjugality and patrilineal inheritance; cultural and territorial hegemony reflected in the idea of the nation-state has been interrogated and articulated in nationality movements, specifically in the North East and Jammu & Kashmir. The misrepresentation and marginalisation of women and their interests coincides with this hegemonic representation of 'Indian culture'.

Understanding the significance of language as a tool of dominance has been central to the feminist project originating from international but also national spaces. The diverse voices emerging from the margins – those of the queer, sign-language enabled, Dalit, *adivasi* (tribal) and Muslim - are unable to enter into a conversation with the mainstream or with each other due to the absence of translation. There are, however, sites of resistance to sustain and revive cultures at the margin as well as inspire new egalitarian cultures.

The new social movements, such as the Dalit movement, assert their cultural rights through resistance, offering a counter discourse to dominant narratives of power and contributing greatly to an understanding of culture as a site of difference, multiplicity, contest, and negotiation. Women's movements, too, have contributed to such processes through an articulation of resistance in the form of paintings, songs, films, documentaries, poetry, autobiographies, and so on. We have today a conjuncture of opposites: persistent exclusion of large sections of people, increasing privilege of a few and the very real possibility of new connections and conversations.

We have women leaders of grassroots peoples' movements against corporate land grab and mining lobbies as well as from forest-dweller communities, such as Dayamani Barla from Jharkhand and Keli and Sarmi Bai from Rajasthan, taking an active role in claiming the commons at the political level and leading movements. Grassroots women, for instance in the context of land, are saying that it is not just deeds to land and

resources that are at stake; it is about a way of life that is self-reliant and gives autonomy and dignity to each individual. For tribal movements, women came together to demand that they not only wanted to have joint title, but that access had to be recognised for all women, even unmarried daughters, because they too have the right to live with dignity. It is not just the economics of being able to provide and sustain opportunities for material gain; it is about creating livelihoods in a shared economy.

There are also fiery, independent, militant activist women like Medha Patkar, with the politics of her struggle against ecologically unsustainable and unjust capitalist development; Irom Sharmila, who has been force-fed and under arrest for over 11 years by the State because she continues her fast for the repeal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), a law that allows her state of Manipur and the northeast region, in general, to be treated as occupied territory. Then there is Nalini Nayak, who works with the fisher people's movements on issues of livelihood and ecological sustainability (Nayak, 2005).

Ecological Movements, the 'Resource Base of Our Feminism'

Across North East India, there is a growing body of politically conscious and empowered women, who have stepped in to fill a vacuum that neither governments, nor struggling militant outfits and rebel organisations have been able to. The Meira Paibis of Manipur, Naga Mothers' Association (NMA) in Nagaland and the Nari Adhikar Sangram Samiti (NASS) and Asom Mahila Sachetan Mancha in Assam, among others, have been striving to reach afflicted women and vulnerable sections of the community in order to arrest continuing hazards to their life and liberty and bring some semblance of order. Most of their members have experienced untold suffering, whether as participants in the struggle or having been victims. The participatory "politics" of activist groups, such as the NMA or the NASS, straddles the line between normative female behaviour and aggressive resistance, of which a glaring and unique demonstration was the now iconic slogan 'Indian Army Rape Us' on a banner draped around the nude Meira Paibis protesting on the streets of

Manipur's capital, Imphal, in the wake of the Manorama murder case in 2004. This incident had instantly drawn attention to militarised societies in India's north-east. This moment has come to assume a symbolism that draws from the power of women's agency and their political awakening². But more significant is the involvement of an increasing number of women from these very societies who have taken initiatives at peace-building through active negotiations, spontaneous activism both within and outside the state and by continuing to write and speak vociferously at various fora against violence and in favour of conflict resolution and peace-building and in an effort to reach out to ordinary women trapped in endless litigations within the family.

Feminism and Women with Disability

Disabled women occupy a multifarious and marginalised position in Indian society, based on their disability and also on socio-cultural identities that separate them into categories constructed according to such properties as caste, class, and residential position. Disabled women, thus, can have plural identity markers that make their daily experience perplexing and difficult.

A culture in which arranged marriages are the rule inherently puts disabled woman in a difficult position. However difficult, the possibility exists for "normal" women to resist this cultural arrangement, while disabled women confront an uphill task. Some disabled girls from rich or middle class backgrounds might be able to negotiate the difficulties inherent in arranged marriages, albeit with a great deal of compromising. Disabled sons retain the possibility of marriage, as they are not gifts but the receivers of gifts. Disabled as well as non-disabled men seek "normal" women as wives and therefore, participate in the devaluing of people because of disability.

In a society where there is widespread female infanticide, aborting imperfect children will not cause any stir or rancour. This becomes clear with respect to the feminist campaign against amniocentesis as a sex-determination test. While there is an on-going discussion around the

² "Equality, Pluralism and the State: Perspectives from the Women's Movement - A Report," Indian Association of Women Studies: XIV National Conference on Women's Studies, Guwahati, 4-7 February 2014. p. 14.

ethical contradictions that prenatal sex testing poses for feminists, prenatal testing to identify and abort children at risk of disabilities does not get addressed (Menon, 2012).

For disabled women themselves, these issues become secondary because cultural stereotyping denies them the role of motherhood. As elaborated by Sudhir Kakar, a psychoanalyst (1978: 56), whether a woman's family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class, or religion, whether she is a new, young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infants, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant borne and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and redemption of her ability, role, and status as a woman. Disabled women are, however, denied the possibility of this fulfilment, as marriage and consequent motherhood are both difficult achievements in a socially restrictive environment. (It will be worth mentioning that single motherhood in the Indian culture has been the privilege of only very elite women. In general, having a child out of wedlock evokes stigmatisation.) The denial of women's "traditional roles" to disabled women creates what Michele Fine and Adrienne Asch (1988) term "rolelessness", a social invisibility and cancellation of femininity that can impel them to pursue, however hopelessly, the female identity valorised by their given culture but denied to them because of their disability.

A great deal of thoughtful work by Indian feminists analyses the impact of the evaluative male gaze. However, the essential difference between being sexual objects and objects of the "stare" has not been understood. If the male gaze makes normal women feel like passive objects, the stare turns the disabled object into a grotesque sight. Disabled women contend not only with how men look at women but also with how an entire society stares at disabled people, stripping them of any semblance of resistance. Neither Indian feminism nor the Indian disability movement acknowledges that disabled women are doubly pinned by the dominant male gaze coupled with the gaze of the culture that constructs them as objects to be stared at.

In principle, some disabled women might have benefited from the activities of certain women's groups, but no

documentation exists of specific instances. On the other hand, ample evidence abounds that disabled women are the victims of domestic violence and sexual violation.

The Indian Association for Women's Studies (IAWS) recommends the inclusion of issues and challenges faced by women with disability as part of the WS curriculum, with special emphasis on how conflict (both familial and social) has a profound impact on understanding the structures within which disability operates and remains embedded. In this context, the issues of structures and communicational access of care must take centre stage within the dialogue of women's groups.

Feminists Shaping the Health Movement

One of the key concerns of the women's movement has been health of women. But these concerns are not considered as health movements, perhaps because in these campaigns the basic dignity of women as human beings is the primary, core issue. There have been movements in which women's groups have participated or taken the lead by identifying these as health issues. Take the opposition of the women's organisations to hazardous injectable contraceptives. The Stree Shakti Sanghatana and Saheli have demonstrated against the use of Depo-Provera, an injectable birth control method with serious side effects and risks. These and other groups (Forum for Women's Health, Mumbai) have also campaigned against NET-EN and Norplant, the other harmful injectable contraceptives. Health groups including the Medico Friend Circle and All India Drug Action Network (AIDAN) supported this campaign. Saheli filed a PIL on this issue. Thanks to all these moves, the government decided not to include injectable contraceptives in the Family Planning Programme, though it refused to ban them.

The women's movement has a profound influence on different health action groups in India most of whom are funded and work in a focused manner in specific, small areas. These groups have taken up women's health issues which had earlier been neglected. For instance, conventional health work would limit itself to Maternal and Child Health, whereas during last 20 years, women's reproductive health issues have increasingly been taken up. Thus, women's health has had a much broader, longer influence on health activism in India.

Feminists in War-zones and Conflict Areas

Sexual violence in conflict areas— Kashmir and the North East – is impacted by special legal regimes while in communal violence, women's bodies are targeted. In conflict zones, violence against women is embedded in special laws as also in regular laws, such as the AFPSA, which carries a colonial legacy (Philipose and Bishnoi, 2013). The Commanding Officer of a unit in the armed forces has the prerogative of going by any law against an alleged culprit (Butalia, 2002).

Meanwhile, the gains made by the women's movement, with regard to amendments in various laws, in 2013, are significant. There is a breakthrough into the absolute impunity for men in uniform – an explanation in the Criminal Penal Code states that any form of sexual violence by a public person does not need sanction for prosecution. The sanction clause was removed. As per Section 376 (2) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), custodial rape by men in the armed forces was termed as 'power rape'.

The 1984 anti-Sikh violence witnessed sexual violence against women, although there was no formal acknowledgement of it. In the Naroda Patia case in Gujarat, in 2002, sexual violence was central to communal violence and every member of the mob was named/blamed by the trial court. Post December 2012, it was acknowledged that power and prejudice intersect and an understanding that in a coercive context- there is need for a recognition of 'power'.

Feminist Solidarity with Sex Workers

Set within the existing national and international debates, feminist debates have explored the category of sex worker, their autonomy and nature of work/labour, from a specifically Indian location. It contended that forms of sexual labour reconstructed the social stigma associated with those communities who have been involved in that work. Feminist and Dalit positions on sex work were analysed along with that of religious groups, to explore questions of justice, given that these have generated critiques and justifications to 'normalise' this form of work. Radical feminists treat sex work as a product of capitalism while the civil societal gaze looks at women involved in such labour within the logic

of appropriation and patronage. One argument has been that India had seen an implicit relationship being established between traditional sex work and the caste structure, and the 'naturalising' of sex work in relation to Dalit communities - be it the *Devadasis*, *Jogins*, *Muralis*, or the Kalavanteens of Maharashtra, all of whom were brought under the stigmatised identity of 'prostitutes' under the colonial legal framework, overlooking questions of livelihood, caste exploitation, and sexuality. Following Victorian morality, while the national and social reform movements did not lobby with the colonial powers to deny the category of labour to this section of society, neither the Dalit nor the women's movements had a homogeneous response on issues of sex work in India.

Thus, government programmes do produce spaces for women to participate legitimately and actively in the public realm, and the effects of such participation can neither be accurately predicted nor strictly controlled. Nevertheless, feminist politics needs to be very suspicious of the domestication of gender through State policy and the spurious clarity offered by government policies on 'women' and 'women's empowerment'. This clarity comes at the cost of solidifying existing patriarchal structures and cultures.

Feminist Solidarity with Domestic Workers

In the first allIndia survey of non-unionised female sex workers conducted recently, 71 per cent said they had moved voluntarily to sex work after having found other kinds of work to be more arduous and ill-paying. The largest category of prior work was that of domestic workers. In other words, a large number of women in the sample had found being a domestic worker to be more demeaning, exhausting and poorly paying than sex work (Sahni and Shankar, 2011). One estimate of the number of domestic workers ('servants') in India is made on the basis of the fact that the white-collared middle class in the country is around thirty million. Assuming most of them would have a maid, and that some would be in the same family, the number of domestic workers is likely to be more than 15 million (Menon, 2012). Feminists have offered solidarity and achieved considerable success in collectivising and unionising domestic workers for safeguarding of their rights.

Solidarity with Women and Transgender Survivors of Sexual Violence

The brutality of incidents involving rape, sexual violence and its various manifestations in women's lives require us to have a deeper understanding of sexuality and the implications of sexual violence. These affect not only women, but also transgenders and men. Yet, issues of sexual violence affect women in very different and specific ways. There is a need to discuss feminist perspectives on rape within the legal discourse, as also the idea of consent and coercion, which have specific meanings with regard to evidence in cases related to sexual violence. The legal system obscures women's experiences of rape and sexual assault through extra legal considerations such as morality, virtuousness and appropriate sexual behaviour, which include notions of a 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable' woman. The understanding of sexuality within the legal discourse needs to be broadened, along with transforming the judicial system, to also encompass a broader theoretical understanding which includes the context in which crimes against women occur, to address issues of social responsibility and the need to challenge patriarchal social and sexual assumptions to prevent stereotyping of men and women's experiences from feminist perspectives (Shah, Merchant, Mahajan and Nevatia, 2014).

Feminism and Intersectionality

The intersectionality of caste, class, ethnicity and gender in the subordination of women strongly suggests that solutions to the gender question would have to be found on multiple fronts and not on the plank of patriarchy alone; when women dare to defy the system, success is sure to come. While success may not be visible in tangible and immediate terms in the sense of a complete end to oppression, the very act of resistance is empowering, giving women a voice, which together with other voices becomes powerful enough to shake the foundation of oppressive regimes. Social and political crises act as an impetus for struggle and resistance – be it in the domain of literature, law or social movements. This fact is illustrated by the surge of critical writings. At the empirical level, it is visible in the mass movements that were led by the young, educated youth in India's metropolitan cities and smaller towns post the December 16, 2012, rape of the 23-year-old para-medical student. Similar processes are visible in the Northeast, which saw the phenomenal rise in the

women's movement in the states of Manipur, Nagaland and Mizoram as a reaction to atrocities perpetrated by army personnel on hapless citizens.

Over the years, the anti-Sikh riots showed the need for the women's movement to be drawn into the struggle against communalism, while the Shah Bano case forced a re-think on debates on the subject of the Uniform Civil Code, given that the slogan had been hijacked by communal forces and there was a need to explore other ways to find gender-just solutions, including within the existing frameworks for religious communities (Patel, 1995). Events in December 1992 and 2002, and developments in the South Asian region as a whole indicated that communalism and fascism were real possibilities. Developments in Pakistan, where Malala Yousafzai and other young women's struggle for education, had become symbolic of the new energy which had infused the women's movement and their link with other democratic struggles.

Thus, 'woman' then, is not a natural and self-evident identity, the obvious subject of feminist politics. The subject of feminist politics has to be brought into being by political practice. There are no pre-existing 'women' who may be Hindu or Muslim, uppercaste or Dalit, white or black; rather, there are 'people' who may respond to different kinds of political challenges, as 'Dalit' or 'Muslim' or as 'women'. The success of feminism lies precisely in its capacity to motivate 'people' to affirm themselves as feminists in different kinds of contexts. But equally importantly, sometimes, a feminist will have to recognise that the defining factor at work in a particular situation may be race or caste, not gender. The success of the Slut Walk, organised by militant young women, and those who staged flash mobs against sexual harassment on Delhi Metro, both of which took place in 2011, are testimony to this fact.

Polarisation of Public Opinion

In India, legislation against child marriage has emerged as a critical area of State intervention with the National Population Policy (2000) and the National Empowerment Policy (2001) insisting that 18 be the legal age of marriage for girls and the Prohibition of Child Marriages Act, 2006, recommending that all marriages below the age of 16 be made void. One of the papers mapped state legislative interventions in the light of conflicts between

the State and community, e.g., conflicts between the Muslim Personal Law Board in Andhra Pradesh and the State Women's Commission on this issue; the state's evident incapacity to implement its laws, child marriage prohibition officers not knowing that they have been vested with this responsibility, the multiple bureaucratic hurdles that make it difficult for families to access social schemes aiming to raise the age of marriage for girls and the strategic use of these laws by household and kin-based patriarchies to foist kidnapping cases on 'elopement' marriages just below the legal age of consent. While there is, on the one hand, a strong conservative tendency to criminalise sexual activity amongst 'very sexual young adults', and this tendency is reflected in the language of court judgments, there is also the disturbing rise in the incidence of political organising by intermediate backward castes in states such as Tamil Nadu, that seeks to prevent women from invoking the law to sustain marriages of choice, especially when they choose to live with Dalit men. The links between the policies of the state to curb/contain child marriage and the social impulses, fears and anxieties of a caste society to control women's sexual choices and relationships needs to be closely scrutinised and further elaborated by feminist scholarship through a critical reading of the making of laws.

It was inevitable to engage with the state and government policies given the prevalence of patriarchies so deeply embedded within all domains – households, kin/communities, markets and state institutions and actors. Women as a category is mediated with various realities and the main actors are divided on certain issues such as the sex workers versus prostituted women divide.

Feminist Groups and Social Media

Feminist groups have made excellent use of social media by launching Yahoo and Google groups besides setting up cyber forums, blogs, and similar outlets for quick communication and coordinated action, sharing of intellectual work and resources, creating archives with photographic memories, reports, posters, diaries,

songs, documentary on women's issues which are available online. Feministsindia@yahoo.com, www.prajnyaarchives.org, www.sparrow.com, www.avaarchives.com, www.cwds.com and art, humour and music, both offline and on social media platforms, have been effectively used by feminist groups as a form of resistance and influencing the young and old alike.

The cyber space is a new area of concern for feminists as it has become a site for gender based violence through Facebook and other social networking sites. There have been a growing number of reported complaints of women students being sexually harassed at educational institutions. And, shockingly, there has been a trend of social media slandering or community shaming of those who have complained. They have been targeted, called names and accused of spoiling the 'image' of the educational institution.

There are initiatives on the social media that challenge sexist stereotypes of Indian women in order to expose the ingrained sexism that still pervades much of Indian society. Through a series of powerful images, it mocks the notion of 'appropriate' roles for women. Each meme begins with a phrase that seems to adhere to one of those traditional ideas - before brilliantly skewering it. For example, 'I must go to the kitchen...it's the only part of the house where I haven't done electrical fittings yet," reads one³. There are examples of videos that have gone viral where young women have launched an attack on sexual violence and hypocrisy in the country, tackling issues such as rape, clothing, infanticide, marriage and women walking alone at night.

This age of the proliferation of social media, on the one hand, widens space for expression and dialogue. On the other, its form and culture is one that thrives on binaries of 'for' or 'against', leaving no space for grey, and creating fixed positions, instant responses and gladiatorial communication. Women's rights activists' engagement with this space of social and television media not only seems to have impacted their communication

³ Claire Cohen, (March 10, 2016) How 'Spoilt Modern Indian women' are busting sexist stereotypes on Facebook: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/how-spoilt-modern-indian-women-are-busting-sexist-stereotypes-on/>

and dialogue in ways that fail to respectfully engage, but also in ways that leaves no room for nuance, dialogue or reflexivity (Naqvi Farah, PLD, 2015).

Alliance of Feminist Groups with LGTB Groups

During the last decade of the 20th century in India, the hitherto private realm of sexuality emerged as a focal point and basis for various forms of political assertion. India is increasingly witness to people asserting their right to be different as sexual beings in terms of their sexual orientation, gender identity, and sexual practices. The more established definitions of activist politics are now being forced to engage with new political concerns articulated by people who claim gay, lesbian, *hijra* (trans-woman), transgender, *kothi* (an effeminate man or boy who takes on a female gender role in same sex relationships), and numerous other identities under the rubric of queer (Narain, 2004). There is no obvious solidarity between the struggles of these various groups (in fact, there are serious differences, particularly around issues of class and gender which need to be acknowledged) but the queer political project, which is at an incipient stage, really attempts to build one community out of a diverse range of communities and practices. Common to each of these identities— apart from their roots in sexuality— is their questioning of the heteronormative ideal that claims that the only way in which two human beings can relate romantically, sexually, and emotionally is in a heterosexual context. The word 'queer', as used by David Halperin, demarcates not a positivity, but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative.

The term 'gender' had its beginnings in India in the 1970s as a feminist contribution to public discourse. Destabilising the biological category of 'sex', we find that gender has taken two distinct forms since the 1990s. On the one hand, gender as an analytical category is being used to challenge the notion of 'woman' as the subject of feminist politics. This challenge comes from the politics of caste and sexuality. On the other hand, gender is mobilised by the State to perform a role in discourses of development, to achieve exactly the opposite effect; that is, gender becomes a synonym for 'women'. Thus, the first trend threatens to dissolve, and the second to domesticate, the subject of feminist politics. Gender is a network of power relationships within which human beings are located and are constantly being constructed.

So it is a sociological and political category; a fluid process and hence can be changed.

In India, the realities of the non-normative experience, i.e., gender identities, sexual practices, sexual identities, culturally sanctioned forms of erotic behaviour, contest the embedded nature of heterosexism in law, medical practice, culture, and society. They have traditionally existed and continue to exist in the contemporary context.

Resistance to heterosexism takes place through a proliferation of identities and practices such as jogtas, shivshaktis (both of which are traditional and culturally sanctioned forms of gender non-conformity, particularly by men who take on the gender identity of women), etc., which are too many to be enumerated. Outside the framework of communities there are stories of individual people who assert their right to a different life. The most publicised example is the marriage of Urmila Shrivastava and Leela Namdeo in 1988, two women from a rural background who were serving in the Madhya Pradesh constabulary. This, of course, is not the first such instance of resistance, as there have been at least 10 documented cases of women who not just live together but want societal recognition for their relationship and hence attempt to marry each other. What is interesting to note is that these women have invariably been from a small-town background and have had little exposure to Western culture or the queer rights discourse. Thus, even without the strength of a community to back them, these women have individually contested the heteronormative social order.

From late 1980s, the growing awareness about the AIDS epidemic made it increasingly legitimate to talk about sex outside the realms of law, demography and medicine. International funding for HIV/AIDS prevention played a significant role in the creation of new NGOs dealing with sexuality or funded sexuality programmes in old ones. Another factor that made sexuality visible in the public space, both elite and non-elite, was the opening up of the media in the 1990s, as part of structural adjustments in the Indian economy.

In the 1980s, the initial response of the established leadership of the women's movement was entirely

homophobic, denouncing homosexuality as unnatural, a Western aberration and an elitist preoccupation. An important landmark is the 1991 National Conference of Autonomous Women's Movements in Tirupathi at which an open and acrimonious discussion on lesbianism took place, with the greatest hostility coming from the Left groups that decried lesbianism as *an elitist deviation from real political issues*. Since that time, there has been intense dialogue within the women's movements and great shifts in perception have taken place, especially on the Left. Openly, homophobic arguments are almost never made (publicly) any more within the women's movement but there continues to be the sort of argument which suggests that sexuality is less urgent than the bigger issues facing the women's movement.

Controversy around LGBT Rights

With regard to Article 377, women's groups have expressed deep regret and shock and registered their protest at the Supreme Court judgment of December 11, 2014, that overturned the progressive judgment of the Delhi High Court (Shah & Muralidhar) of July 2, 2009, and created a setback for the struggles and efforts of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) people and all those who have supported their campaign. The Delhi High Court judgment had foregrounded Dr Ambedkar's insistence on Constitutional morality being the bedrock of rights of all citizens rather than public morality in India's deeply hierarchical and prejudice entrenched society. In 2009, in a landmark ruling the High Court had decriminalised homosexual acts, making consensual gay sex legal under the law for the first time since 1861, when the British colonial authorities had brought in Section 377 of the IPC, which outlawed "sexual activities against the order of nature".

Queer politics in a sense can trace its roots from the feminist movement in India as the largest number of people presently in queer politics is drawn from the feminist movement. This movement, which began in the early 2000s, did not see itself as a kind of minority politics, thereby getting trapped in the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy. "Queer" is an inclusive umbrella term that designates all those who are willing to question the norms of gender and sexuality. The word 'queer' is used consciously to differentiate itself from other categories such as LGBT politics and queer politics is approached through the idea of intersectionality. Sexuality is not seen

through the prism of equal rights or identity. There is no one notion of sexuality and sexuality is interconnected with the concepts of caste, class, religion and sex in a fundamental way. So, politically, lesbian suicides would also be seen as an issue of violence against women and not simply an issue of the LGBT movement. Essentially, queerness is seen as something bigger than sexual preferences.

Gay Pride parades (also known as pride marches, pride events, and pride festivals) for the LGBT community are events celebrating LGBT culture and pride that began in 1969 in New York city. The first marches were both serious and fun, and served to inspire the widening activist movement; they were repeated in the following years, and more and more annual marches started up in other cities throughout the world. Many parades still have at least some of the original political or activist character, especially in less accepting settings. The variation is largely dependent on the political, economic and religious settings of the area. However, in more accepting cities, the parades take on a festive or even a Mardi Gras-like character, whereby the political stage is built on notions of celebration. In India, it began in 1999 in Kolkata, West Bengal, and annual marches are organised in many cities including Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, in solidarity with the cause globally.

An important part of the third wave feminism is sex-positivity, a celebration of sexuality as a positive aspect of life, with a broader definition of what sex means and what oppression and empowerment may imply in the context of sex.

The "personal is political" has long been a rallying point for the women's movement, and never has it been more applicable as in the realm of sexuality. From abortion rights to the use of contraception, women's groups have campaigned for the right to control sexuality and bodily integrity. For women, the only legitimate expression of sexuality has been within heterosexual marriage, rigidly circumscribed by caste and community. Sex for pleasure has traditionally been taboo for women, who are expected to merely "submit" to the sexual act to satisfy their husbands and produce children, preferably a son. Of course, prostitutes/sex workers are at the other end of the scale, their entire existence constructed around sex. Patriarchal control of women's sexuality is reinforced by laws, as well as biases of the judiciary, to bolster attempts

to maintain the unit of family – however oppressive or violent it may be. Sexuality is increasingly seen as fluid and as a range of behaviours and situations that go beyond inflexible binary categories of “heterosexual” or “homosexual”.

In India, lesbians and bisexual women are organising and demanding visibility and social recognition of their relationships, demanding an end to harassment and violence. Ironically, the current marginalisation in law is also seen by some to be advantageous, since female-female sex is not specifically criminalised. Section 377 has nevertheless been used to harass lesbian women and compel them into heterosexual marriages. More and more lesbian women’s suicides coming to light are evidence of the need for social recognition and decriminalisation of non-heterosexual sexuality (Painter, 2009).

Lesbian and bisexual women have had an uphill struggle not only vis-à-vis mainstream society but also within the women’s movement. Their issues have been brought squarely on the agenda of the Indian women’s movement in recent times by LGBT groups, and women’s groups as well as democratic rights groups have been forced to confront prejudices and challenge premises earlier taken for granted. Alliances are being forged, and mutual dialogue has enabled a collective understanding to develop and the struggle to move forward.

It is appropriate to mention here that the government is equally reluctant to make marital rape an offence, because it would interfere with the “sacred” relationship between husband and wife. The husband is assumed to have the right to have sex with his wife by virtue of the fact of marriage, and consent is assumed for all time. This obnoxious notion has been challenged time and again, with attempts to bring marital rape into the purview of the rape law. Yet, the law has no qualms about invading the privacy of consenting adults to engage in the sexual activity of their choice. Any law that appears to threaten the institution of the family and marriage faces an uphill struggle, and the solicited repeal of Section 377, challenging notions of morality, family and heterosexual marriage, particularly so.

Queer politics does not speak of the issues of these communities as ‘minority issues’ but, instead, speaks

of larger understandings of gender and sexuality in our society that affect all of us, regardless of our sexual orientation. It speaks of sexuality as politics, intrinsically and inevitably connected with the politics of class, gender, caste, religion, and so on, thereby both acknowledging other movements and demanding inclusion within them (Narain and Bhan, 2005: 3-4)

Voices Against 377, a broad coalition formed to campaign for the abolition of Section 377, links same-sex desire to women’s rights, child rights, anti-communalism and anti-war politics. PRISM, a ‘non-funded, non-registered feminist forum of individuals inclusive of all gender and sexual expressions and identities’ seeks to ‘link sexuality with the other axes of construction and control, such as gender, caste and religion’ while simultaneously demanding of progressive movements that they ‘engage with issues of marginalised sexualities as an intrinsic part of their mandate’ (Sharma and Nath, 2005: 82-3).

This knitting together of sexuality with wider left-wing politics can paradoxically also be limiting for a queer politics of sexuality. Clearly, just as with feminism itself, queer politics can have many, often mutually-contested, strands.

The other factor Gupta (2016) draws to attention is the operation of class within queer politics. He defines class for the purposes of his analysis, in terms of access to money and the ability to speak English. People who identify themselves as hijra or kothi (who have been very visible in public queer political action) are not, in this sense, of the same class as the urban elite likely to identify themselves as gay, lesbian, transgender, queer. Queer politics and counter-heteronormative trends complicate notions of women and gender. They also complicate the answer to the questions: who is the subject of feminist politics? Can gay men be the subject of feminist politics? How about trans-people – both male-to-female and female-to-male? Consider the following troubling example. Some hijras claim the right to be recognised as ‘women’.

The experience of oppression that *hijras* have is not reducible to the experience of ‘women’. Therefore, more promising is another strategy followed by *hijras* – the demand to be recognised as a third gender. A few years ago, as the result of long-term lobbying by NGOs

working on sexuality and human rights, a provision was introduced whereby, on Indian passport forms, *hijras* could write 'E' in the column which requires M/F for 'sex'.

The recognition of several genders and of multiple and shifting ways of being constituted as political entities may be able to help generate new ways of thinking about representative institutions in a democracy. The possibility of alliances between *hijras* and the women's movement faces questions not immediately amenable to any clear resolution. Urvashi Butalia raises some of these questions in the moving account of her friendship with Mona, a *hijra*, in Delhi. Mona was born male but from the moment she became conscious of herself as a person, she was convinced she was born into the wrong body. Are *hijras* then, part of the 'women's movement'? Not a question amenable to an easy resolution, and we will have to keep talking and thinking, and arguing.

Now that Section 377 is on its way out, the fissures and differences within the movement will become more visible. There are those who are content to be gay or lesbian without fear, and don't want to be political at all; there are queer, politically aware people who are Hindu right-wing or pro-capitalist or anti-reservation; and of course, there is queer politics that is opposed to all these. This is the moment of the coming of age for queer politics, when it encounters the searing recognition with which feminism has only recently come to terms, that not all non-heterosexual people are queer, just as not all women are feminist; and not all queer people (nor all politically active women) are Left-oriented or secular.

Connection of Indian Feminist Groups with International Debates and Actors

Women's rights activists emerged from the struggles of solidarity for global issues such as anti-war movements, fight against racial discrimination, working class and trade union movements, national liberation struggles in Africa, Latin America and Asian countries, and assertion of identity by native population and minorities. They were connected with international debates on the role of revolutionary movement in women's liberation, relationship of women's movement with the State, why the need for 'autonomy' of women's organisations from mainstream political parties, importance of networking with the perspective of 'Think globally, Act locally'.

Since mid-1980s, Indian feminists have played a crucial role in an international network for policy advocacy called DAWN, i.e., Development Alternatives With Women. The vision of DAWN has been crystallised in *Development, Crises and Alternative Visions* by Sen and Brown (1987).

Largely, the language of 'equal rights' has been learnt from the capitalist West. At a global level, the neo-liberal economy is dominating, but the struggles are moving on and gaining political ground. Cross-movement solidarity has been created in spaces like the World Social Forum, the engagement with the Buen Vivir or Living Well movement, as it's called in Latin America creating livelihoods in a shared economy. There is a positive trend in women strengthening solidarity across regions and continents, and in playing more significant roles as decision makers in movements to reclaim the commons. The CEDAW was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993 and India is a signatory to it. Women's groups in India meticulously report acts of discrimination, raising the issue of human rights violations of women at the global arena.

Over the past few years, possibilities and concerns have emerged of using Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council on women, peace and security in maintaining women's central position at the peace table. In India, the resolution is not considered a peace measure. The problem also arises from the fact that the State does not recognise any conflict areas but calls them as disturbed areas. However, despite such problems the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) continues to be a significant tool in the hands of women of the Global South, including India, to press for increased gender sensitivity in the peace discourse and greater participation for of women in the peace process at decision making levels.

One Billion Rising: Violence against women is rising across the globe. One Billion Rising is the biggest mass action in human history to end VAW. The campaign, launched on Valentine's Day, February 14, 2012, began as a call to action based on the staggering statistic that one-in-three women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. With the world population at seven billion, this adds up to more than one billion women and girls. More than 200 countries are part of

this global movement and women's groups in India have played an active, enthusiastic and very important role in all the activities organised under this movement in different parts of the country, highlighting the different dimensions of the issue regionally and globally. In 2016, the theme of Revolution continues with a call to focus on marginalised women and to bring national and international focus to their issues; to bring in new artistic energy; to amplify Revolution as a call for a systemic change to end violence against women and girls; to call on people to rise for others, and not just for themselves.

The cyber world has emerged as a potential space for trans-national activism, even as the rise and consolidation of religious identity- alongside the 'shrinking' of the welfare state - has made Dalit women more vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination, leading to further marginalisation (Dalit Women, 2016). On the other hand, there is renewed energy and activism of Dalit women's collectives, e.g., National Federation of Dalit Women and All India Dalit Women's Forum, founded 1995 and 1996 respectively. At the global level, the UN World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001 provided an opportunity to draw parallels between Dalit women's oppression and racism. The 'Delhi Declaration' (2006) emerged around the same time, with transnational Dalit feminist activism highlighting issues of survival and dignity, even as there were other problematic issues of identity and sovereignty.

Indian women's groups, to an extent, are also connected to the international debates around engaging with men and masculinity in addressing VAW. The Indian WS academic world is connected with the international world in terms of theorising on feminism, using nuanced categories for interrogation into different aspects, cross sharing at international conferences and programmes. But there are doubts on the extent to which the activist world across the country is connected to international debates and actors.

Women's Movement and the Development Agenda

During the 1970s and 1980s, the women's movement highlighted marginalisation of women from the economy. The efforts of women activists were directed in agitation and propaganda for women's rights, sexual-fighting against escalating violence against assertive women and team-building to counter sexual harassment

in the streets and at the workplace. Feminists have been demanding equal share for women in the public spaces, such as streets, gardens, clubs and transport services, at any time of the day and night (Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011). In the 1990s, the women's movement was demanding its legitimate place within the mainstream, with its own agenda of empowerment of women in partnership with men. It has been able to identify its allies in all sections of society (Ramchandran and Kameshwari, 2014). Its horizontal and vertical networking has created congenial atmosphere to execute a development agenda with the help of effective use of information technology, communication channels, modern managerial practices and an efficient law and order machinery. The development policies pursued in recent years have directly impacted the rights enjoyed by different social segments and aggravated prevailing inequalities in multiple sites and domains. While the intersectionality of gender-based experiences of inequalities with prevalent hierarchies is not new, the increasing overlap and convergence between different forms of discriminations and exclusions is adding to the vulnerability of specific sections of women and posing greater challenges to their quest for a life of dignity.

In instances where women had taken an active part to stall the so-called development projects and entry of private industrial corporations that directly and adversely affected their livelihood, it was found that from their initial inclusion, participation and, graduating to leadership roles, they faced opposition from within the movement, their families as well as from society and the government at large. Yet, slowly but surely, they found their way into decision making bodies. However, after the movement ended, both possibilities existed: they either moved to a different level of leadership away from the masses of women, or became less visible. Men grudgingly acknowledged the role of such women, but their perceptions of who actually owns these resources remains patriarchal. The real outcomes of such movements must be analysed on the basis of their commitment to gender concerns and also to ensure that women should have an equal share in their benefits.

Women have en masse participated in women-targeted economic development programmes, such as micro credit, livelihood and other anti-poverty interventions, and the very notion that the State might intervene in

community management of its resources. Women and the oppressed castes are using the spaces opened up by state developmentalism and the challenge is to map how they are doing so and what new contestations are generated when they do so. Both by assuming 'empowerment' to be an automatic outcome of women attending meetings, seeking loans and initiating livelihood activities, or by denouncing in entirety these initiatives and, therefore, not engaging with them, an issue that begs serious investigation is overlooked, viz., the question of how the social identities of women and solidarities and tensions amongst women are re-worked through rural development programmes. Thus, perspectives from the women's movements shape and influence inter-linked struggles and campaigns for the right to food, minimum wages, social security and pensions, and more broadly to social protection. Labour and feminist movements and discourses have been intersecting and shaping each other's demands and campaigns. The provision of maternity benefits, for example, is a victory of the labour as well as the feminist movement. This called for a greater reflection on the vocabularies used and the way the struggles were represented within and to others, whether through the 'rights' or 'empowerment' frameworks. The state government's welfare schemes for unorganised workers have been expanded to bring domestic workers within their ambit.

The most difficult areas have been providing educational opportunities for the poverty groups, Dalit and tribal women, low-cost housing, environmental and occupational safety and human rights concerns. The state, political parties and beneficiaries of women's groups, too, have a duty to ensure a democratic and multi-cultural atmosphere within which the women activists can take judicious and gender-just decisions about allocation of developmental resources and development funding for construction of schools, community centres, sports clubs, libraries and reading rooms, low-cost hospitals and low-cost housing for the poverty groups. Gender budgeting as a tool is used by elected women representatives to promote gender equality. Thus, the message of the women's movement and its struggle for the rights of women can no longer be seen as a movement for sectional rights. Women's struggle for their democratic rights as citizens, hence, remains inextricably linked to issues of equality and

respect for diverse pluralist traditions. This highlights the immense possibilities as well as the challenges. There is active participation by women in Hindu right-wing and upper caste anti-reservation politics, ecological movements and land struggles, as well as in armed Maoist movements. All these can be (and have been) studied from a feminist point of view.

Women's Movements in India

What constitutes 'women's movements' in India today? In the 1980s, the self-defined 'autonomous' women's movement emerged, that is, autonomous of the patriarchal control of political parties. At the same time, mainstream women's organisations, both independent as well as women's wings of political parties, have mobilised women around issues of violence against women, personal laws, declining sex ratio and reservation in electoral bodies. The sum total of interventions, separately and sometimes together, by women of political parties, feminist and HIV/AIDS-related NGOs, non-funded feminist and queer groups and individuals, democratic rights groups, feminist women's studies research institutes and university programmes (though not all women's studies programmes are feminist) – all these produce a distinctive feminist space in the Indian public sphere, marked as much by dissension as by agreement on different issues. The level and the intensity of the engagement and its effectiveness differ as between a 'national'-level, English public to Hindi and other language publics and regions of India, each of which must be studied in its specificity.

Success of Feminist Movements

The last 50 years of feminist activism in India have managed to challenge the 5,000 years of patriarchal order by striking at the root of exploitation and oppression, subjugation and degradation of women by deconstructing covert and overt violence against women in personal and public lives, to question pillars of male domination within the family, kinship networks, organised religion, the media and the State. A series of legal reforms with respect to family laws dealing with marriage, divorce, custody of child/children, maintenance, inheritance, domestic violence, sexual violence, workplace harassment, maternity benefits and gender budgeting have become the part of an official agenda due to the feminist movement. For this, pioneers of the women's rights movement and women's studies scholars worked in unison.

Currently, there is a divide/disconnect between theory and practice: often women's studies groups and women human rights activists are seen to be working in distinct and separate silos unlike the 1970s when there was greater dialogue between the women's movement and women's studies. Understanding of privilege to reshape the world has been the distinct contribution of the feminist movement along with the focus on marginalised women, whether Dalit, tribal, or Muslim.

The gendering of citizenship requires us to question and to challenge the fact that citizenship, a supposedly public identity, is produced and mediated by the supposedly private heterosexual patriarchal family. Feminist thought thus recognises the patriarchal family as the basis for the secondary status of women in society, and hence the feminist slogan 'The personal is political'. That is, what is considered to be 'personal' (the bedroom, the kitchen) has to be recognised as completely submerged in power relations with significant implications for what is called 'the public' (property, paid work, citizenship) and, therefore, it is 'political' (Menon, 1999).

Women of different ideological shades have coexisted in the feminist movement in India. To see like a feminist, in Nivedita Menon's words, 'is not to stabilise, it is to destabilise'. The more we understand, the more our horizons shift. The backlash to feminists and feminism,

both from younger women themselves, but more importantly from traditional society, which perhaps accounts for the majority of the population, gets fuel in the context of the political environment of cultural nationalism. This also means that the major insights of women's activism have not altered the fixed notions of gender roles and traditions. Some of these, in fact, have enjoyed a revival with marketisation - a good example of this is the newly-minted popularity of Karva Chauth (a day when Hindu married women in North India fast from sunrise to moonrise for the safety and longevity of their husbands).

And as has been highlighted throughout this account, there are innumerable new energies from different class and caste positions transforming the feminist field, new contestations of patriarchy, as well as contestations of normative feminism. If one thinks of social order as a series of overlapping structures, then one can see that these structures have to be assembled through a variety of interventions. Their borders are porous, the social order fragile, and every structure is constantly destabilised by another outside it. Like any other structure of power then, patriarchy, too, has an outside, which is what makes possible the different kinds of protests that constantly undermine it.

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Imprint

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