

**CSS @ 50 YearS (1969-2019)**

Lecture Series: II

**DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S  
MOVEMENT IN INDIA**

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# PREFACE

On the momentous as well as emotional and nostalgic occasion of completing 50 years of its voyage (1969-2019) Centre for Social Studies, Surat (CSS) has planned series of activities. We have started with Lecture Series; the first lecture in this series was delivered by Prof. E.V. Ramakrishnan. The present one is the second in the series which was delivered by renowned feminist academic Prof. Vibhutipen Patel.

Founded in 1969 as Centre for Regional Development Studies by our founding director late Prof. I.P. Desai, CSS is an autonomous research institute recognised by MHRD of the Central Govt., and receiving financial support from the ICSSR, New Delhi and Govt. of Gujarat. Though the faculty strength has remained small over a period of time, they have been representing variety of disciplines of social sciences as CSS has adopted interdisciplinary research approach. Apart from mainly empirical research CSS has also been actively involved in holding seminars on various subjects and training courses for mainly teachers and researchers as well as publication of books based on research and other academic pursuits of faculty and other scholars. So far CSS has published 160 books, both in Gujarati and English and also 19 selected bibliographies on important themes. The institute has been publishing quarterly journal in Gujarati ARTHAT since 1981 providing social sciences literature on various themes to Gujarati readership and also medium to publish articles for scholars and teachers. Till date CSS has organised 107 national and international seminars and dialogues. We have founded I P Desai memorial lecture series to commemorate our founding director under which so far 27 lectures have been organised, all of which are published. The institute has been holding lectures at regular interval under its 'Colloquia' forum in which scholars from all over the country and often from overseas present their research papers and ideas. Till date 400 such lectures have been organised. In all CSS has organised 47 training programmes including, on 'Application of Computer-SPSS in Social Science Research' - which were held continuously for 25 years as well as on 'Research Methodology' and 'Capacity Building', interacting with more than 900 scholars and teachers from all over the country. We also have interacted with another more than 200 scholars pursuing their Ph.D. and M.Phil. under our 'Guidance and Consultancy Programme'. In terms of research, the key areas that CSS has been focussing include issues and problems of marginal communities such as tribals, dalits, working sections, women, minority groups and others, sects and religion, migration, rural transformation, social conflicts, movements, riots and violence, urban society, literature and social consciousness, human resource development (education and health), coastal studies, environmental issues, social impact assessment of development projects, land and credit markets, governance, social justice and civil society. Theoretical contributions of CSS have been well-recognised in the field of

social stratification, agrarian relations, social movements, sociology of education, issues related with dalits, tribes and development studies. The focus of Centre's research endeavours since inception is not only to contribute to theoretical knowledge but also to assist in policy formulations and implementation for issues pertaining to social development. Institute has accomplished more than 300 research projects till date.

For the "Lecture Series" the larger theme of "Social Change and Social Movement" is chosen as per CSS central focus in terms of academic pursuit. In the present lecture Prof. Vibhutiben Patel has addressed various aspects pertaining to women's movement in India. Beginning with theoretical exposition on feminism she has covered different types of movements and addressed various related issues such as ecological movement, reproductive rights of women, declining child sex ratio, feminism and women with disability, harassment at the work-place and 'me too movement', role of feminists in health movement as well as in war-zones and conflict areas, their solidarity with sex workers, with LGBT groups as well as victims of sexual violence, their participation in queer politics, feminism and intersectionality, feminist groups and social media, connection of Indian feminist groups with International groups, 'one billion rising' movement, women's movement and development agenda, gender budgeting as well as challenges ahead for feminists and women's movement.

I take this opportunity to express my profound gratitude to ICSSR, New Delhi and the Government of Gujarat for supporting CSS during this long span. I am also grateful to members of our Board of Governors for guiding and steering us, as well as our former and present colleagues, including our administrative staff, who have collectively contributed significantly and immensely to take CSS up to this point of achievement. And how can I forget a vast circle of our friends and well-wishers; scholars from different institutes not only from India but also from abroad, from neighbouring university campus and colleges of different parts of south Gujarat; also from other institutes and universities across the country; those organizations with whom we have done collaborative research endeavours; our activist friends who have shared their grass-root experiences to make our research earthy and concerned members of civil society who have been meeting us and attending CSS events regularly and encouraging us. I express deep gratitude towards them all.

And last but not the least, I am intensely grateful to Prof. Vibhutiben Patel for accepting our invitation and delivering a stimulating and thought-provoking lecture. I also express gratitude to my colleague Dr. Sadan Jha for supporting in bringing out this lecture.

September 2019

Kiran Desai

# DYNAMICS OF WOMEN'S MOVEMENT IN INDIA

Vibhuti Patel

## Introduction

I congratulate Centre for Social Studies, Surat (CSS) for instituting Lecture Series on the occasion of completing 50 years of its journey, on the theme, **Social Change and Social Movements** under one of its major activities of Colloquia Forum. I express my heartfelt thanks and gratitude to the CSS for conferring an honour upon me to deliver IIInd Lecture under this series on "Dynamics of Women's Movement in India".

This monograph is guided by feminist philosophy of women's movement in India that is informed by a group of social theories, moral philosophies and related political movements that advocate social, political and economic equality between the sexes. Feminism is a complex set of political ideologies used by the women's movement to advance the cause of women's equality and to end the sexist theory and practice of social oppression.

Main concerns of women's movement in India have been:

- Men outnumber women in India, unlike in most countries where the reverse is the case.
- 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. Even when girls are enrolled, many of them drop out of school.
- Women's work is undervalued and unrecognized. Women work longer hours than men and carry the major share

of household and community work, which is unpaid and invisible.

- Once 'women's work' is professionalized, there is practically a monopoly on it by men. For example, the professional chefs are still largely men. The Sexual Division of Labour ensures that women will always end up as having to prioritize unpaid domestic work over paid work. It is not a 'natural' biological difference that lies behind the sexual division of labour, but certain ideological assumptions.
- Women generally earn a far lower wage 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.
- Women are under-represented in various bodies of governance as well as decision-making positions in both public and private sectors.
- Women are legally discriminated against in land and property rights. Most women 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.

The women's movement is marked by 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 gender relations: 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.

Every vision needs a starting point and it is with great pleasure that I present this paper that encapsulates 'two steps forward, one step back' dynamics of the story of the collective wisdom of women's rights movement so far. Hope this inclusive, yet brief, analysis of actors, debates and

strategies of the women's movement in India will have ripple effects in terms of critical reflections and new learnings.

The first wave of feminism was marked by the generation of struggles by English educated women against child marriage, widow burning, and female infanticide and efforts towards education for women and their voting right. The gender politics touched only women from upper caste and upper class. In the second wave of feminism that began in the mid-1970s, the educated middle class women, who were actively involved in different social movements of students, youth, workers, peasants, tribal communities and dalits and in other aspects of civil liberties, 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. Here, the gender politics was focussed on 'women's agency' and women were to be seen not merely as passive and mute victims of discrimination, injustice and exploitation, but as active agents challenging gender-based discrimination and gender violence in all spheres of their lives. 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 period, young women, differently abled women, women from ethnic and religious minorities and women with alternative sexuality. This wave has deepened the discourse of discontent. 'Third Wave' acknowledges the benefits of second wave feminism and provides the world-view of a young feminist from the global South. Issues around identity and culture impacting gender relations have occupied the centre stage in the globalised world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The current stage of Gender Politics is informed by a third wave of feminism whose ideological moorings lie in the post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality. Here, disciplines such as literature, politics, art, cultural criticisms,

history and sociology have played a dominant role in defining gender politics. 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. Contemporary gender politics encompasses macro-micro and meso realities in all spheres, economy and polity, jurisprudence and policy making, and local-national-regional-global governance.

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 all the more so apparent 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**

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, while at the same time offering 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 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 (Mies and Shiva, 2014). Rural and tribal women are demanding land rights in panchayats and also fighting legal battles (Velayudhan, 2009).

Livelihood concerns of women such as fuel, fodder, water, animal care, agriculture, kitchen gardening, food security and food sovereignty are taken up by feminists not only at the policy levels but also in terms of mobilisation of women and formulation of successful models by rural and tribal women's collectives; e.g. Navdanya in Uttaranchal and *Annadana*, Soil and Seed-savers in Bangalore and Asha Kachru's efforts of organising women farmers.

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 percent of the world's population (privileged North Americans and Europeans) can continue to consume 80 percent of its resources in the name of progress."<sup>1</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva. (1993). *The Introduction to Ecofeminism*, Fernwood Publications, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, ISBN 1-895686-28-8.

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 16<sup>th</sup> century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women which prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, were closely connected” (Shiva & Mies, 2014).

### **Ecological Movements, the ‘Resource base of our Feminism’**

Across the North East India, there is a growing body of politically conscious and empowered women, who have stepped in to fill a vacuum that neither government alone, nor struggling militant outfits and rebel organisations have been able to close. The *Meira Paibis of Manipur*, *Naga Mothers’ Association of Nagaland (NMA)*, the *Nari Adhikar Sangram Samiti (NASS)* and the *Asom Mahila Sachetan Mancha of Assam*, among others, have striven 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 by being part of the struggle, or, having been victims of it. The participatory “politics” of activist groups, such as the NMA or the NASS for example, straddles the borders 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 on the streets of Imphal, in the wake of the Manorama murder case; Triggering off a major focus on militarised societies in India’s northeast, this moment in the region has come to assume a symbolism that draws from the power of women’s agency and their political awakening.<sup>2</sup> But more

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<sup>2</sup> *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, pg. 14.

significant is the involvement of an increasing number of women who have taken initiatives at peace-building in these very societies through active negotiations, spontaneous activism both within and outside the state and by continuing to write and speak vociferously at various forums against violence and for the need for conflict resolution and peace building to reach out to ordinary women trapped in endless litigations within the family.

## **Reproductive Rights of Women**

When it comes to reproductive rights of women, most of the efforts of the women's groups in India have been directed against excesses committed in the name of family planning programmes. Now, Indian Council of Medical Research, All India Institute of Medical Sciences and Institute of Research in Reproduction (IRR) have shown readiness to discuss scientific, medico legal and operational dimensions of bio-medical research conducted on human subjects. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and World Health Organization (WHO) have drawn guidelines about population policies that shift focus from targeting women for population control to women's reproductive rights (Sen, Germain and Chen, 1994). Ethical guidelines for bio-medical research are drawn. Still in the interior parts of India, poor women have been the main targets of the abusive sterilisation operations and unsafe injectable and oral contraceptives. Recent research on adolescent girls and abortion has highlighted the problem of teenage pregnancies, trafficking of young girls for sex trade and complicity of the criminal justice system. Campaign against sex determination resulted in central legislation banning amniocentesis, *chorion-villi-biopsy* and sex pre-selection techniques for femicide. But, much is needed to be done to make the legislation effective in real life. Centre for Enquiry into Health and Allied Themes (CEHAT) and the Lawyers Collective have jointly supported a petition (Public interest Litigation in the Supreme Court of

India) filed by Dr. Sabu George for effective implementation of the Act (Patel, 2009).

### **Declining Child Sex Ratio**

Sex ratios are a critical indicator of both social attitudes towards women as well as changing dimensions of social denominators with regard to Gender and Development. The report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India — *Towards Equality* — first drew attention to this startling reality. The Committee's findings had pointed to two extremely significant trends – of declining work participation rate and declining sex-ratio, both of which were critical indicators to assess women's status. It has also enabled women activists, scholars and policy makers to engage with the wider linkages of these emerging social trends. However, the problem of declining sex ratios has become worse as well as more complex over the years, and in fact, reached alarming proportions in certain states. Concern with regard to this has been voiced on international platforms and through United Nations (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 advance in technologies which facilitate pre-birth selection through assisted reproductive technologies and practices which find favour in the midst of abiding patriarchal norms and mind-set.

Activists have continuously pointed to the total lack of political will displayed with regard to the implementation of the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, 1994 and its provisions, delay in the issue of notifications and guidelines. All these allow for complicity between retrogressive social beliefs and modern day practices. These 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 ratios 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 (number of females to every 1000 males) decreased sharply, starting from 972 in 1901 to a low of 927 in 1991, and since then has shown 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) from 1991 to 2011 shows that the phenomenon has widened and deepened, spreading over the entire northern and western belt in 2011 compared to only Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and parts of Gujarat having very bad ratios in 2001; North East India has some of the best CSRs in the country. However, maps for each state showing the difference between 2001 and 2011 indicate that things are not so good in Manipur, Nagaland and in parts of Arunachal Pradesh; the statistics also show the difference in boy and girl children as well as for all ages in the five-year age data of 2011. The basic question is why families are agreeing to sex selection which manifests itself as son preference and daughter aversion. There is a need to focus our attention on the need to look at concrete factors which influence decision making, rather than accepted notions of cultural stereotypes, which frame cultural values, mind-sets and the attitude of mothers/families in particular ways, which are broadly seen to be traditional. More disturbing was the fact that otherwise apparently modern and progressive decisions, such as of educating the girl child and advancing the age of marriage, were being taken alongside an underlying purpose which was to give away the girl in a "good marriage", which also necessitated allocating resources for dowry and the accompanying marriage expenses. It was clear that even when overt forms of discrimination may not be present, sex selection was being practised; the small family norm translated into "at least one boy and at the most one girl". There appears to be a connection between neo-liberalism,

falling workforce participation rates of women and the declining sex ratios. New Reproductive Technologies and ways of Assisted Reproduction opened up new possibilities of sex selection and pre-selection.

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 6 years. The period between 2004 and 2006 witnessed the first visible signs of change<sup>3</sup>. 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 in India 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 Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act, a comprehensive set of efforts was made to build value of girls, counter gender discriminatory attitudes and create awareness on the adverse consequences of such discriminatory practices. 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 included intensive engagement with a range of stakeholders including policy makers, administrators, the judiciary, medical community, media and community leaders (Patel, 2010).

## **Feminism and Women-with-Disability**

Women with disability occupy a multifarious and marginalised position in Indian society, based on their

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<sup>3</sup> "How many girls are missing at birth in India? Trends in Sex Ratio at Birth (2001-2012)", UNFPA, July 2015.

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. Though difficult, the possibility exists for "normal" women, to resist this cultural arrangement, while disabled women confront an uphill task. Some disabled girls in the rich or middle class might be able to negotiate the difficulties inherent in arranged marriages, albeit with a great deal of compromise. Disabled sons retain the possibility of marriage, as they are not gifts but the receivers of gifts. Disabled as well as nondisabled men seek "normal" women as wives, and therefore participate in the devaluing of people because of disability (Erevelles, 2000).

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 ongoing discussion of the ethical contradictions that prenatal sex testing poses for feminists, prenatal testing to identify and abort children at risk for disabilities does not get addressed (Patel, 2009).

For disabled women themselves, these issues become secondary because cultural stereotyping denies them the role of motherhood. As elaborated by a psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakkar (1978, p. 56), whether a woman's family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class, or religion, whether she is a fresh 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 the wedlock evokes stigmatisation.) The denial of women's "traditional roles" to disabled women creates what Michele Fine and Adrienne Asch (1988) term "role-lessness," a social invisibility and cancellation of femininity that can impel disabled women 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 a culture where any deviation from a normally accepted archetype is seen as a marked deviation, the impaired body becomes a symbol of imperfection. The myth of the beautiful body defines the impaired female body as unfeminine and unacceptable. Disability is thus constituted as being profoundly the "Other" in our society. The roots of such thinking are found in Indian mythology: Lakshmana, brother of Lord Rama, cuts off the nose of Shurpanakha, sister of King Ravana, who is interested in him. That Lakshmana can



only respond to what he defines as non-acceptable behaviour by disabling the ugly female monster indicates how disability and desexing are equated in the Indian psyche. The assumption that sexuality and disability are mutually exclusive also denies that people with deviant bodies experience sexual desires and refuses them recognition as sexually typical despite their differences.

Indian feminist scholarship has looked at embodiment along the axes of caste, class, and historical phases such as the impact of colonisation; however, the impaired body has not been considered as having analytical consequence. This continues to render the disabled invisible in a manner very similar to the invisibility experienced by blacks in a white racist society. As Robert Young (forthcoming) argues, "In a racist society it is necessary for the African-American subject to be rendered invisible in order to enable the Euro-American subject (whiteness) to preserve the illusion of autonomy, rationality and control" (cited in Erevelles 2000, 35). Erevelles's application of this analysis to disability pursues a similar argument. She says that a (nondisabled) subject, upon encountering its Other (the disabled subject) finds it necessary to suppress the memory of this deviant image in order to support the illusion of normalcy and wholeness. That these claims to normalcy or wholeness are themselves illusions becomes vividly apparent when one examines how constructions of a normative self are in fact predicated on the existence of the disabled Other. 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 Women's Studies Curriculum, with special emphasis on how conflict (both

familial and social) has its 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.

### **Sexual Harassment at the Workplace and #MeToo Movement**

Sexual harassment at the workplace has been one of the central concerns of the women's movement in India since the '80s. After 30 years of consistent effort, Indian women have managed to get The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 introduced. Due to pressure from child rights organisations, the previous year, the Parliament of India passed The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, aimed at protecting children in India against the evil of child sexual abuse. Since 2012, after gang rape of a young woman physiotherapist in a moving bus in Delhi, there has been nationwide protests and intense discussions 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.

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 Government of Rajasthan. The feudal patriarchy 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 *Vishakha* that filed public interest litigation in the Supreme Court of India (Patel, 2010).

In 1997, the Supreme Court passed a landmark judgment in the *Vishakha Case* punishing Bhanvari 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 after the rape of Bhanvari Devi, who was raped as punishment for carrying out government-sanctioned work, as we have earlier seen. In the years since these guidelines, 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 kinds of organisations are uneven in character, depending on the presence within the organisation of feminists with a perspective on sexual harassment. Where such a perspective is lacking, the committees and policy become just one more employer-generated disciplinary mechanism against employees, especially since, in most such cases, there are no trade unions.

University policies (for instance, at Delhi University; Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi; North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, and Jadhavpur University, Kolkata), 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 open challenge to the pervasiveness of a culture that allows men to humiliate, harass, intimidate, and exploit women, with impunity, has come as a result of the global #MeToo Movement. The power of #MeToo movement lies not just in the individual/collective narratives that are being shared in the public domain and not as whisper campaign, has resulted in a public discourse on 'misogyny' and 'toxic patriarchy' on the one hand and also #MenToo Movement to combat false cases.

### **Improvement in the Societal Role of Educated Women, but there is a Glass Ceiling**

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, 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 administration, judiciary, corporate world, politics and educational institutions. Statistical profile of women in India provides yearly account of Indian women's advancement in the spheres of education, employment, political participation, positions in 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 day to day life.

## **Movers and Shakers**

Women's rights groups, activists, civil society organisations, independent researchers including academia such as women studies 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 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, mounting tensions with regard to the rights of diverse communities and ethnicities, the inequalities based on caste and class hierarchies have got exacerbated. These also determine people's abilities to garner their citizenship rights. Given the uneven and unequal nature of development and lack of respect shown for federal democratic principles in the modes of governance adopted, the negotiation of these rights has itself come to be seen as problematic.

## **Feminists Shaping Health Movement**

One of the important concerns of the women's movement has been health of women. The movements in opposition to domestic violence, sexual abuse, dowry deaths are directly related to the health of the women. But these movements are not considered as health movements, perhaps because in these campaigns, it is the basic dignity of women as human beings is the primary, core issue. There have been movements in which women's groups participated or took lead by identifying these as health issues; for example, the opposition of the women's organisations to hazardous injectable contraceptives. The Stree Shakti Sanghatana in Hyderabad, Saheli in Delhi demonstrated against the use of Depo-Provera, the hazardous injectable contraceptive. These and other groups (Forum for Women's Health, Mumbai)

campaigned against NET-EN and Nor-plant, the other 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 those moves, the government decided not to include injectable contraceptives in the Family Planning Programme, though it refused to ban them. 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 health action groups have taken up women's health issues which had been neglected earlier. For example, conventional health work would limit itself to Maternal and Child Health, whereas during the last 20 years, women's reproductive health issues have been increasingly 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 for example, in Kashmir and North East, is impacted by special legal regimes, while in communal violence, women's bodies are targeted. In conflict zones, the violence against women is embedded in special laws as also in regular laws, such as the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), which carries a colonial legacy (Phillipose and Bisnoi, 2013).

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 (CPC) states that any form of sexual violence by public person did not need sanction for prosecution. The sanction clause was removed. As per Sec.376 (2), custodial rape by men in 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. After 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, 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, the Dalit, nor the women’s movement, had a homogeneous response on issues of sex work in India.

## **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 the experiences of men and women 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, which 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, we see it in the mass movements led by the educated youth in India's metropolitan cities and smaller towns after the 16 December rape of the 23-year old para-medical student in 2012. 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 these 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 gender just solutions, including within the existing frameworks for religious communities. 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 the struggle by Malala Yousafzai and other young women for women's education, had become symbolic of the new energy which had infused the women's movement and their link with other democratic struggles.

In inter-caste and inter-religious marriages, the dominant sectarian caste/religious councils act extremely violently against the dalit and minority communities in spite of court verdict and state protection to the couples.

### **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 years 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 years be made void. One of the papers mapped state legislative interventions in the light of conflicts between 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 and bottlenecks that make it difficult for families to access social sector 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', as one respondent pointed out, 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. It was pointed out that 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 must be closely scrutinised and further elaborated by feminist scholarship, through a critical reading of the making of laws.

When the 5-members multi-religious bench of The Supreme Court of India has given the verdict on much polemicised issue of 'Triple Talaq' that instant divorce invalid as it violates fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution of India; it brought out intersectionality of gender justice, minority rights and identity politics. Bharatiya Muslim Mahila

Andolan, a community-based all-India Muslim women's organisation had conducted multi-centric research on status of Muslim women in 2014 and filed the petition and campaigned consistently to build public opinion against triple talaq and took a position that it is against Koran. Awaz-e-Niswan, a community-based feminist organisation based in Mumbai took a position that triple talaq is against gender justice. Thirty-two years back, when Shahnaaz Shaikh had filed public interest litigation in response to the triple talaq given to her by her professor husband at midnight and thrown out of her matrimonial home, it became an issue of identity politics. The petition stated that 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.

Sharp polarization around ban on entry of women in reproductive age to Sabrimala Temple and the inter-religious marriage of Hadiya shook not only Kerala but the whole of India. Popular opinion that was supportive for entry of women in Shani Singnur temple and Haji-ali Dargah in Maharashtra turned divided in the case of Kerala.

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**

Feminists groups have made excellent use of social media by launching Yahoo groups and Google groups; besides cyber forums, blogs, etc. for quick communication and coordinated action, sharing of intellectual work and resources, creating archives with photographic memories, reports, posters,

diaries, songs, documentaries on women's issues which are available online. E.g. [Feministsindia@yahoo.com](mailto:Feministsindia@yahoo.com), [www.prajnya archives.org](http://www.prajnyaarchives.org), [www.sparrow.com](http://www.sparrow.com), [www.avaarchives.com](http://www.avaarchives.com), [www.cwds.com](http://www.cwds.com). Art, humour and music – both offline and on the social media have been effectively used by feminist groups as a form of resistance and influencing of the young and old alike. 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 has been 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.

### **Alliance of Feminist Groups with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) groups**

During the last decade of the 20th century in India, the hitherto private realm of sexuality emerged as a focal point and the 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*, transgender, *kothi*, 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 – all 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 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 the 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 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 Tirupati at which an open and acrimonious discussion on lesbianism took place, with the greatest hostility coming from leftist groups, *decrying 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 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual or Allied (LGBTQIA) Rights**

With regard to Article 377, women's groups expressed deep regret and shock and registered its protest at the Supreme Court judgement of 11 December, 2014, on Section 377, overturning the progressive judgement of the Delhi High Court (Shah & Muralidhar) of 2 July 2009, and creating a setback to the struggles and efforts of LGBTQIA (Lesbians, Gays, Bi-sexuals, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual) communities and all others who have supported these struggles. The Delhi High Court Judgement 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, a landmark ruling in Delhi's High Court had seen homosexual acts decriminalised, making consensual gay sex legal under law for the first time since 1861, when British colonial authorities brought in Section 377 of India's penal code, which outlawed "sexual activities against the order of nature" (Narain, 2004).

**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 that began in the early 2000s did not see itself as a kind of minority politics, thereby getting trapped in the 'us' vs. 'them' dichotomy. 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. So, 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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) culture and pride 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 *Mardi Gras* – like character, whereby the political stage is built on notions of celebration. In India, it began in 1999 in Kolkata and annual marches are organised in many cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai in solidarity with the cause globally.

An important part of the third wave of 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.

### **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, 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, and importance of networking with the perspective of "Think globally, Act locally". Since the 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 neoliberal 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 is 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 Convention on the Abolition of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1993 and India is a signatory to it. Indian women's groups have meticulously reported against discrimination and raised the issue of human rights violations of women at the global arena (Nainar, Uma and Baxi, 2013).

Over the past few years, possibilities and concerns have emerged over 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 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 to end violence against women in human history. The campaign, launched on Valentine's Day 2012, began as a call to action based on the staggering statistic that 1 in 3 women on the planet will be beaten or raped during her lifetime. With the world population at 7 billion, this adds up to more than ONE BILLION WOMEN AND GIRLS. More than 200 countries are part of this global movement and the Indian women's groups have played an active, enthusiastic and very important role in all the activities organised under this mass movement in different parts of the country and thereby 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 system change to end violence against women and girls; to call on people to rise for others, and not just for ourselves.

Cyber space has emerged as a potential space for transnational 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 (Stephen, 2009). On the other hand, there is a renewed spurt in the display of energy and activism of Dalit women's collectives, e.g., the All India Dalit Women's Forum, National Federation of Dalit Women and All India

Dalit Women's Forum, founded in 1994, 1995 and 1996, respectively. At the global level, the UN World Conference on 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' of (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 groups to an extent are also connected to the international debates around engaging with men and masculinity in addressing violence against women. The Indian women studies 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 of 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 1970s and 1980s, the women's movement highlighted marginalisation of women from the economy. The efforts of women activists were directed towards 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 work-place. Feminists are demanding equal share for women in the public spaces such as streets, gardens, clubs, and transport any time of the day and night (Phadke, Khan and Ranade, 2011). In 1990, the women's movement is 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 development agenda with the help of effective use of information technology, communication channels, modern managerial practices, 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 with dignity. Gender experts have evolved gender-related development indicators (Rustagi, 2004).

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 to also ensure that women should equally share 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. 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, we overlook an issue that begs serious investigation 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 women's movements shape and influence inter-linked struggles and campaigns for the right to food, to minimum wages, to 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. Maternity benefits, for example is a victory of the labour as well as the feminist movement. They called for greater reflection on the vocabularies we use and the way we represent our struggles to ourselves 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 have a duty to ensure democratic and multicultural 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 before us.

## **Gender Budgeting**

During the past two decades, gender politics around local, state and union budgets in India has sharpened in its analytical rigour among gender economists as well as women's rights groups. "Peoples access to services and resources are determined by government budget policies. Gender budgets initiatives around the world have attempted to systematically examine how government budgets address discrimination with regard to women's access to housing, employment, health, education, and other services" (Elson, 2006). Budget is an important tool in the hands of the state for affirmative action for improvement of gender relations through reduction of gender gap in the development process. It can help to reduce economic inequalities, between men and women as well as between the rich and the poor. Hence, the budgetary policies need to keep in considerations the gender dynamics operating in the economy and in the civil society. There is a need to highlight participatory approaches bottom-up budget, child budget, green budgeting, local and global implications of pro-poor and pro-women budgeting and inter-linkages between gender-sensitive budgeting and women's empowerment. Understanding the relationship between macro-economic policies and the Union Budget, state budgets and the local self-government institutions in the context of economic reforms and globalization is a MUST as it has influenced women's lives in several ways. It is good economic sense to make national budgets gender-sensitive, as this will enable

more effective targeting of government expenditure to women-specific activities and reduce inequitable consequences of previous fiscal policies. The Gender Budget Initiative is a policy framework, methodology and set of tools to assist governments to integrate a gender perspective into the budget as the main national plan of public expenditure. It also aims to facilitate attention to gender analysis in review of macro-economic performance, ministerial budget preparations, parliamentary debate and mainstream media coverage. Budget impacts women's lives in several ways. It directly promotes women's development through allocation of budgetary funds for women's programmes or reduces opportunities for empowerment of women through budgetary cuts.

### **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, we see greater aggression in defining 'correct' behaviour, which acquires special characteristics with reference to women and the attempt is 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 also exacerbating exclusions and denials in both the cultural and the political domains. 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 levels.

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 wellbeing. 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 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 violence against women 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 of 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 more specifically true for gender-based hierarchies, e.g., with regard to labour; wage disparities; rural, peri-urban and urban livelihood and employment patterns resulting into 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, especially, 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. There are at present sustained and resurgent efforts to resist and challenge hegemonies in the spheres of the state, natural resources, labour, body, markets, culture and ideology, conflict, language, sites of law, boundaries of relationships and the interfaces of these arenas. 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 against the state, women face conflict and confrontation even within 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, but also 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 marginalisations are being engendered. The state is increasingly complicit with these processes of marginalisations present today more in its repressive, extractive and appropriative roles than the ameliorative one of providing constitutional guarantees. 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 disproportionate impact on women (Patel, 2009).

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 just 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; new relationships are forged through migration for livelihood and in confronting notions of stigma. 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 coincide 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 as well as national spaces (Rege, 2006). The diverse voices emerging from the margins, those of the queer, sign-language enabled, Dalits, Adivasis, and Muslims, are unable to enter into conversation with the mainstream or with each other due to the absence of translation. There are, however, also 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 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 (Stephen, 2009). 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 people's movements against corporate land grab and mining lobbies and from forest dweller communities, respectively 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 example, 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, force-fed under arrest for over 11 years by the Indian state, as she continues her fast for the repeal of the Armed Forces (special Powers) Act, the law that enables her state of Manipur and the North-East of India in general to be treated as occupied territory and Nalini Nayak, who works with the fisher people's movements on issues of livelihood and ecological sustainability terms (Kurian, Nayak, Vivekanand, 2005).

## **Conclusion**

The last 50 years of feminist activism in India has managed to challenge the 5000 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 family, kinship networks, organised religion, media and state. 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 feminist movement. For this, the pioneers of women's rights movement and women's studies scholars worked in unison. Gender politics in India has changed drastically due to shift from mass mobilisation and grassroots level activism to proactive participation of women in decision-making bodies of government and non-government structures at all levels, from local self-government to board rooms of corporate governance.

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