being represented and how does the representation take place within different cultural forms.

Gender : Gender is the socio-cultural construction of men and women in society. It refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and identities of individuals within a society that is often categorized as masculine, feminine, or non-binary. Gender shapes individuals, and social groups and impacts behaviours and other aspects of life including career choices, health behaviors, and participation in social activities.

Dalit Literature : Dalit literature is the genre of Indian writings that expresses 'dalit consciousness'. It gives voice to dalit experiences, lives, struggles and discrimination faced by the dalit individuals and community.

Dalit Consciousness : Dalit consciousness is awareness of the shared experiences of Dalit oppression, shaping the collective voice in Dalit literature.

9.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Culture, gender and politics are intricately related. Scholarship has since long focused on the complex interplay between gender and culture. Women, particularly their bodies have always been the repositories of both the honour of the family, community (including caste, religion and ethnicity) and nation. Such a burden on women, have most of the time expressed through control, regulation and restriction in terms of mobility, choice and life decisions. We need to recognize how culture is a site of political contestation particularly in relation to the community and nation hood.

2. By critically engaging with women's writing in India, one is able to address the linkages between gender, culture and politics of knowledge production, distribution and consumption. Thus, it raises issues with respect to; one, alternative knowledge building process, two, how knowledge is not only gendered but also context specific to one identity locations and three, cultures of literary and orality. Such issues address questions of contexts; such as that of structures of caste, gender, class in which they were written and read; the politics of writing, particularly the reception of their work and expressions of resistances – the subversion that featured the women's writing in India.

3. The objectives of dalit literature are to make visible: one, the discrimination faced by the community and build dalit consciousness. Two, to give voice to the violence and social exclusion faced by the dalits. Three, seeks to bring about social awareness among the dalit community and larger society that in turn can lead to political and social change. Four, use literature as a tool of resistance and to empower the community. Five, help build a socially just world based on the values of equality and justice.

4. By analysing dalit women autobiographies one can understand: one, how do dalit women contest and redefine the upper caste definitions of their social status? Two, how do they view their struggles, institutions and practices prevalent in Indian society?

Three, what are the different ways they show their dissent? Four, how do the dalit women view gender relations both within and outside the community?

5. It is important to analyse regional cultural performances in India, as one can highlight how; one, these performances are located within social and material conditions of Dalits and Bahujans. Two, how these performances are marginalised by elite forms of entertainment and three, one needs to emphasize their everyday lives, struggles of labour of different class, caste and gender.

9.10 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. Explain the significance of Bama's Kurukku.
2. Explain the significance of Kumud Pawade's autobiography.

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. What is the significance Dalit autobiography?
2. Explain the significance of Tendulkar's play 'Silence! The Court is in Session'.

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- Dr.

BLOCK - IV:
MASCULINITIES

Block four of this course focusses on addressing the concept of masculinities from a gendered perspective. The three units of this block is written by Dr. Shefali Jha, DAIICT, Hyderabad. The focus in this block is not only to develop a critical understanding of masculinity as diverse but also to address how to reframe masculinity by questioning the hegemonic forms of masculinity and nurturing a gender just and equitable form of 'supportive' masculine behaviour and practices.

The first unit focusses on analysing masculinity as a pluralized concept, thereby emphasising on not evaluating it as a monolithic structure. Such a perspective pushes for an understanding that recognizes masculinity as a dynamic, evolving and diverse concept. The unit also differentiates between various forms of masculinity such as hegemonic, subordinated and marginalized masculinities, thereby highlighting its plurality and diversity. The unit further emphasizes in critically engaging with texts and interactions in our everyday interactions so as to emphasize on how gendered expressions of masculine power are articulated and expressed in our everyday interactions.

The second unit explains in detail about hegemonic, subordinated and marginalized masculinities as process. To do this the unit critically examines popular texts and engages with their reception within the society. The unit in addition also develops an awareness of ethnographic and historical research in context to masculinities. As crucial dimension addressed in this unit is regional focus on masculinity, where an effort has been made to develop a comparison of regional formations of gender and sexuality.

The third unit builds on the analysis of the key concepts in the field of critical men and masculinity studies. This is done with building arguments with references from texts and everyday experiences. The unit also develops a critical understanding of alternative forms of masculinity. Such an analysis would help the students to examine masculinity, not only through theoretical perspective but also reflect on everyday constructions of diverse forms of masculinity and think of ways to develop more equitable forms of gender just society.

The Units included in this Block are:

Unit - 10 : Masculinities and Power

Unit - 11 : Learning to be a Man: Family, Schooling, Caste, Religion and Work

Unit - 12 : Reframing Masculinity as Supportive Masculinity

UNIT-10: MASCULINITIES AND POWER

Contents

10.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyze masculinity as a pluralized concept
- Distinguish between hegemonic, subordinated, and marginalized masculinities
- Assess texts and interactions in the world based on the exercise of gendered power
- Formulate arguments about masculinities in relation to everyday interactions

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The first question that may have occurred to you is "why masculinities, and not masculinity?" That is in fact where we will begin, because it is where the social science research into the question begins today. Along the way we will take up other questions: what are the different types of masculinities? What does power have to do with these types? And how do answers to these questions help us understand gender relations in societies?

As with gender, the question of masculinities and power involves thinking across disciplines. Consider a recent controversy in the world of sport, which a quick online search will bring back: the Algerian boxer Imane Khelif was accused of cheating because she competed as a woman in the 66-kg weight category in the 2024 Summer Olympics held in Paris, France. The social media campaign against her was fueled by two things: one, the complaint made by her Italian opponent Angela Carini, to the effect that she had never been punched with such force in her career. Two, Khelif's 'looks' were judged to be masculine, by celebrities like the writer J.K Rowling (author of the highly successful Harry Potter series of books) and the businessman Elon Musk, as much as anonymous trolls online. In this discussion, power fig-

ured in two ways. One, as physical, biologically determined power— the idea that men have a certain definable kind of body and the muscle structure to go with it. It follows from this that they have more strength and stamina. This is the reason sporting competitions have gender divisions, it is argued: so that women do not have to unfairly compete with men, who are built to be bigger and stronger than them.

This seems to be based on our experience, observation, and scientific fact. But is the evidence on this clear? It may come as a surprise, but the answer is no. Biological sex is very complicated to determine, because there may be differences between the genetic, endocrinal, and anatomical elements (Erikainen 2020). Here we are not even considering new research which shows that individual cells in humans may have different genetic material, and so different chromosomes. But this was the second major way in which power played a role in the controversy about Imane Khelif, and it is a different way than the first. This is the power of science itself as the ultimate basis of truth in matters like these. It did not seem to matter that Khelif had been brought up as a girl in her village, that she had had to struggle to be a boxer because such a choice is not easily available to girls, or that she had always competed in the women's category and had been defeated by women boxers. In the end, the International Olympics Association stood by Khelif, and she would go on to win the gold medal in the category. As the controversy shows, appearance, chromosomes, hormones, genitals, health conditions, passports: all of these play a role in what looks like a simple binary between 'male' and 'female.'

But there is more. There are other ways in which power played a role in the attack on Khelif, and this is the kind of power social scientists are most concerned with when it comes to masculinities. Here was a boxer from rural Algeria, being accused of not being feminine enough by a white European woman. Indian athletes like Dutee Chand and Caster Semenya, the South African sprinter had also found themselves in situations where they had to prove their 'female' status to international sports authorities. This should make us pause and think: why is it that it is mostly non-white persons from marginalized backgrounds who have to provide proof that they are not men? Research suggests that the rules and procedures which decide what sex a person is, are strongly influenced by histories of race and colonial domination. So we see that 'science' cannot answer the questions brought up even in specific contexts like internationally competitive sports. The same criteria that include some women may exclude others. Thus, disciplines like Biology, Medicine, International Law, History and Sociology can immediately be seen to be involved for us to make sense of these controversies— which show how complex the question of masculinities and femininities is.

A final thing to note is that male athletes are not tested for gender or biological advantage over other male athletes. It is worth asking why: Some males may have higher testosterone levels than others, or longer arms and legs than others, a stronger bone structure, better metabolism or other genetically determined features. These give them an inherent biological advantage over others in most sports competitions. But the binary of male and female is the only difference which seems to matter— and only in the case of females.

If we push this thought in another direction, we see that just as some women are deemed to be more or less 'feminine' than others and this has serious, life-changing consequences, some men can be—and are—judged to be more or less 'masculine' than others. We all live in patriarchal societies which give men power over women as a whole, and masculinity is by

default a position of strength and power. But as feminists continue to argue, we should remember that sex and gender is most helpfully thought of as a spectrum of biological and social identifications. All parts of this spectrum are not equally powerful socially, each is in a relation of power with what we can call the 'norm' of masculinity or femininity. As we will see, it is in this field that the question of multiple masculinities is posed.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. What is the main problem with scientific criteria to determine maleness or femaleness?

10.2 MASCULINITIES AND POWER: SOME CONCEPTS

The pronoun "he" has been used to refer to "human" in social theory for most of its history, and this usage is still common in mainstream literature across disciplines like Law, Philosophy, History, Sociology, Economics, Anthropology and Literary Studies. From this, we could say that all disciplines have actually studied men since the beginning, but it is also true that this was noted and criticized by feminists studying these various disciplines. The focus of gender studies then became women's lives, work, and experience. But the discussion of gender also had the effect of bringing the question of men and masculinity into focus, in a new way. As a subject of study, this took off on a global scale in the early 1980s, following the feminist movements of the 1970s. From the field of "Men's Studies" to con temporary "Masculinity/Critical Masculinity Studies" the study of masculinities as a field has contributed greatly to our understanding of the construction of gendered selves through power relations in different contexts.

Although psychologists and psychoanalysts like Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler had studied men and masculinity far earlier, their focus was on trying to understand the essential features of male sexuality at the level of the psyche. Today this work is read and understood mainly from the point of view of the social sciences. This means, first, that we treat gender as a social category, and in studying masculinities, we study different, socially available and unavailable forms of 'being a man'. In this unit, we will look at the ways in which social scientists have analysed how power becomes central to the formation and identifications that make up masculinities. As we will see, the field of Masculinity Studies has emphasized local and context-specific analyses of masculinities. In the last section of this unit, we will look at Indian debates on masculinities and power, which contribute to this discussion and also provide new perspectives on it. The concept of "hegemonic masculinity", first proposed by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell, has been particularly influential in the field. We will begin by exploring this concept and the debates it has generated.

10.3 HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

The word 'hegemonic' derives from the concept of 'hegemony' associated with the work of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). Hegemony is a specific way of analyzing power relations in a given society, especially relations between dominant and 'subaltern classes'. Briefly, Gramsci argued that the source of the power of dominant groups comes in equal measure from their ability to gain consent for their ideas and ideology from other, subordinate groups, as from economic power and the use of force. Hegemony is most clearly visible in the domain of 'civil society', that is, the space of culture, education and everyday interaction. The struggle for change, then, also means the struggle to transform ideas and ways of doing things taken for granted by a particular society.

Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity builds on this description. First proposed in her work Gender and Power (1987), it was refined further in Masculinities (1995). The concept assumes that in any society, there is more than one way of being a man, as the title itself suggests. All these ways are not equally accepted, desired or aspired to: certain ways of being a man give one more power and status in particular societies and contexts than others. In Connell's three-part categorization, hegemonic masculinities function through the exclusion of 'marginalized' and 'subordinated' masculinities. To take the first, in her own words:

Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell 1995: 77)

There are four important things to note here. First, masculinity is here understood as part of a 'practice of gender', which means that this is not about individual psychology or ideas or beliefs. It is about a set of actions we know we have to perform in certain ways and not others—this is a social knowledge of doing which we are supposed to gain from being members of particular societies at a particular time. Then, to understand masculinity, one must place it along with 'femininity'. This also means that masculinity cannot simply be equated with men. There are, as we saw with Imane Khelif, women who are judged 'masculine', and equally, men who are judged 'feminine.' But we are trained to ignore these questions, or make jokes about them because the social ideal of normal masculinity and femininity is so powerful. This pushes us to realize that the association of men and masculinity itself is part of the hegemonic ideal of masculinity.

Second, and following from this, it is clearly not enough to simply place masculinity and femininity next to each other to understand their practice. They have to be understood in relation to each other, and bearing in mind the key fact that masculinity is always about power. Note the use of the term 'legitimacy' here: what does it mean? A legitimate system is one that is based on our acceptance— nobody has forced it on us, we have all somewhere decided that it is the best system there is, and it works for us. Now we know that a patriarchal system is unjust and unequal. As we know and the definition clearly states, this is a generalized system based on the "domination" of men over women. How can such a system be made acceptable and 'legitimate'? Hegemonic masculinity is one very big answer to this question, according to Connell's definition. The stakes in hegemonic masculinity are nothing less than the upholding of patriarchal relations of power.

Third, hegemonic masculinity (like any practice of gender) is "embodied": these relations of power play out over the bodies of human beings who are taken to be the 'ideal' or 'deviate' from the ideal of masculinity. This is not just about hormones, genitals or body structure, though that is an important part of it. What kind of body one has, how one looks, dresses, speaks to others, behaves in a crowd or at home— all of these become important for the exercise of this hegemony.

And finally, there is the important phrase "currently accepted answer". Why is this important? Because it suggests that hegemonic masculinity is socially, historically changing. This is built into Gramsci's concept of hegemony, as we have seen, and Connell emphasizes this aspect in her definition. An answer that is "accepted" today, may become completely unacceptable tomorrow. Political movements, economic and social changes, popular culture and technologies all contribute to major shifts in ideals of masculinity.

Let us take a small example to understand these points. Think of the range of hairstyles of the kind that are advertised on every street-corner of Indian cities and towns by 'salons' catering to men and boys. Twenty years ago, this kind of attention to styling was considered 'feminine'; all men needed to do was go to a barber who would cut their hair short and give them a shave and a head-massage. Even today, many boys and men may go to such barbers in their neighbourhood, but we see more and more salons with new hairstyles being advertised by models and actors, and more young men with different haircuts.

Older men may find these changes strange, even irritating. For them and many younger men, not only the new hairstyles but also the attention to hair and skincare among young men may still seem like feminine behaviour. At certain places and times, these embodied ways of being men mark the difference between regions, rural and urban spaces, aspiration and belonging. Remember that hegemony is always a matter of contest: at any given time, there is more than one answer to the question, "what shows that you are a man?" and many things contribute to the making and changing of these answers. We can make note of a combination of economic and social factors here: the rise of the service economy, the spread of media technologies, especially through the internet, and the creation of an aspirational and upwardly mobile middle class with a different sense of the self from an older generation of middle- and working-class men. Some things, though, may have stayed the same: film stars and cricketers, for example, have always set trends in styling among urban youth in India.

This does not mean that one is free to choose any way of being masculine or feminine as one likes. There are wrong and unacceptable answers, which we will discuss in detail below. But there is a range of "currently acceptable" answers. Notice, for example, that the army ideal of the clean-shaven, physically fit and trained for aggression recruit with very short, clean, crew-cut hair is also part of hegemonic masculinity in our societies. It signals discipline, patriotism and military strength, all of which are core values of masculinity in most societies. And once again, this ideal works in contrast with those of femininity, and with other ways of being masculine. Is there then more than one type of hegemonic masculinity in any given social and historical context? Yes, there is. Do they have some common features? Let us look at this question a little more closely.

According to anthropologists Filippo and Caroline Osella, it is the ideal of the "modern 'breadwinner'" that has come to be the dominant value associated with male prestige and power in the Indian context. Ultimately, they argue, Indian men derive their own sense of value as men from the idea that they must not only provide for their family to ensure basic necessities like food, shelter, and education, but also to protect them with their social, physical and economic strength. Has this always been the case? No. It is to be seen in relation to changing family relationships, where more and more women are educated and able to earn and support families. At the same time, all of us suffer from economic uncertainties in a scenario of rampant unemployment or underemployment, where steady, well-paying, and permanent jobs with benefits are becoming more and more difficult to find. But the hegemonic ideal of the modern breadwinner is still strong, and we could say it gets stronger the more it is threatened. But this is also to be seen in relation to Indian histories of masculinities.

Many studies locate a moment of big and important changes in the 19th century, when social reformers in different regional contexts were fighting to change traditional patterns of gendered behavior. In the fight against practices like child marriage and the prohibition of widow remarriage among some Hindu castes, these reformers posited the ideal of a new kind of masculinity: an educated, enlightened husband who would cast aside traditional objections to women's education and wanted a capable, equally educated and modern companion of a wife. In fact, this may be understood as part of a global process: the historian Mrinalini Sinha has proposed the term "colonial masculinity" to understand the making of both British and Indian constructions of what it meant to be a man, and therefore to exercise power over others, especially women and subordinated men. At the same time, this process was based on the marginalization of the bodies, work, and culture of the poor and oppressed castes in Indian society. We will explore these in more detail in the next unit.

In short, the concept of hegemonic masculinity is supposed to capture the dynamic internal contradictions in these ideals at any given point of time. These contradictions come from the socio-economic realities of class, caste, religion, race and sexualities, which means that the "currently accepted answer" to the problem of ensuring that patriarchal relations stable, is always open to challenge and change. This is why any discussion of the hegemonic must also include a concept of subordinated masculinities, resulting from specific kinds of exercise of power.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. What is 'hegemony' and why is it useful for the study of masculinities?

10.4 SUBORDINATION AND MARGINALIZATION

In the Introduction to this unit, we discussed the making of an identifiably male or female body in the field of sports. Ambiguity on this front is policed and punished, even though the science is uncertain on where to draw the line between male and female. Still, that line is powerful, as we can see from the cost to individual athletes who seem to fall outside or in between, like Dutee Chand or Imane Khelif. In social terms, this line may be identified as the system of "compulsory heterosexuality". Masculinities that fall outside or ambiguously between the types associated with heterosexual relations of family, marriage and reproduction can be identified, in Connell's terms, as subordinated. These kinds of masculinities, which fall on a spectrum of sexual desires and relations where female masculinities and male femininities become visible, disturb the hegemonic models of masculinity and femininity in any given society.

In their study of the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the 'genderqueer', like Kothi men in urban India, sociologists Pushpesh Kumar and Debomita Mukherjee document they different ways in which the loss of jobs and threat of disease played out in their lives. In broad terms, these were "men who articulate feminine self in Kothi subculture but stay within family and community". They had to live double lives as "man and Kothi" (Kumar & Mukherjee, 2021). Many of them come from marginalized caste backgrounds, and depend on badly paid jobs for sustenance. The more "effeminate" among them compete with women for domestic work, for example, while others who are able to "pass off as men" may get employed as "office boys." Many of them supplement their meagre income with sex work, "as they cannot rely on their rather hostile heteronormative family and kin for support." During the pandemic, not only did their economic situation become more difficult, but they were also exposed to violence at home and outside.

Within the spectrum of sex and gender identifications, power is distributed differently depending on other social factors. In the making of gendered selves, power also works in less visible ways. As we have seen, this means we have to think about small things: how one looks, what one is allowed to wear or not wear, how one is expected to carry oneself in the presence of social superiors, what kind of language one is allowed to speak etc. All of these seemingly small and trivial things are not only significant, but significant because they have been put in place by historically grounded relations of power. They seem to be part of both 'tradition' and the 'modern' world, and we cannot point to one person or an institution which has made these rules—but we know they exist and must be followed. The distinction between subordinated and marginalized masculinities is meant to help us think about the different ways in which power works to shape masculine selves.

In the western literature on masculinities that may be understood as marginalized, much attention has been paid to oppression along the lines of race, class, and indigeneity. The sociologist Paul Willis wrote one of the most influential books on the class politics of education in England, Learning to Labour. Here he showed, among other things, how working-class schoolboys in the 1970s learned to differentiate themselves from others, looking down on book-learning and behaviour they identified as feminine. Willis argued that their ideals and thoughts were produced by a system of education which slotted them into the margins of English life—they were 'learning to labour' and step into the shoes of

their working class fathers, while resisting the power structures of school life. Marginalized as they were, a certain kind of "sexism" as well as contempt for "ethnic minorities" (South Asian or Caribbean in late-1970s Britain) was part of the group's rebellion against the dominant culture of the school. Their rebellion reflected the distance felt between the values of working-class life and the bourgeois values of the school.

More recent work on marginalized masculinities has raised questions about the role that colonial and racial violence has played in the making of, for example, black and indigenous masculinities, which 'mimic' hegemonic ideals of white masculinity in specific contexts (Hokowhitu 2012). In the Indian context, feminist scholars in particular have challenged this concept of mimicry and tried to understand the intersections of caste, class, and other marginalities as they work to shape gendered ideals and practices. For an example, let us consider the words of the Dalit feminist historian Shailaja Paik:

Dalit masculinity was mocked at and beaten down every day by dominant castes and yet, Dalit men were oppressive towards Dalit women. The control of women was also linked to honour or respectability, as well as efforts to restore manuski, dignity for them and the community as a whole. Dalits were not merely imitating the savarnas. They were adopting different strategies to work with honour and respectability, and to wrench status in the structure that refused to grant them ordinary human rights and basic humanity. (Paik 2021: 133)

Dignity, respectability, status, honour: all of these signify a secure place within a social system where power is distributed according to where one stands. As we noted earlier, masculinity is constructed to varying degrees in opposition to femininity, and in patriarchal systems, men are positioned such that they exercise power over women. However, what Paik describes here is the making and perpetuation of a kind of marginalized as opposed to hegemonic masculinity: Dalit men are "beaten down every day" by savarna men and women, whether by verbal insults and humiliation through language or through physical violence or most often, a combination of both. These are not individual but community-based, historically produced relations of domination. Here women come to occupy a complicated position: physical and sexual power is exercised over Dalit women's bodies and selves, which is intended to humiliate and dehumanize them. But more, their subservience becomes an index of the marginalized man's status and dignity, denied to him by the oppressive system of caste. On the other hand, women from the privileged castes may be denied equality with the men of their own and superior castes, but their bodies and desires are both restricted and protected as valuable to caste honour and prestige.

Thus, subordinated masculinities may be understood as types of masculinity which fall outside the ambit of the heterosexual, reproductive norm embodied by hegemonic masculinity. Marginalized masculinities is the broad term for socially disempowered, non-hegemonic forms of masculinity which still falls within the heterosexual framework of gender binaries and conventional family life. If we follow the rough schematic laid out by Kumar and Mukherjee to help us understand the basic framework of these concepts: in the Indian context, marginalized masculinities may include those of "Dalit, Adivasi and Muslim men", while subordinated masculinities would broadly include "gay or transmen who stand opposed to heterosexual norms."

A final thing to note: While it is true that a majority of men in a given society may not attain the hegemonic ideal or even be close to it, their closeness to it and their ability to aspire to it is structured by the socio-economic relations within which they live and relate to others. If hegemonic masculinity is understood to be defined by its distance from 'feminization' in a patriarchal system, subordinated and marginalized masculinities occupy the least powerful positions in their distance from the ideals which make up hegemonic masculinity in a given society at a given time. As we have seen already and will see in the next two units, these positions are not the same, they are not simple, and they are not unchanging. We should always bear this in mind as put these concepts to use.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

3. What is the difference between marginalized and subordinated masculinities?

10.5 SUMMARY

We often assume that 'gender' only refers to 'women.' This is because historically, the question of gender has been raised by women's movements and research that is directly associated with them or arises from them. Yet, studies of women's experiences and the gendered practices of domination that have structured them have always also had to do with men. The field of Masculinity Studies developed in tandem with and in sympathy with feminist goals of gender equality. It evolved with the 'woman' question shading over into the question of 'gender'. This meant thinking about and working with an unstable and fluid process of how one comes to be a woman or a man in the world. After all, as Simone de Beauvoir famously wrote, "one is not born, but rather, becomes a woman." Understanding masculinity is also about starting from this point: one becomes a man, rather than being born one. Some people may be born as boys or girls and may yet become women or men, or stay with the gender they were born with but still be judged and treated as the opposite, be it feminine or masculine. These are not scientifically stable, objective or 'natural' identities, as we are often led to assume. As the case of the sportspersons referred to in the Introduction shows, nature does not make clear determinations of 'male' and 'female': these are cultural categories made by humans and enforced by institutions which are themselves part of a patriarchal order. The operations of power, we can see from these examples, begin by identifying and naming bodies and behaviour as male or female, and directly arising from these separate categories, masculine and feminine.

To think about masculinity in the plural is also to complicate the ways in which we observe and experience the workings of a gendered world. Raewyn Connell's signal contribution to the theorization of masculinities, on which the discussion in this unit is based, has been to set out a framework and introduce concepts that allow us to account for the complexity of power in shaping gendered selves and relationships which we see around

us and live every day. Her work underlines, first, that to speak of gender is to speak in terms of relations: masculinity is always related to femininity, however we describe each term in a specific context. Second, it is forms of economic, political, and social power that make up these relations. Thus, the concept of hegemonic masculinity only makes sense in the context of patriarchal distributions of power, which are themselves held in place by the marginalization and subordination of other kinds of masculinities. In the following units we will look more closely at the processes that enable men to become masculine by learning how to 'perform' masculinities in relation to femininities and other forms of masculinity at particular times. Over time and with experience, these learned performances are internalized, imitated, parodied, or discarded depending on the lives and relationships of power through which those lives are lived.

In short, we can note that the study of masculinity as a social construction constrained and directed by the system of power named patriarchy, follows from the work of women's movements and feminist scholarship worldwide. The definitions and examples cited in this unit aim to enhance our grasp of concepts like hegemonic, subordinate and marginalized masculinities. With this in place, we can now proceed to look at the different ways in which masculinities are learned in particular contexts, and how we can move towards alternative forms of masculinities that challenge and subvert the hegemonic masculinity that upholds patriarchy.

10.6 GLOSSARY

Kothi : Term in some Indian languages for men or boys who identify as feminine in a same-sex relationship.

Trans or Transgender : A person who does not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. Originally from the Latin for 'on the other side' (trans), the opposite of cisgender, derived from 'on the same side' (cis).

10.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. 1. The main problem with scientific criteria to determine maleness or femaleness is that they are unstable and can be contradictory. Thus, in fields such as elite sports, these criteria can be used in unfair and discriminatory ways against athletes with atypical bodies.

2. Hegemony is a concept which describes the operation of power in a given society based on class conflict, where a dominant class holds power not just with force but also with the silent or spoken consent of others to its values or ideologies. The sociologist Raewyn Connell has used this concept to analyse masculinity and showed that it is helpful because it connects masculinity with social and economic power, and also allows for a plural and conflicting field of masculinities.

3. Both marginalized and subordinated masculinities are defined in relation to hegemonic masculinity in a society at a particular time. 'Marginalized' refers to kinds of masculinities which are socially and economically disempowered, based on racial, caste, regional and other such differences, which are pushed to the margins by the

powerful, mainstream form. 'Subordinated' refers to ways of being masculine among non-heterosexual, queer identified trans groups.

10.8 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. How are masculinities related to patriarchy? Discuss with one example from the unit.
2. What is the relationship between science and power when it comes to masculinities?

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. What is the "breadwinner model" of hegemonic Indian masculinity? Think of an example from your own experience and discuss them in your answer.
2. What is the problem with the "mimicry" model of thinking about subordinated masculinities? Discuss briefly with an example from the unit.

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UNIT-11: LEARNING TO BE A MAN: FAMILY, SCHOOL, CASTE, RELIGION AND WORK

Contents

11.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain hegemonic, subordinated and marginalized masculinities as process
- Analyse popular texts and their reception in context
- Develop an understanding of ethnographic and historical research
- Compare regional formations of gender and sexuality

11.1 INTRODUCTION

A popular old English nursery rhyme goes something like this:

What are little boys made of?

Snips and snails

And puppy-dogs' tails

That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of?

Sugar and spice

And everything nice

That's what little girls are made of.

This poem clearly differentiates between boys and girls and presents us with a contrast which is playful, but 'natural' (what are they 'made of'?) Boys and girls are meant to be understood in comparison with each other. The rhyme reinforces the idea that boys and girls are essentially, substantially different from each other– girls are everything 'nice' which belongs to the home and the kitchen ('sugar', 'spice'); boys are a bit complicated and belong to the outside world, of animals of various kinds, some cute (puppies), some not so cute (snails). This rhyme comes from and advocates for a world of hegemonic masculinity. Since it is aimed at children, it shows us how to make the binary of masculine/feminine attractive, playful and fun.

In fact, it is helpful to think of it as a script for a performance, where the roles of 'male' and 'female' are written and assigned much before birth. Anthropologist Emily Martin points to this in her famous essay, "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male-Female Roles" (1991). She showed how Biology textbooks in America and even research papers describe the egg and the sperm, especially their role in the process of conception, as passive recipient and active provider respectively. These descriptions are very far from reality: sperm moves very slowly and without direction, and the egg is known to exert positive force to guide this mobility. Biologists know this, but when they write, they follow the socially recognizable roles of the respective genders: male equals active, female equals shy and passive, especially in sexual contexts. Even at the level of scientific observation and truth, then, we find that the dominant social script of gender is being followed.

When we think in terms of a 'script' and 'performance' or 'enactment', we can also conceptualize masculinity and femininity as learning to be a certain way by doing certain things. These lessons are reinforced in daily life, by institutions, individuals, spaces and events. This is the case for hegemonic, and also subordinated and marginalized masculinities. As we saw in the previous unit, research in the field of Masculinity Studies has engaged with the issue of asymmetries of power in the construction and enactment of masculinities. In this unit, we will unpack these processes as they play out in the Indian context at different sites, like the family, schools, workplaces, public spaces, and media. We will study in particular how social factors like class, caste, and religion work to make up masculinities in our context.

11.2 EMBEDDING MASCULINITIES: AXES OF DIFFERENCE

As we saw with the example of the rhyme, gendered ways of being are learned from an early age, before we are even fully conscious or aware of ourselves. Just as girls are taught or socialized into learning to be girls in specific ways according to the cultural and historical context, there is a socially and culturally acceptable way of 'being a man' which boys are actively taught and pick up from their environment. Class, physical capabilities,

caste and religion: all these factors decisively influence this environment, and all of these institutions both shape and are shaped by the state and law. The study of masculinities must therefore take into account these connections in all their complexity.

There are significant sites where these processes have been studied, all of which have something in c1ommon: they fall on the public/private spectrum that organizes our lives as social beings and citizens. This division between the public and private plays a significant part in the making and understanding of gender relations in modern societies. We often assume that the relationships in the family, household, and even religious belief is– or should be– a 'private' or 'personal' matter in which others/outsiders should not intervene. On the other hand, 'the public' covers institutions ranging from schools, university campuses and places of employment to spaces like the street, the market, cinema halls, coffee shops, even buses and trains. This is the domain of living and acting with strangers, whether they are fellow students, workers, employees, passengers, or people completely unknown to us. Here we learn to take account of other people's opinions and judgements, and become open to changing our own accordingly. This is the commonsense understanding of the difference between the two spheres, or ends of the spectrum.

As students of sociology know, these domains are deeply tied to each other: religious belief and practice cannot exist without institutions, which are in turn tied up with the economy, law, aesthetics, education etc. Similarly, intimate relationships between individuals are governed by norms and rules not only of religion and caste, but also by laws and economic arrangements which usually support these rules and norms: many examples come to mind, from the small matter of choosing nominees for bank accounts, to the laws of who can inherit property from whom, who is allowed to visit you in a hospital or care for you in an emergency, and what kinds of relationships count as 'marriage' in different societies at different times.

This is why masculinities are conceptualized here as being 'embedded' in various socio-economic and political relations, which both make up and are classified within the public and private dichotomy. For instance, we know that caste and religious practice varies regionally across the subcontinent, within India and outside; we also know that hierarchy and discrimination are built into it everywhere. But it gets more complicated: these hierarchies and discrimination intersect with others, let us say on the lines of gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, language etc. Just as the system of what B.R. Ambedkar called "graded hierarchy" enforces a sense of superiority and inferiority among members of different caste and sub-caste groups, the formation of religious or ethnic majorities and minorities acts on the system and impacts its operations of power. We should remember that each region may have its own history of the formation of masculinities.

To take two historical examples: In colonial Bengal the creation of newly urbanized populations of rural and urban elites, consisting of men who worked closely with British officials and subsequently led movements against them, contributed to the stereotype of the "effeminate babu", who was compared negatively to the "manly Englishman" (Sinha 1995). In the Malabar region of Kerala, Nair social reformers pushed to change the matrilineal system in the nineteenth century partly as a response to British criticism of it as 'unnatural'. But there were other factors, as the feminist historian G.Arunima has demon-

strated: matriliny was also a system of joint property-holding, and its transformation meant that individual men could now hold and dispose of property in their name. In addition, the institution of the sambandham (see Glossary) had come to be perceived as an insult to the honour of the caste– which meant the men– because it allowed Nair women to enter into serially monogamous relationships with Nair and Namboodiri men (Arunima 2003). All these factors contributed to the dismantling of the matrilineal household among the Nairs, in all but name. Once again, we see how colonial power, economic arrangements, caste practice and sexual arrangements come together to create 'normal' Nair men and women.

Today, we have to think about increasing urbanization, the rapidly changing nature of work, cultures of consumption, and the ever-widening gap between rich and poor: these are some of the effects of the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991 that are now being documented and understood. If we say that the creation of a new middle class has been one of the lasting effects of liberalization, the hardships faced by rural communities and forced migration to towns and cities is the other side of the same coin. This means that more and more families are either split between villages and cities, or have moved to urban locations to live precarious and very different lives than before. This has direct consequences for conjugal relationships, parenting, patterns of work and rest, and modes of relating to others.

Together, we can say that they are among the most powerful socio-economic and political forces to produce models and performances of hegemonic masculinity, as well as subordinated and marginal masculinities. In analysing both marginalized and subordinated masculinities, we often see both difference from and aspiration to the hegemonic. In this unit, we will explore these dynamics in some detail, particularly with respect to the hierarchies of hegemonic and marginalized masculinities.

We will look at four major areas in which the question of masculinities and power have been explored: childhood and schooling; family, marriage and sexual relationships; labour and work; representation. In each part, we will see that learning to be a man is part of different and dynamic processes, not fixed types or roles. It can go in many different directions: reinforcement of practices on an everyday basis may not occur, or it could fail, the norms themselves change with time and with active political intervention, and individuals or whole groups may learn to interpret them differently or reject them entirely.

11.3 LEARNING TO BE MALE: SITES OF PRACTICE

In South Asia, the normative family is based on endogamous (within caste and/or sub-caste) heterosexual (between a man and woman), arranged marriage (families make/approve suitable partners). By 'normative' we mean 'according to the norm' or what is generally acceptable as an ideal case in a society. These criteria do not derive their power from being written down or 'official', but those families or people who do not conform to them feel the weight of non-conformity in their social as well as personal lives. The family is based on a normative arrangement of gender and caste, and it is also the only legitimate site for reproduction– both biological and social– in our part of the world. It is not only the birth and nurture of children that is grounded in the family, but also the inheritance of property, status, respectability, and support during difficult times. Thus, family relationships will occupy a very important place in our discussion below. But as we have

said above, the learning of masculine roles, styles and ways of being never stops– it is a process that goes on inside and outside homes every day.

11.3.1 'Growing Up Male': Childhood and Schooling

In an autobiographical essay titled 'Growing Up Male', the educationist Krishna Kumar reflected on the ways in which North Indian boys were socialized into maleness in his childhood. A crucial part of this process was to distance oneself from girls, at home and at school: "as a boy I was surrounded by a p1owerful discourse that delineated girls and women as sex objects, with little or nothing of their own in life in terms of sensation or demand." (86) Kumar goes on to observe that this discourse of objectification is created and sustained by practices of gender segregation in schools, the absence of sex education, even everyday language and terms of abuse in those languages. Other research has shown how gendered segregation may operate even in mixed or co-educational settings, where assumptions about boys and girls being "innately" different operate– boys are supposed to be more aggressive and resistant to authority, while girls are neat, have "good handwriting", and are generally thought to be more obedient and peaceable (Bhattacharjee 1999).

Again, context is important: schooling is different, depending on where one comes from. The students in Bhattacherjee's study, cited here, were from government schools which service largely poor urban neighbourhoods. The Annual Status of Education Reports (ASER) circulated by the NGO Pratham, however, tell us about the differences between states and districts when it comes to education in India. Though overall percentages of enrolment have been increasing, the kind of institutions (public, private, mixed) that children have access to and the quality of education imparted in them varies widely. Even with 94% enrolment in rural India (ASER 2022), not only is a significant number of 5-year-olds outside of the school system at an early age, even within that percentage there are differences in age and skills taught in anganwadis– where a majority of children are enrolled– private and government schools. Based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) of 2018-19, a recent report compiled by UNICEF notes that "2 per cent of all children – close to 5 million [50 lakh] children aged 5–17 – were engaged in economic activity in India" (3). The data shows that more boys than girls combine paid work and school, especially between the age of 14-17. Adivasi and Muslim boys, and boys from poorer households are more likely to work and study than boys like the ones Krishna Kumar writes about.

Contrast this to an institution like the Doon School in Dehradun, Uttarakhand whose elite nationalist culture has produced generations of politicians and bureaucrats in India. Though the Doon School had some students who were girls (because the children of teachers were given a free education here), the ethos of the institution as understood by the students themselves was invested in the making of a certain kind of man. This man would be different from and stand above his fellow countrymen (and women), guiding them in the ways of progress and development. In many schools, especially at the secondary and higher levels, masculine values like aggression and control over others is taught through what is called 'hazing' in the American context, and 'ragging' in South Asia. In recent years,

governments have had to recognize the violence and humiliation inherent in these 'rites of passage' into institutional life, but they continue to cause lasting trauma and take young lives even today.

The difference between the hegemonic masculinity shaped by institutions and childhoods like these, and the marginalized masculinity of the urban poor attending government schools is important to understand. The concepts proposed by Connell allow us to read the differences between superficially similar practices of aggression and contempt for authority, though they were observed and documented before by scholars like Paul Willis (mentioned in Unit I). Understanding hegemonic masculinity means that we must pay attention to these different social contexts of childhood and education where boys become men, and subordinate as well as marginalized masculinities are shaped in relation to the hegemonic.

Autobiographical accounts from invisible social groups are some of our best sources to understand the variations in the making of masculinities. Kishore Shantabai Kale, for example, writes in Against All Odds (2000) of his childhood as the son of a Kolhati tamasha dancer, touring with his mother's troupe while studying and doing odd jobs for them. This is a context where girls are valued more than boys. While young 'Kistya' negotiates his marginal status and the constant threat of abandonment, he also writes of the pleasure of watching his mother and her friends perform, the frenetic excitement of the performance milieu and the skills he develops which set him apart from other boys, such as cooking and managing a home.

If patterns of gendered childhood socialization and schooling depend on the regionally varying hierarchies of class, caste and religious belonging, it follows that there cannot be a single set of solutions to the problem of gender inequality. The making of a hegemonic masculinities may be open to change by a process of "counter-socialisation" in schools, as Kumar suggests. However, how this would work in the case of subordinated and marginalized masculinities is another question.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. According to Krishna Kumar, what is wrong with the way boys are socialized into masculinity in school?

11.3.2 Sexuality and Conjugality

As we have seen, marriage, family, and reproduction play an important role in the scripts of hegemonic masculinity. For example, in the anthropological and sociological literature, we find much discussion of the polarity between the figures of 'the householder'

and 'the renouncer' proposed by the anthropologist Louis Dumont, to theorise caste society. The argument that 'semen anxiety'— roughly, the notion that the loss of semen meant the loss of masculine vigour, so that celibacy became a significant source of power– was the main organizing principle of masculinities in India, follows from this textual picture of caste society. As Caroline and Filippo Osella point out, when we look at this work today through the lens of Critical Masculinity Studies, we may read these types as models of hegemonic masculinity (2004: 4).

Another important strand in early studies of masculinity may be traced back to theories grounded in the psyche carried out in the 1980s, exemplified by Ashis Nandy and Sudhir Kakar's work. Kakar's work drew on his clinical practice as well as research to propose that 'Indic' masculinity was largely organized around relations with the mother or the maternal figure within a joint family establishment, so that the feminine was always closely integrated with the masculine. Nandy argued that hegemonic Indian masculinity was constructed through the colonial encounter, replacing earlier, more varied ways of being men. A leader like Gandhi challenged this psychological influence of colonialism by refusing to conform to the tropes of the hegemonic colonialist model, according to this view. His 'androgyny' actually drew on Indic masculinity shaped by different patterns of family relations than in the West.

We have seen in Unit I that the family itself was influenced by social and historical changes. Feminist historians of South Asia have recorded the processes by which, in the 18th and 19th centuries, various socially sanctioned sexual arrangements came to be regulated into legally codified marriage and property relationships. One major effect of these changes was to renew, and in some cases harden, the boundaries between the good, virtuous woman whose proper place was at home, and the bad, promiscuous woman who was at home in public spaces. These public women could be courtesans, sex workers or prostitutes, or indeed women from Dalit-Bahujan castes going about their traditional or paid work (Chatterjee 1991; Gupta 2017). But what is important for us here is that these boundaries also led, at the same time, to the making of masculinities charged with policing these boundaries and enforcing these gendered codes.

It is important to note that these norms and boundaries were not invented wholesale during British rule. Uma Chakravarti's work on the Sanskrit canon and its later interpretations, for example, has proposed the concept of 'Brahmanical patriarchy' to understand the system of family and conjugal relations within which both lower-caste men and women of all castes were subordinated differently to masculinist norms (1993). Prem Chowdhry shows how hegemonic masculinity in rural Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan is based on contempt for women, especially wives, and a common anxiety about being humiliated by them in the eyes of the community. As she notes:

Possession and control of land, money, and women are associated with izzat (honor), which is essentially male honor (sic). For this honor, a strong body and physical strength, expressed in local terms as musai barg? (physically strong like a pestle/pounder) is considered necessary to command, control, and possess his land, money, and women. (Chowdhry 2015, 12)

An assertive wife or a daughter who exercises her choice in sexual matters must be

violently controlled, even killed, for a man's honour to be maintained. Colonial policies have definitely had a major influence on these practices, but the concepts are also deeply rooted in languages and traditions. These concepts of shame and honour operate within communities at different scales: from the biradari to the sub-caste, to a caste and religious community; from the space of a few villages to a state and an all-India geography.

An ICRW (International Centre for Research on Women) study on domestic violence published in 2002 reported striking patterns from four different sites in India. Across the states of Rajasthan, Punjab, and Tamil Nadu, there was overwhelming agreement (over 90%) among a random sampling of men, married and unmarried, and belonging to different castes, classes, and communities on markers of masculinity: "physical appearance, conduct, responsibilities, and sexuality" (52). The report records the "near universal agreement" that "a man must be a provider, protector, procreator and sexually faithful" (54). Lapses in any one or more of these roles threatened men with a loss of status as men, and resulted in violence against wives and/or other female members of the family: 85% reported being violent towards their wives in the previous year; here violence was distributed into types like physical, emotional, sexual, or by exercising 'control'. The highest percentage admitted to committing emotional violence, 40% admitted to physical violence. Significantly, these patterns were repeated in a smaller sample of MSM (men who have sex with men) in the National Capital Region. A better example of the power of hegemonic masculinities would be hard to find.

Recent socio-economic shifts have both made this power and the resistance against it more visible, and more complicated. For example, as we noted earlier, the opening up of the Indian economy in the early 1990s led to a shift in the relationship between social groups, and between things and people. Terms like 'consumerism' and 'aspirational' have been used to describe the new ethos of Indian urban communities. We can say with certainty that to learn to be a man in these times means to learn a different set of skills, comportment, and imagination of the social and sexual.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. What were the main elements of hegemonic masculinity according to the ICRW survey? How were they related to domestic violence?

_____

_____

_____

11.3.3 Labour, Work, Markets

Being the 'breadwinner' in a family is a major source of ideological and socio-economic power vested in masculinity. In general, Indian "women are considered as secondary earners in the household – they participate in the labour market only when there is a need to augment the household income." (Sahoo & Sarkar 2021). This means that it is seen as the man's responsibility to earn and support the family. While women's

work is devalued even when it is highly paid, masculine attributes are associated with the economic decision-maker in the household/family. This has major implications for hegemonic masculinities, and is seen especially during times of crisis.

In their study of youth in Western Uttar Pradesh, Roger, Patricia, and Craig Jeffrey show how the pressures of modern education and making a living are negotiated by young men. In a scenario where suitable employment is hard to get and education inadequate, they evolve a variety of strategies to cope with social expectations, including drawing on caste and community networks to maintain status while cultivating the lives and outlooks of 'educated' men. In a later book, Craig Jeffrey focuses on the importance of time in young Jat men's pursuit of respectability through education and widely prevalent unemployment or 'underemployment'. What these young men call 'timepass' refers to the frustrating wait for better work and respectable marriage prospects. This involves, among other things, meeting at tea-stalls, occupying public spaces to chat with other men and often, casual sexual harassment (Jeffrey 2010).

In a different scenario, among the Tamil Dalit youth of Thirunur, the move into precarious and irregular forms of work, like painting, working in a garage or a shop, was a statement against the agricultural work on which their elders had depended. Working in the fields was associated with the traditional caste order, which had given the landowning Mudaliar caste power to oppress and humiliate Dalit men and women. Young Dalit men in this context not only refused to work the land, but also adopted aggressive practices of controlling public spaces in the village as well as women and older people in their households: "A man should...avoid bad habits; but at least one bad habit he should have. Otherwise no one will respect us." (S.Anandhi et al, 2002: 4402) Another factor in the performance of these marginalized masculinities is the role of things in asserting a new kind of public self: unlike their elders, many young Dalit men styled themselves in "jeans, shirts, and shoes", also smoking and drinking in public (4402). But the money for these acts of masculine assertion would come from their own or their sisters' poorly paid factory jobs.

The liberalized economy has created a highly stratified economic scenario. According to estimates by the World Inequality Lab, present levels of inequality in India are higher than during British rule (Bharti et al, 2024). This means that men enter the workforce at earlier ages, for more precarious work, and often for work that was seen earlier as 'feminine', such as cooking, cleaning and care work in the service industry, which accounts for a significant part of the larger Service sector. For jobs at the higher end of the spectrum, 'soft skills' are important. These are part of the habitus of the new corporate employee: owning certain kinds of clothes, accessories and gadgets, added to fluency in English are the defining elements of the identity of the new middle class. While styling has always been an important part of gendered performances, the specific styles and requirements of dress, language and etiquette demanded by the new economy represent an important factor in the changing norms of hegemonic masculinity, especially in urban contexts.

For some, they set impossible targets, but for others they provide new opportunities: Matthew Wilkinson shows how Naga men who are forced to migrate to cities like New Delhi have an advantage in the market because of their education and English skills. Hegemonic Naga masculinities, he argues, have to be understood at the intersection of

history (stereotypes of violent 'head-hunting'), politics (insurgency and militarization) and a society dealing with both internal and external migration (Wilkinson 2017). This example highlights again why we need to use the plural 'masculinities' in our discussion, and the need to understand the 'hegemonic' in context. The boys and men who may occupy a position of power within Naga society, are marginalized when we take into account the national space and the dominant culture of metropolitan India. Thus, hegemony and marginalization must be understood in the interplay of the local, regional, and global levels (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005).

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

3. Discuss one connection between caste, work, and masculinities from the examples in this unit.

11.3.4 Representation: Publics and Masculinities

Representation can be approached in many ways, but here we will discuss two: one, the circulation of popular images of masculinities through discussions on sex and gender in popular print culture; two, through cinema and politics. Representation is important for us because popular images and narratives of masculinity both feed into and challenge institutional realities of gendered power. They also help us identify and study dynamic of masculinities and power in our societies.

Sanjay Srivastava has analysed the popular but furtive discourse of sexuality in what he calls 'footpath capitalism': pamphlets, visual material like advertisements and wall posters, advice columns in vernacular magazines and books which detail the many problems and pleasures of sex and sexual relationships. This material is publicly available and accessible, and seems to be aimed at what he calls 'sub1altern masculinities' in the city. In these images and words, one can find discussions of pleasure, illicit relationships and anxieties of being men in a world of assertive, modern, attractive yet threatening femininities (Srivastava 2007).

On the other hand, Charu Gupta shows how early 20th century advice manuals and other publicly circulated material in Hindi, like journals, magazines and caricatures warned upper-caste women against mixing with women of the working classes and castes, because doing so would threaten their home and the ideal behaviour expected of the upper-caste Hindu wife (2017). The dangers that threatened the marital home included women who circulated in public, working in their traditional jobs as midwives, sellers of goods and services, and they marked out here for being both uncouth and sexually available. In response, men from these stigmatized castes began to advocate for restricting women to the home and more significantly, by encouraging them to do paid work rather than render services expected of them in the caste order. Thus, the hegemony and subordination of

men and masculinities played out in tandem over the bodies and lives of women– with very different effects on the women themselves.

Religious difference came to be part of this dominant discourse in a different way, Gupta's material shows: The powerful stereotype of the sexually attractive and virile Muslim man to whose charms upper-caste Hindu women were especially vulnerable, matched in some ways the threat of conversion to Christianity to which Dalits were seen to be especially vulnerable. The hegemonic masculinity of the modern, Hindi-speaking, upper-caste Hindu householder was thus constructed through the marginalization of minority and lower-caste men. These men were seen as powerless and unable to control or protect their women, unless they converted to Christianity and therefore threatened the Hindu community as a whole. Muslim men, on the other hand, were seen as violent and sexually alluring at the same time, in contrast to the allegedly peace-loving and non-violent upper-caste Hindu patriarch.

The fact that these stereotypes are still repeated and wield a great deal of power a century later shows that these processes of hegemony and subordination are continuously being reproduced, even in vastly different socio-economic circumstances. Let us turn now to our second sense of representation: the models or types which represent hegemonic masculinities in the public domain and in popular culture. Cricket, cinema, and politics can be identified as the most active sites for the production of popular– and occasionally, populist– heroes in our context. Here again the array of attributes we have looked at is evident: a "56-inch-chest", devotion to mothers or mother figures, muscular strength to protect the nation, family and/or romantic partner, and projecting sexual desirability on screen and/or on the field of sport or politics. Let us look briefly at an example or two from politics and cinema.

Masculinity is not an attribute that only attaches to men, which is why we treat it as a plural set of practices, always in process in particular contexts, and always enmeshed in grids of power. One example of the power exercised by hegemonic masculinities is the attribution of its elements to women politicians who are believed to exhibit exceptional leadership qualities. In the ICRW report referred to in the last section, many male participants in the Rajasthan and NCR (MSM) groups thought of Indira Gandhi as being masculine. In fact, these views echo the journalist Inder Malhotra's widely quoted description of the former Prime Minister as "the only man in a cabinet of old women". This tells us a great deal about the dynamics of hegemonic masculinity.

In Hindi cinema, the height of Mrs. Gandhi's (as she was known) reign witnessed the rise of the 'angry young man' Amitabh Bacchan, who replaced romantic heroes like Rajesh Khanna in the movie-going public's heart. The deep baritone voice and the rebellious, aggressive, working-class persona of Bacchan came to symbolise the political atmosphere of the 1970s. Bacchan's stardom was powered by disaffected young men who filled film theatres from Bombay to Cairo, watching him in classic action dramas like Deewar (1975) to potboilers like Mard (1985). A very different phenomenon is the intense identification of fans, particularly young men, with stars like Mohanlal and Mammootty in Malayalam cinema. These fans compete with each other and take pleasure in contrasting identifications with Mammootty's "solidly bourgeois self" with a persona represented by Mohanlal, which is more "working-class and in solidarity with the poor" (Osella & Osella

2004, 241-242). All these actors have played many different kinds of roles, especially later in their career. The important point here is once again to note the importance of the range of masculine attributes on display here: from the protective, honest breadwinner to the virile, rebellious hero.

11.4 SUMMARY

This unit has discussed the processes through which hegemonic and marginalized masculinities inform and modify each other. Positing that learning to be a man is a long process that must be carried out every day, we have identified through examples the operations of caste, class, and religion in four sites: childhood and schooling, sexuality and marriage/conjugality, work/labour and the market, and finally, sites of representation and public life. In all of these, the making and performance of masculinities, their association with power was seen to be both historically grounded and socially reproduced.

11.5 GLOSSARY

Biradari : Literally 'brotherhood', this can refer to different units of kinship defined by patrilineal descent in different contexts. Among the Jats, it is generally an intra-caste group of clans, all of equal status.

Matriliny : A kinship system where descent is traced through the female line.

Sambandham : A system of marriage where Nair women could contract sexual relationships with Namboodiri (Brahmin) and Nair men, with children being born and reared in the mother's home.

11.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. The main problem is that boys are separated from girls and taught to treat them as completely different from themselves. Masculinity develops in opposition to femininity, and this leads to unhealthy relationships and behaviour in adult men.
2. According to the ICRW survey, the main elements of hegemonic masculinity were being able to provide for the family economically, protect it, being able to produce children, and being faithful to a woman. If men failed at one or more of these, the fear of losing status as a man would be vented against their female partners in the form of violence.
3. An example is the study of Dalit youth in Tamil Nadu. The clothes and 'bad habits' through which they defy the caste order shows a new kind of marginalized masculinity taking shape. They are consumers of goods and services rather than workers on land owned by upper caste. This is one connection we can see between masculinity, caste, and work.

11.7 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. What a1re the major ways in which schooling shapes hegemonic masculinities?
2. How has the post-liberalization Indian economy impacted the dynamic between hegemonic and marginalized masculinities?

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. What role do models of femininity play in the making of men?
2. Why is it helpful to think in terms of a 'script' and 'performance' of masculinities/ femininities?

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- Dr.

UNIT-12: REFRAMING MASCULINITY AS SUPPORTIVE MASCULINITY

Contents

12.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Analyse key concepts in the field of Critical Men and Masculinity Studies
- Illustrate your arguments with examples from texts as well as real-life situations
- Develop a critical understanding of alternative forms of masculinity
- Evaluate texts and everyday interactions sociologically to promote gender equity

12.1 INTRODUCTION

In Units I and II we discussed the questions and approaches to studying masculinities that have become popular in the social sciences and yielded insights about the relationship between masculinities and power. In this unit, we will look more closely at possible alternatives to the hegemony of certain kinds of masculinity in given societies and contexts. Assuming the power is not uniformly distributed or exercised in the same way everywhere at all times, this unit will discuss the new frames within which alternatives to dominant, mainstream norms of masculinity are emerging. This emergent frame comes with new concepts like 'hybrid' 'inclusive', 'caring' and 'supportive' masculinities proposed by sociologists studying these phenomena. In this unit we will discuss these concepts with examples, and also address some of the challenges that arise in the process of reframing masculinities.

12.2 QUESTIONING HEGEMONIC MASCULINITIES

The Grip of Change (2006) is the English translation bringing together two of the Tamil writer P.Sivakami's path-breaking writings: the novel Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum (1989) and Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum Asiriyar Kurippu ("Author's Notes for The Grip of Change"). Translated by the author herself, this composite text tells the story of a powerful Dalit leader named Kathamuthu, through the educated, conflicted eyes of his adolescent daughter, Gowri. This conflict is between her allegiance to her father and his politics on the one hand, and his treatment of women and pursuit of power on the other hand. It is the crux of the narrative. This is reflected in the structure of the novel: the main character in Book 1 is Kathamuthu, the father; the main character of Book 2 is Gowri, who looks back at her own hostile portrait of her father and questions her narrative choices which show him up as an uncaring and opportunistic person. In this part, she recalls his gentleness and love as a father, and his pride in her educational accomplishments. She also remembers his courage in resisting caste oppression. Why, she asks herself and the reader, did "the author" suppress these details in her novel? How could she have overlooked his strength, and his caring and supportive side in writing about his public and private life as a rural Dalit leader, friend, husband, and father? Could it be that she had seen her father mostly through the eyes of the mainstream, dominant script of gender and power?

Sivakami's writing shows us one way in which masculinity can be 'reframed', by literally drawing attention to the requirements and assumptions of mainstream narratives of masculinities, especially when they are marginalized. The concept of hegemonic masculinities is useful precisely because it helps us understand that 'masculinity', understood to be a single, monolithic thing, always operates in relations of power, and is therefore also always open to challenge, resistance, and re-negotiation. As we saw earlier, it is part of a continuous process, which plays out in different ways at the level of institutions, individuals, events, and everyday life. The social dynamics which shape this process are plural and intersecting with each other at different levels, making different demands from men, boys and women at each intersection. It is because of this plurality and the many power relations that mark them that we can note contradictions and alternatives to dominant, hegemonic masculinities.

The Grip of Change raises the question of masculinities as a question about the politics of memory and representation. Ethnographic, historical and sociological studies have contributed the bulk of research into the ways men themselves analyse and speak of their experience of masculinity in the contemporary world. It is from this larger field that we will draw in this unit, to familiarize ourselves with concepts like 'hybrid', 'inclusive', 'supportive' and 'caring' masculinities. There are many overlaps between these categories, but the important thing to bear in mind is that the theoretical and critical emphasis in each case is different. We will use examples in each case to keep track of these differences.

12.3 REFRAMING MASCULINITIES: THE CHALLENGES

Before we begin our discussion, it is worth examining the challenges to the task of reframing masculinities as supportive or caring. We will look at the debates about this within the field of Critical Studies of Men and Masculinities (CSMM) in more detail

below; in this section, we will map the problem. While it is generally accepted that practices and ideals of masculinities, even hegemonic masculinity, have changed in the last four decades, at least three major questions have come up:

1) How far should the study of masculinities be separated from the analyses of changing forms of patriarchy, a system of power which privileges men over women?
2) How do we read the hegemonic in relation to subordinated and marginalized masculinities today?
3) How do we understand the role that is played in the analysis of masculinities, of the socio-economic hierarchies between European and American societies and the rest of the world?

Raewyn Connell's work and other scholarship inspired by her theories has consistently tried to lay emphasis on all these questions, while trying to come up with a theory of masculinities that can explain their practice in different contexts. For these sociologists, there is no separating the question of masculinities from patriarchal power. Yet, it is undeniably the case that in many Western societies, and even in our parts of the world, there is a clear, observable change in attitudes (personal and institutional) towards same-sex relationships, and a spectrum of gender identification beyond the usual 'male' and 'female'. This acceptance may still be limited in many ways, though some scholars have pointed out that the accommodation, even recognition of same-sex relationships has occurred in many ways outside the frame of rights in the Indian context (Vanita 2005). Regional and national histories are extremely important, but we have also seen that masculinities and power cannot be analysed without taking into account the larger system of patriarchy.

This is partly why we saw the practice of hegemonic masculinities becoming visible, and even being reinforced by crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. There were reports of increased domestic tension and violence, and even during the pandemic, working women were expected to work both outside and inside the home much more than their male counterparts. A study conducted in Poland found that "women turned out to be those who performed the lion's share of care work…[and] that in most cases women were only supported by their male partners, who tend to choose selectively the tasks that need to be performed." (Wojnicka & Kubisa 2024, 1734). Here a whole new dimension of "support" emerges: on the surface, men may be helping out in the home and taking on chores they would not usually do. However, in practice they were doing the bare minimum on their own terms, rather than recognizing and genuinely sharing joint responsibility for the household and care in a crisis situation.

Then again, a study of care-workers in the Netherlands emphasises how men across race and class try to exercise hegemonic masculinity in a sector associated with feminine work, but it is white men who succeed most often in this exercise. They are able to both get higher wages and leave their jobs for better ones when they feel they have had enough of these low-paid jobs (van Wees et al, 2024). In this scenario, the work of caring for the sick and infirm, seen as a job for women or 'gay men', provides yet another site for the hierarchy of masculinities to play out.

Finally, there is the global difference between what we call societies of the Global North (Europe, America and other rich countries with histories of modern empire-building) and South (largely ex-colonies of the North), of which both masculinities and CSSM are part. As we saw with the examples in the previous section, the local and regional occupy an important place in Indian and West Asian work on masculinities. These are societies on which colonialism has left a deep and lasting imprint, one major legacy of which have been social fabrics torn by sectarian conflict, war, and increasingly, emigration to Europe and America. Theories of care, support and inclusivity have to take these different dynamics on board while documenting and aiding the process of 'reframing masculinities.'

As Connell and Wood noted many years ago, globalization has given rise to new kinds of practices and styles of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Wood 2005); we can think of examples even in Indian metropolises and small towns, in the aspiring cosmopolitanism of young engineers and other 'tech' professionals who dream of climbing the ladder in the corporate workforce stretching from Bengaluru to the Bay Area in San Francisco. The 'breadwinner' and 'protector' ideals may have shifted here in favour of a polished, 'go-getter' personality, rich in the 'soft skills' promised by so many YouTube videos, short-term online courses, self-help gurus and coaches, even universities around us. At the same time, unemployment is on the rise, and this is accompanied by a massive backlash against feminist ideals of gender equality and justice. The best site to study this backlash may be the rise of the so-called manosphere on the internet (Rothermel 2023).

Keeping these points in mind, we go on now to look at concepts that attempt to meet this challenge of reframing masculinities as caring and supportive.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. List two major challenges in the task of reframing masculinities as supportive or caring.

12.4 HYBRID OR INCLUSIVE MASCULINITIES?

Let us look a little more closely at the contrast between hybrid and inclusive masculinities. These are two readings of the same phenomenon: the adoption of practices that have been understood to be opposed to hegemonic masculinity, by men belonging precisely to privileged groups. To put it simply, it seems that men and hegemonic masculinities have changed for the better, particularly by adopting some of the features of subordinated masculinities. What do we make of these changes?

For example, upper-class, white, American men who take pride in staying home, cooking well, and looking after their children, or young athletes who are more accepting

of same-sex relationships and open to promoting a culture of emotional expressiveness and sensitivity in their groups. Inclusive Masculinity Theory or IMT argues that there is an observable and lasting change in mainstream practices and ideals of masculinity, because of the significant reduction in homophobia, particularly among younger men in western societies (Anderson & McCormack 2016). For theorists of Inclusive Masculinities, this 'inclusion' of homosexuality is something to be recognized, valued and built upon in the research. In positing this change, they differ from theorists of hybrid masculinities in two major ways. One, they disconnect the study of masculinities and the changes they document from the persistence of patriarchy as a system of control over women. They argue that patriarchy is important to look at, but it is a separate question which may prevent a proper historical analysis of masculinities. Two, they emphasize the actual change in laws, institutions and practices of masculinity especially in relation to sexual identities and the broadening of the sex-gender spectrum beyond the binaries of male and female.

On the other hand, the concept of 'hybrid masculinities' has been proposed and used to demonstrate the enduring power of patriarchy in all societies. Theorists of hybrid masculinities show how hegemonic forms can borrow from or adopt styles and practices associated with subordinate and marginalized masculinities—but still uphold the power of patriarchy. In fact, this may be the most effective way today of legitimating (remember this term from Unit I) patriarchy. The three main directions of argument in studies of hybrid masculinities have been summarized in a widely-circulated paper in the following way:

First, hybrid masculine practices often work in ways that create some discursive distance between young, White, straight men and hegemonic masculinity, enabling some to frame themselves as outside of existing systems of privilege and inequality. Second, hybrid masculinities are often premised on the notion that the masculinities available to young, White, straight men are somehow less meaningful than the masculinities of various marginalized and subordinated Others, whose identities were at least partially produced by collective struggles for rights and recognition. Third, hybrid masculinities work to fortify symbolic and social boundaries between (racial, gender, sexual) groups– further entrenching, and often concealing, inequality in new ways. (Bridges & Pascoe 2014, 250)

Let us look at each of these elements. According to this theory, it is clear that there has been substantial change in the practices associated with hegemonic masculinity, where more men are comfortable with expressing emotions, even giving up the role and status of 'breadwinner', and with publicly endorsing, supporting, even nurturing non-heterosexual relationships. But what is more important is to record the ways in which these hybrid forms are based on new ways of exercising power and domination over others, both men and women. For example, young, white, heterosexual men may listen to hip-hop and adopt the styles and language associated with the subculture, or they may engage in sexual relationships with men, or claim to be in touch with their 'feminine' side– without really challenging their own powerful positions and privilege within the larger system of gender inequality (Eisen & Yamashita 2017). In fact, the first point being made by the quote above is that adopting a 'softer' kind of masculinity allows 'hybrid practices' to be more powerful than before, because men who embody them come to think of themselves as not exercising any kind of power.

The second and third points extend this criticism. The second argues that through these hybridizing practices, hegemonic masculinities come to seem less defined and powerful ('meaningful') in comparison to subordinate and marginalized masculinities, which have had to struggle collectively in order to make a mark in the world and which are still continuously open to attack. Think of the myth of the Black man's sexual virility or the ways in which Dalit and Muslim men are represented in the Indian context (we discussed these in Unit II), one as hardworking and tough, the other as a romantic, poetry-writing, seductive figure with a hidden agenda. Then again, think of the sensitivity, emotional openness and bonding associated with gay men. Some of these features may be adopted into the hegemonic model, but marginalized and subordinated masculinities will still be presented as more well-defined and stronger.

The third element is thus linked to the first two: hybrid masculinities in fact hide real inequalities of power. Hybridization occurs when hegemony is exercised by selectively adopting many of the features associated with marginalized or subordinated masculinities. This borrowing may often be acknowledged by men in positions of privilege. This happens, for example, when it is said of something "that's so gay" in the American or European contexts. IMT theorists argue that context matters for such descriptions– it may not always be homophobic or intended as an insult, and may not be seen or received as such depending on the group one is with. According to them, we cannot generalize and say that such an expression works according to stereotypes and further strengthens the 'symbolic and social boundaries' between different practices of masculinity which are already positioned in a hierarchy. On the other hand, as we can see from the quotation above, this is exactly what the theorists of hybrid masculinities argue is happening when observations like these are made. Even if it is said in a positive sense by people close to one, by labelling something "gay" they are exercising their power to draw lines around what is and is not gay or straight behaviour.

A third way of thinking about the changes in practices of masculinity has been proposed; here, the terms 'care' and 'support' have been used to think about these changes. In the Indian context of masculinity studies, these concepts have been widely used. What do 'caring' and 'supportive' masculinities look like? Let us now briefly examine this question with examples from the field.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. What are the main arguments of IMT?

12.4.1 Support/Care: Tracking Emergent Masculinities

When we speak of hegemonic masculinities, three major features stand out: one, the role of violence in maintaining hegemony over women and other men; two, the power

of the 'breadwinner' role, and the related duties of 'protection' which men are expected– and expect themselves– to perform in their capacity as men. Finally, the third feature is sexual virility, which is also linked to faithfulness: the ability to maintain a heterosexual relationship with a female partner (girlfriend or wife), and a family with children. We have discussed each of these with examples in Units I and II.

If we look closely at the second and third elements now, we can see the potential for contradiction or going against the norms of hegemonic masculinity in these. Let us begin with the last: the expectation that a man should be able to sexually satisfy a woman and maintain a stable heterosexual family. There is potential in the practice of this norm to turn towards support, respect for, and interest in a woman's sexual pleasure and domestic satisfaction, even though it is often used to do the opposite: police women and bully subordinate and marginalized males into complicity and conformity.

Similarly, if we look at the second aspect: Think about the ways in which the 'breadwinner' or 'protector' role which a man is expected to perform, can be expressed in actions and relationships which are supportive of women or other men who occupy marginalized or subordinate positions. A male breadwinner may not only support his wife and children in their work or fulfilling their ambitions in life, but also his old parents, single and widowed sisters, as well as other members of the family. He may also support policy measures or work towards institutional reform which aligns with feminist goals of gender equality and justice, as part of his vision of being a protector and breadwinner. Note that both these aspects center the role of the heterosexual family in the shaping of masculinities, hegemonic and otherwise. But as we will see, family and work both may contribute to the making of supportive masculinities– and in most cases do.

The theoretical literature has turned towards the concept of "caring masculinities" to understand some of these changes and re-alignments in the practice of masculinities: "The rejection of domination and the integration of values derived from the realm of care such as positive emotion, interdependence, and relationality are […] at the core of caring masculinities." (Elliott 2015, 13) The argument is that material relations and everyday practices of care– for children, for the elderly, the sick, or simply one's partners– both mould and effectively result in distance from, if not a dismantling of the values of hegemonic masculinities. This does not happen in a day, nor can we predict that it will happen all the time or in every case where men take on roles of care, but it is an important place from which masculinities may be 'reframed' as caring and supportive, rather than distant and dominant.

Evidence for this kind of adaptability and re-negotiation can be found in several studies. We will discuss four examples from India here: the first from a north Indian rural context involving activism and organization, the second from an urban middle class family setting in Mumbai, the third and fourth from different activist contexts, in peri-urban locations from Ahmednagar, Maharashtra to the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya.

MASVAW (Men's Action for Stopping Violence Against Women) of Uttar Pradesh is an organization founded to work with men in rural areas and small towns, in order to motivate them to intervene in issues of domestic violence. The organization has worked in the area since 2001. Its volunteers have carried out studies among participating men and

activists who work with them to gauge how the ideology and practices of masculinity they practice and experience around them have changed through their work. The results have been encouraging. The activists report a greater understanding and sensitivity to what counts as violence: not only physical, but they recognize that emotional and psychological violence of husbands over wives, for example, were part of their daily lives. Interviews with their wives also revealed that these men take greater responsibility for household work and have been working to develop a companionate, mutually respectful relationship in the marriage after their work with the organization (Mogford and Das 2007; Das et al 2012).

It is true that these gains were limited to some men who either worked directly with or were in the orbit of MASVAW, and that they laid emphasis on their relationships within the family. Still, the study of their experience came up with some important findings. Among these were the limits of the "gender sensitization" approach. What does this mean? This is a kind of training which is quite popular, which is based on the idea that men should be trained to be more sensitive towards women's concerns, which are different from theirs and which they do not pay attention to. It aims at limiting the exercise of patriarchal power. The MASVAW experience showed that this approach encourages "paternalistic" attitudes among men towards women, reinforcing the protector role. A better approach was to promote "change among men" in a society where "the desire for change may be limited to some men, [but] the change in gender-related expectations can be much more universal." Here, women's concerns or expectations are not the problem to be solved by sensitive men; rather, men themselves learn to see their conduct and expectations as needing change, to live better and happier lives in the family.

But what if this creates conflict within the family itself? As we saw in Unit II, family dynamics are not simple or straightforward in any sense. A second important insight of these studies was that creating a "peer group is necessary as a mechanism for developing an alternative discourse" (Das & Singh 2014, 76). This is because such changes have to confront and manage a lot of resistance from within the family– including older women– and in the larger social group to which these "champions" of gender equity belong. It becomes crucial for these men who are trying to model a different kind of masculinity to have other men like themselves to talk to and socialize with, in these situations.

The next example comes from an ethnographic study of couples in Mumbai, one of South Asia's most cosmopolitan metro cities. Between 2012 and 2015, the anthropologist Gauri Pathak conducted a study of the social dimensions of PCOS (Poly-Cystic Ovary Syndrome) among middle-class women. This is a health condition which has become increasingly common in the past few decades. PCOS has a range of symptoms and cannot be 'cured', only managed, and not all women suffer from the same kind of symptoms. But one of these effects is on fertility: cysts in the ovary impact women's ability to conceive and carry a pregnancy. As part of her larger study, Pathak observed and interviewed in detail five Muslim middle-class couples in order to understand what "supportive" meant when applied to men/male partners. She found that in being supportive partners to women with PCOS, men had extended the role of "protector" that they had traditionally been trained to take on, in different directions. This meant taking care of and supporting wives and partners who were not only anxious about their own condition, but also faced

uncomfortable questions in larger family and social circles: "Demonstrating calm and safeguarding their wives' emotional well-being also became a form of care for their wives." (Pathak 2018, 119) These men not only listened and tried to reduce their wives' anxiety, they also shielded them from the questions and criticism of the larger family and social groups. Here we have an urban middle class milieu of upward mobility and aspiration, plus a certain kind of exposure to global discussions of privacy, the difficulties faced by women and concepts of emotional well-being. Part of this was the consumption of new and global forms of entertainment, like TV shows, movies and social media content through which different representations and conversations on gender became more widely available. These were all significant factors in the making of this supportive "emergent masculinity", which has been analysed in other national contexts such as in West Asian countries (Inhorn 2012).

It would be a mistake to assume that practices of support are mainly located in the family or what is usually understood as the private domain. While the family does play a central role in shaping care and supportive practices, interventions in the public domain to create "support structures' which can house and sustain some of these practices have also been studied in the Indian context. In an important book documenting the findings of another kind of project on supportive masculinities, the sociologist Radhika Chopra and her team of researchers have shown how men have intervened actively in issues of female infanticide or femicide, organizing sex workers, or providing spaces for grieving mothers and widows in conflict situations (Chopra 2007). Many of these men were encouraged to do this work through their personal experiences, often with women close to them within the family, or through the experience of dealing with their own sexuality in a largely heterosexual milieu. However, their work took on a social and 'public' dimension thanks to these experiences.

In these contexts, 'support' does not draw on the 'breadwinner' and 'protector' roles assigned to men by tradition in any straightforward way. Rather, it extends from a recognition of the importance of social change, strongly rooted in local and regional cultures of sociality and care. For example, in 1989 Girish Kulkarni of Ahmednagar decided to set up an organization to look after the children of sex-workers, and then young women who were sold into the sex trade themselves. This was the result of his own experience of witnessing the often violent, painful and exploitative working conditions of these women (Hebbar, 2007). Today, his organization 'Snehalaya' has offices in many countries, and runs hundreds of projects across Maharashtra.

It is notable that Kulkarni's ideals of social service go together with his assertion of masculine prerogatives at home and among his wider circle: in the account, he emerges as an exceptionally caring and supportive man for the sex-workers and their children, by channelling the privileges and powers of hegemonic masculinity into his work of care. Thus, his mother and wife support his work because in any case, the home is drawn into his rehabilitation efforts, especially to shelter children at risk; they also observe and learn to admire his dedication. Though this is not actually discussed, we can imagine that caste privilege would also have played a role in the success of his mission. What the research does show is that his work depended on his ability to persuade different interest-groups to come together in support of his efforts– businessmen, philanthropists, educationists, the

police, brothel-keepers, and sex-workers themselves were among them. In fact, we can see in Kulkarni a contemporary version of the 18th and 19th century social reformers, who staked their lives and respectability in order to change the law/customs governing practices like widow remarriage, sati, and women's education. Chopra reminds us of this lineage in her introduction to the volume in which this essay appears, including in it figures like Rammohun Roy, Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar, and Jyotiba Phule.

However, for someone like Prince Thangkhiew– a tireless field-worker for the RGVN (Rashtriya Gramin Vikas Nidhi) in the Khasi hills– the legacies are different. 'Prince' worked among Khasi families in remote villages to build up Self-Help Groups (SHG) primarily run by women, who could benefit from the microcredit on offer to start small businesses like a small shop or finance a local network for the growing and selling of rice locally. As a highly committed fieldworker for RGVN, Prince was known across the region as a "supportive partner", whose work had allowed not only individual women and their families, but whole villages to nurture these much-needed SHGs (Goswami 2007). According to this account, his dedication to the cause, going above and beyond the requirements of his job, had won him widespread recognition in the villages and particular comfort and trust among the Khasi women who had come to know him over the years. He travelled between villages and also included his own home in Guwahati in his work: it became a place women could access if they were traveling to the city to conduct some business. Through his experience, Prince had become familiar with Khasi practices of matrilineal kinship and inheritance, which runs through the youngest daughters in the family. These practices affect everything from family life, education and the kind of entrepreneurial ventures the microcredit schemes are trying to introduce into these societies.

In this example, "support" is understood in a very different way than the previous examples we have considered: Prince's hard work and close bonds within Khasi society are located within a larger understanding of development. They are also enabled by a new, post-liberalization emphasis on entrepreneurship and self-help, which is about the making of a whole new kind of person among the close-knit Khasi community. The joy and sense of fulfilment that he derived from his work relationships brings together the public domain of work with the pleasures of affection, warmth and friendship we associate more with the personal. In this context, we may think of Prince Thangkhiew as an 'outsider-insider', whose commitment and support are critical for the Khasi women and their villages to access a powerful new field of economic and social re-alignments which is spread across the globe today.

In these different examples, we see a range of practices of care, whether within institutions or outside them. Conceptions of 'caring' and 'supportive' masculinities which have been studied by sociologists here depart from the major concerns of 'hybrid' and 'inclusive' masculinities, as discussed above. This is in at least two ways: one, emphasis is laid on practices across the public-private divide, even as the family is positioned as an important space that falls within both domains; two, much attention is paid to local and regional configurations of masculinity and the networks within which these work towards change. The work of 'reframing' is constant, and the details of the process, the importance of peer groups and organizations which enable change is emphasized.

12.5 SUMMARY

The use of the concept of 'hegemony' to analyse the operations of masculinities and power also means that there are cracks, fractures and possibilities of transformation that arise from within the 'hegemonic bloc', as one theorist has described it (Demetriou 2001). This weakness of the hegemonic, however, may also be its greatest strength. It means that it has the ability to adapt to critique and borrow elements from subordinated and marginalized masculinities, without really giving up the privileges of race, class, caste, region, and gender. This kind of adapting and borrowing results in the creation of 'hybrid masculinities', which exercise power in a different way than before.

Other theorists disagree with this reading and argue that the real changes in men's attitudes and in institutional cultures of 'homohysteria' must be recognized. They do this by proposing a concept of 'inclusive masculinities', which means to record the genuine and well-intentioned adoption of non-hegemonic qualities to enlarge the scope of masculinities. On this view, we lose the positive steps which have been made if we keep connecting this inclusivity to patriarchy and power. A third category of 'caring masculinities' has been put forward to argue that it is through practices of caring for others and cultivating interdependence that hegemonic masculinities of all kinds may be questioned and challenged. The term 'supportive masculinities' has been used by some in the literature on the Global South in particular; this takes up elements of all these three terms, depending on the context, and has been used both to critique hegemonic masculinity as well as endorse practices which seem to challenge key features of it. Each of these concepts and the phenomena they describe, indicates the extent to which the historical and socio-economic dynamics of masculinities and femininities have changed over time and continue to change in the present.

12.7 GLOSSARY

Homohysteria : Different from the more commonly used homophobia, this refers to the effects of homophobia on heterosexual persons, specifically their irrational fear of being identified as gay. IMT theorists developed this term to show how inclusive masculinities contribute to lessening this fear.

Homophobia : Irrational fear and persecution of same-sex relationships and people who have them.

12.8 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. One major challenge is the ability of hegemonic masculinities to adapt to critique, making them more durable. Another challenge is the backlash against feminist ideals of equality and justice, which were also the ideals of CSSM.
2. IMT argues that it must be acknowledged that masculinities have changed and become more inclusive in today's times. It also argues that patriarchy should not be a central part of the analysis of masculinities.

12.9 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic present a challenge to the task of 'reframing' masculinities?
2. What role do caste and class play in the formation of supportive masculinities? Discuss with reference to one example from the unit.

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. What are the major differences in the perspectives of 'inclusive' and 'hybrid' masculinities?
2. What were the major findings of the MASVAW study?

12.10 SUGGESTED READINGS/ OERs

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- Dr.

BLOCK - V:
HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF GENDER STUDIES IN INDIA

Block five of the course, uses a gendered historical perspective to analyse the growth and institutionalization of gender studies in India. All the three units in this block are written by Dr. Astha Mishra, ISB, Hyderabad. This unit is built on the argument that feminist historiography involves a radical reclaiming of how knowledges are constructed, with specific reference to how history is recorded, explained and analysed. Such a gendered perspective challenges the traditional methods of doing history, and critiques its androcentric, patriarchal frames that while privileging dominant forms of knowledge, often marginalizes and renders invisible the knowledge formations emerging from women and other vulnerable communities. In the first unit, the focus is on explaining the meaning and utility of feminist historiography. While doing so, it emphasizes on the need to contextualize the conditions in which feminist historiography emerged and challenged the dominant hegemonic discourses. Further the unit focussed on analysing the importance and impact of feminist historiography in the contemporary India. Such a framing would help students to examine how the politics of knowledge production; specially address questions like, 'what is knowledge?, how is knowledge produced and disseminated and who is a knowledge producer?. This unit addresses questions of feminist epistemology. The second unit in this block addressed how and in what ways Indian nationalism, and the postcolonial state have imagined women. It specifically addresses three sites; one, women as emblems of national culture', two women's political participation as equal citizens and three, women as agents and recipients of development. This unit using a intersectional and gendered perspective, critically examines the three sites, culture, politics and development to argue that the state plays a crucial role in framing the 'imagination' of women in India. Such an analysis would help students to nurture critical engagement with the state and its policies from a gendered perspective. The third unit traces the complex and contested historical, social, and political factors that shaped the growth and institutionalization of the discipline- gender studies in India. The unit examines the factors from 19th-century reform movements to the transformative document Towards Equality report (1974) and the emergence of Women's Studies as a distinct academic discipline within universities in India. Further the unit also examines the fundamental tension between the institutionalization of Women's Studies centres/ departments within the university system (primarily through UGC-funded centres) and the parallel existence and potentially transformative role of autonomous feminist spaces.

The Units included in this Block are:

Unit - 13 : Feminist Historiography

Unit - 14 : Gender, Nationalism and State

Unit - 15 : Emergence and Evolution of Women's Studies in India

UNIT-13: FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Contents

13.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the meaning and utility of feminist historiography.
- Contextualize the conditions in which feminist historiography emerged.
- Analyse the importance and impact of feminist historiography in the contemporary scenario

13.1 INTRODUCTION

Feminist historiography represents a radical reimagining of how history is studied, written, and understood. It emerges as a critical response to the traditional narratives of history, which have long been dominated by male-centric perspectives and patriarchal frameworks, often rendering women and other marginalized genders invisible (Lerner, 1986). At its core, feminist historiography seeks to challenge these exclusions by centering the experiences, contributions, and voices of women, thereby transforming mainstream understanding of the past. But feminist historiography is not merely about "adding women" to existing historical accounts, rather it is about fundamentally questioning the assumptions, methodologies, and power structures that have shaped historical scholarship (Scott, 1986). By doing so, feminist historiography aims to uncover the undocumented, suppressed, or overlooked stories of women, offering a more inclusive, diverse and nuanced interpretation of history.

The significance of feminist historiography lies in its dual role as both a corrective and a revolutionary force. As a corrective force, feminist historiography addresses the errors of omission in historical records, recovering the lives and contributions of women

who have been systematically erased from mainstream narratives. For instance, while traditional histories of political movements, diplomacy, wars, and revolutions often focus on male leaders and actors, feminist historiography reveals the indispensable roles women played as activists, caregivers, or resisters, in fundamentally shaping these events (Rowbotham, 1973; Butalia, 1998). As a revolutionary force, feminist historiography disrupts traditional narratives by exposing how historical knowledge has been shaped by patriarchal structures. For instance, the contributions of women in social movements, such as labor organizing or anti-colonial struggles, were often marginalized or erased in mainstream historiography. As a transformative force, it challenges the very foundations of historical scholarship, in the process revealing how history has been constructed through numerous patriarchal ideologies and practices and calls for a re-evaluation of what constitutes historical significance (Offen, 1988). By acknowledging, documenting and centering women's experiences, this approach not only corrects historical omissions but also redefines the criteria for what is deemed worthy of study. Feminist historians argue that history is not an objective or neutral recounting of events, but a constructed narrative shaped by power dynamics, dominant ideologies, and social hierarchies. By refocussing gender as a critical category of analysis, feminist historiography disrupts these dynamics and redefines the scope of historical inquiry (Scott, 1986).

From a disciplinary perspective, feminist historiography is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on insights from sociology, anthropology, literature, and cultural studies to enrich its analysis. It employs innovative methodologies such as oral histories, and life history, which capture the lived experiences of women who may not have left written records, and archival data such as legal codes, archaeological evidence, temple records, literature and arts, that reads "against the grain" to uncover hidden narratives (Sangari & Vaid, 1989). It also emphasizes intersectionality, recognizing that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of identity such as caste, class, race, and sexuality (Chakravarti, 2006). This intersectional approach is particularly vital in postcolonial contexts like India, where caste and colonialism have profoundly shaped gender relations and historical narratives (Tharu & Lalita, 1991).

In essence, feminist historiography is not just about rewriting history but about reimagining it differently. It seeks to dismantle the hierarchies and exclusions that have defined traditional historiography and to create a more equitable and inclusive historical record. By doing so, it not only enriches our understanding of the past but also empowers social actors located on the margins, by centering and affirming their historical agency and contributions (Spivak, 1988). As we delve deeper into the themes, methodologies, and challenges of feminist historiography in the following sections, this chapter will explore how this transformative approach continues to reshape our understanding of history and its implications for the present and future.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. What is Feminist Historiography?

13.2 THE EMERGENCE OF FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The emergence of feminist historiography as a distinct field of study can be traced to the broader feminist movements of the mid-20th century, particularly the second-wave feminism of the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, scholars with feminist orientation critically examined the absence of women in historical narratives and the ways in which traditional historiography had systematically erased women and their contributions (Lerner, 1986). This intellectual shift was not merely an academic endeavour but a political act, rooted in the feminist struggle for equality and recognition. Feminist historiography, therefore, emerged as both a scholarly discipline and a tool for social transformation, challenging the androcentric biases that had long dominated historical scholarship.

The roots of feminist historiography can be found in the works of early feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Simone de Beauvoir, who questioned the exclusion of women from historical and philosophical discourses. However, it was during the second-wave feminist movement that feminist historiography gained formal recognition as a field of study, marking a decisive break from earlier traditions that relegated women's history to the private sphere—particularly the history of the family. As Joan Scott observes in Gender and the Politics of History, this older framework assumed a rigid public/private divide, positioning women's experiences as marginal to the central narratives of history (e.g., war, diplomacy, and power). Scholars like Gerda Lerner and Scott herself played pivotal roles in overturning these assumptions. Lerner's The Creation of Patriarchy traced the historical construction of women's subordination, while Scott's essay "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" redefined gender as an analytical tool for interrogating power relations, fundamentally reshaping the discipline.

The development of feminist historiography was also deeply influenced by the broader social and political context of the time. The civil rights movements, anti-colonial struggles, and labor movements of the mid-20th century highlighted the intersections of gender with race, class, and colonialism, prompting feminist historians to adopt an intersectional approach (Davis, 1981). This approach recognized that women's experiences were not monolithic but shaped by multiple, overlapping identities and power structures. For example, African American feminists like Angela Davis and bell hooks critiqued mainstream feminist historiography for its focus on white, middle-class women, calling for a more inclusive, diverse and nuanced understanding of women's histories (hooks, 1981).

13.3 FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The development of feminist historiography in India is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past, nationalist movements, and postcolonial realities. Unlike the euro-western trajectory, where feminist historiography emerged primarily from second-wave feminism, a phase which relinquished the egalitarian aspirations of the 'first phase' and began to investigate the deeper apparatuses of power, language and meaning, the Indian context is marked by a complex interplay of caste, class, religion, and colonialism, which have shaped the ways in which women's histories are written and understood. Indian feminist historiography, therefore, not only critiques the androcentric biases of traditional historiography but also challenges the Eurocentric frameworks that often dominate global feminist discourse.

One of the earliest influences on Indian feminist historiography was the social reform movements of the 19th and early 20th centuries, which sought to address issues such as sati, child marriage, and women's education. Reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Jyotirao Phule, as well as women leaders like Pandita Ramabai and Savitribai Phule, laid the groundwork for questioning patriarchal norms and advocating for women's rights (Chakravarti, 2006). However, these early efforts were often limited by their elite and upper-caste perspectives, prompting later feminist historians to adopt a more intersectional approach that considered the experiences of women from marginalized communities.

The nationalist movement in India provided another critical context for the emergence of feminist historiography. While women played significant roles in the struggle for independence, their contributions were often overshadowed by the dominant narratives of male leaders. Feminist historians like Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy have sought to recover these hidden histories, highlighting the participation of women in protests, boycotts, and revolutionary activities (Roy, 1995). For instance, figures like Sarojini Naidu, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, and Aruna Asaf Ali have been re-examined through a feminist lens, revealing their leadership and agency in shaping the nationalist movement.

Post-independence, the field of feminist historiography in India gained momentum with the establishment of women's studies programs and the publication of seminal works that critiqued both colonial and nationalist histories. Scholars like Vina Mazumdar and Lotika Sarkar were instrumental in institutionalizing feminist scholarship, while others like Geraldine Forbes and Jasodhara Bagchi focused on recovering women's voices from colonial archives (Forbes, 1996). The publication of Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History (Sangari & Vaid, 1989) marked a turning point, as it critically examined how colonial policies, and nationalist discourses had constructed and constrained women's identities.

A distinctive feature of Indian feminist historiography is its emphasis on caste and its intersection with gender. Dalit feminist scholars like Sharmila Rege and Uma Chakravarti have highlighted the ways in which caste hierarchies have historically marginalized Dalit women, both within broader society and within feminist movements (Rege, 2006). Works such as Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios (Rege, 2006) have brought attention to the unique struggles and resilience of Dalit women, challenging the upper-caste biases that have often dominated Indian feminist discourse.

In recent decades, Indian feminist historiography has also engaged with global feminist debates, particularly those around postcolonialism and subaltern studies. Scholars like Gayatri Spivak have critiqued the limitations of Western feminist historiography, arguing that it often fails to account for the voices of subaltern women in the Global South (Spivak, 1988). This critique has inspired Indian feminist historians to adopt more inclusive methodologies, such as oral histories and community-based research, to recover the experiences of marginalized women.

In conclusion, feminist historiography in India represents a rich and dynamic field that continues to evolve in response to the country's unique social, cultural, and political contexts. By challenging the exclusions and biases of traditional historiography, it has not only enriched our understanding of Indian history but also contributed to the broader feminist struggle for equality and justice. As we explore the methodologies, themes, and challenges of feminist historiography in the following sections, it is important to recognize the transformative potential of this approach in shaping a more inclusive and equitable historical record.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. Note on Feminist historiography in the Indian context.

13.4 KEY THEMES IN FEMINIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Feminist historiography is characterized by its commitment to uncovering and analyzing the diverse experiences of women and marginalized genders, challenging the patriarchal biases that have traditionally shaped historical narratives. In the Indian context, this approach is further enriched by the country's complex social, cultural, and political landscape, which necessitates an intersectional understanding of gender, caste, class, and religion. Several key themes emerge as central to feminist historiography in India, each reflecting the unique challenges and contributions of this field.

i) Recovering Women's Histories

One of the primary objectives of feminist historiography is to recover the histories of women who have been erased or marginalized in traditional narratives. In India, this has involved excavating the roles of women in various historical periods, from ancient and medieval times to the colonial and postcolonial eras. For instance, scholars like Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy have highlighted the contributions of women in early Indian history, such as the Buddhist bhikkhunis (nuns) and the courtesans of ancient India, who played significant cultural and intellectual roles (Chakravarti, 2006; Roy, 1995). Similarly,

the participation of women in India's freedom struggle, often overshadowed by male leaders, has been brought to light through the works of Geraldine Forbes and others (Forbes, 1996).

ii) Challenging Patriarchy and Power Structures

Feminist historiography in India critically examines how patriarchal structures have shaped historical narratives and institutions. This theme is particularly evident in the analysis of colonial and nationalist histories, which often reinforced patriarchal norms even as they sought to modernize Indian society. For example, the colonial discourse on sati and widow remarriage, while ostensibly aimed at reforming Indian society, often served to justify colonial intervention and reinforce patriarchal control over women's bodies (Mani, 1998). Feminist historians like Lata Mani have critiqued these narratives, revealing how women were constructed as passive subjects in both colonial and nationalist discourses.

iii) Intersectionality: Caste, Class, and Gender

A defining feature of Indian feminist historiography is its emphasis on intersectionality, which recognizes that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of identity such as caste, class, and religion. Dalit feminist scholars like Sharmila Rege and Uma Chakravarti have been at the forefront of this approach, highlighting the ways in which caste hierarchies have historically marginalized Dalit women (Rege, 2006; Chakravarti, 2006). Works such as Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios (Rege, 2006) have brought attention to the unique struggles and resilience of Dalit women, challenging the upper-caste biases that have often dominated Indian feminist discourse.

iv) Reinterpreting Historical Events

Feminist historiography also seeks to reinterpret well-known historical events from a gender-sensitive perspective. For example, the Partition of India in 1947, often narrated as a political and territorial division, has been re-examined by feminist historians like Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon to highlight the experiences of women who faced violence, displacement, and loss during this period (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). These accounts reveal how women's bodies became sites of communal violence and national honor, challenging the dominant narratives of Partition that often ignore gendered dimensions.

v) Women's Movements and Activism

The history of women's movements in India is another key theme in feminist historiography. Scholars like Radha Kumar and Vina Mazumdar have documented the evolution of feminist activism in India, from the social reform movements of the 19th century to the contemporary struggles for gender justice (Kumar, 1993; Mazumdar, 1999). These histories not only celebrate the achievements of women's movements but also

critically examine their limitations, particularly in addressing the needs of marginalized women.

vi) Representation and Identity

Feminist historiography in India also engages with questions of representation and identity, exploring how women have been depicted in literature, art, and media. For instance, the portrayal of women in Indian mythology and religious texts has been a subject of critical analysis, with scholars like Madhu Kishwar and Tanika Sarkar examining the ways in which these representations reflect and reinforce patriarchal norms (Kishwar, 1999; Sarkar, 2001). Similarly, the representation of women in colonial and nationalist literature has been critiqued for its often idealized and homogenized depictions of Indian womanhood.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

3. What are the key themes of feminist historiography?

13.5 SUMMARY

The key themes of feminist historiography in India reflect the field's commitment to uncovering hidden histories, challenging patriarchal structures, and adopting an intersectional approach to understanding gender. By centering the experiences of women and marginalized genders, feminist historiography not only enriches our understanding of the past but also contributes to the broader struggle for gender justice and equality. As we explore the methodologies and challenges of feminist historiography in the following sections, these themes will serve as a foundation for understanding its transformative potential.

13.6 GLOSSARY

Feminist Historiography : Feminist historiography represents a radical reimagining of how history is studied, written, and understood. It emerges as a critical response to the traditional narratives of history, which have long been dominated by male-centric perspectives and patriarchal frameworks, often rendering women and other marginalized genders invisible. Feminist historiography is inherently interdisciplinary, drawing on insights from sociology, anthropology, literature, and cultural studies to enrich its analysis. It employs innovative

methodologies such as oral histories, and life history, which capture the lived experiences of women who may not have left written records, and archival data such as legal codes, archaeological evidence, temple records, literature and arts, that reads "against the grain" to uncover hidden narratives (Sangari & Vaid, 1989). It also emphasizes intersectionality, recognizing that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of identity such as caste, class, race, and sexuality.

Recovering Women's Histories : One of the primary objectives of feminist historiography is to recover the histories of women who have been erased or marginalized in traditional narratives. In India, this has involved excavating the roles of women in various historical periods, from ancient and medieval times to the colonial and postcolonial eras. For instance, scholars like Uma Chakravarti and Kumkum Roy have highlighted the contributions of women in early Indian history, such as the Buddhist bhikkhunis (nuns) and the courtesans of ancient India, who played significant cultural and intellectual roles

Reinterpreting Historical Events : Feminist historiography also seeks to reinterpret well-known historical events from a gender-sensitive perspective. For example, the Partition of India in 1947, often narrated as a political and territorial division, has been re-examined by feminist historians like Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon to highlight the experiences of women who faced violence, displacement, and loss during this period (Butalia, 1998; Menon & Bhasin, 1998). These accounts reveal how women's bodies became sites of communal violence and national honor, challenging the dominant narratives of Partition that often ignore gendered dimensions.

Intersectional perspective of feminist historiography : A defining feature of Indian feminist historiography is its emphasis on intersectionality, which recognizes that gender cannot be understood in isolation from other axes of identity such as caste, class, and religion. Dalit feminist scholars like Sharmila Rege and Uma Chakravarti have been at the forefront of this approach,

highlighting the ways in which caste hierarchies have historically marginalized Dalit women (Rege, 2006; Chakravarti, 2006). Works such as Writing Caste/Writing Gender: Narrating Dalit Women's Testimonios (Rege, 2006) have brought attention to the unique struggles and resilience of Dalit women, challenging the upper-caste biases that have often dominated Indian feminist discourse.

13.7 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Feminist historiography represents a radical reimagining of how history is studied, written, and understood. It emerges as a critical response to the traditional narratives of history, which have long been dominated by male-centric perspectives and patriarchal frameworks, often rendering women and other marginalized genders invisible.
2. The development of feminist historiography in India is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past, nationalist movements, and postcolonial realities. Unlike the euro-western trajectory, where feminist historiography emerged primarily from second-wave feminism, a phase which relinquished the egalitarian aspirations of the 'first phase' and began to investigate the deeper apparatuses of power, language and meaning, the Indian context is marked by a complex interplay of caste, class, religion, and colonialism, which have shaped the ways in which women's histories are written and understood. Indian feminist historiography, therefore, not only critiques the androcentric biases of traditional historiography but also challenges the Eurocentric frameworks that often dominate global feminist discourse.
3. The key themes in feminist historiography includes:
   a. recovering women's histories
   b. challenging patriarchy and power structures
   c. intersectionality- class, caste and gender
   d. reinterpreting historical events
   e. women's movements and activism
   f. representation and identity.

13.8 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. What is feminist historiography? Why is it a necessary academic and political project?
2. Elaborate on the key themes that largely encapsulates what feminist historiography entails?

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. Intersectionality
2. Recovering women's histories
3. What is the role of intersectionality in feminist historiography?

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- Prof.

UNIT-14: GENDER, NATIONALISM AND THE STATE

Contents

14.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Women as Emblems of 'National Culture'
- Women's Political Participation as Equal Citizens
- Women as Agents and Recipients of Development

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed how certain roles are assigned to men and women in stories about nations? For example, women are often seen as the "keepers of culture and honour" while men are portrayed as the "protectors of the nation." These ideas are not accidental, rather they are deeply tied to the ways nations are imagined and how states are created and function. Gender, which refers to the roles, behaviours, and expectations society assigns to men and women, plays a crucial role in shaping nationalism and the state. Nationalism,

or the sense of belonging to a nation, often relies on specific ideas about what men and women should do for their country. Meanwhile, the state, which is the political system that governs a nation, uses laws and policies to enforce these gendered roles.

In this chapter, we will explore how gender, nationalism, and the state are connected. We will discover how gender shapes national identity, how states use gender to maintain power, and how these interlinkages between gender, nationalism, and state impact the lives of individuals, collectives, and societies. This chapter examines how Indian nationalism, and the postcolonial state have imagined women through three key frameworks (Chaudhuri, 1999):

- **Women as Emblems of 'National Culture':** Women's bodies and behaviours became sites for asserting national and collective identity, and a metaphor of cultural authenticity, often reinforcing conservative norms.
- **Women's Political Participation as Equal Citizens:** While the Constitution promised gender equality, patriarchal structures persisted, limiting substantive representation.
- **Women as Agents and Recipients of Development:** The state positioned women as both beneficiaries of welfare policies and active participants in nation-building, yet often within limits.

By the end of this chapter, and through the engagement with these distinct frameworks, you will have a clearer understanding of how and why gender matters in discussions about nations and states.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. What are the three broad frameworks through which the state has reimagined women?

14.2 KEY CONCEPTS: GENDER, NATIONALISM, AND THE STATE

The relationship between gender, nationalism, and the state in India is a complex interplay of historical legacies, political ideologies, and socio-cultural transformations. From the freedom struggle to the post-independence era, the Indian nation-state has grappled with defining women's roles, oscillating between empowerment and control, inclusion and exclusion, modernity and tradition. Before we delve into these complexities, we need to break down some key ideas:

14.2.1 Gender and National Identity

The modern nation has often been imagined through gendered metaphors, particularly of the female body. The many faces of 'mother' are manifested in motherland, mother tongue, motherhood, and have proven to be particularly powerful symbols. Several studies

have examined how the maternal metaphor was not limited to representations of the nation, but also extended to linguistics, which in turn strengthened regional as well as national identities, for instance in north India where the icon of the mother was fused into narratives of nation, language, sharpening the boundaries of community identity (Gupta, 2001). As per this interlinkage between the nation and its inhabitants, women as gendered being are frequently idealized as the "soul" or "spiritual core" of the nation, tasked with preserving its culture, traditions, and moral values. This image is evident in various nationalist movements, where women are expected to uphold cultural practices such as language, dress, and family rituals (Yuval-Davis, 1997). For instance, in India during the freedom movement, women were seen as the custodians of "Bharatiya Sanskriti" (Indian culture), responsible for transmitting Hindu traditions and values to future generations (Chatterjee, 1989). Similarly, in Ireland, the figure of the "Mother Ireland" symbolized the nation's purity and resilience, with women expected to embody these virtues through their domestic and reproductive roles (Meaney, 1991). Women were expected to embody these virtues through their roles as mothers and homemakers, while men took on the public roles of political leadership and armed struggle. This gendered division of labour was a common feature of nationalist movements worldwide, from Algeria to Vietnam. In Algeria, for instance, women's participation in the anti-colonial struggle was celebrated, but after independence, they were pushed back into the private spaces of home, and were back to performing traditional gender roles as part of the state's efforts to reclaim cultural authenticity (Lazreg, 1994).

Scholarly debates on this topic often highlight the tension between women's symbolic importance and their marginalization in nationalist projects. While women were celebrated as cultural icons, their agency was frequently constrained by patriarchal structures that limited their participation in public life (McClintock, 1995). Partha Chaterjee has dissected how Indian nationalists in the late 19th–early 20th century symbolically elevated women as embodiments of cultural purity ("Bharat Mata") while marginalizing their political agency. Nationalists confined women's roles to the spiritual domestic sphere, opposing colonial reforms (e.g., Age of Consent debates). As Chatterjee notes: "The 'new woman' was to be modern... yet rooted in traditional domesticity." In another example, we must consider how Post-1947, the Indian Constitution granted equality, but personal laws retained patriarchal control over marriage, divorce, and inheritance (Agnes, 1999).

The symbolic positioning of women as embodiments of national and communal identity has also historically made them primary targets during periods of conflicts and war. As Urvashi Butalia's (1998) research on Partition reveals, approximately 75,000-100,000 Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women were raped, mutilated, or forcibly converted during the 1947 violence, with their bodies becoming battlegrounds for competing nationalisms. This phenomenon followed a clear pattern across many other geographies battling border related conflicts, and formation of new nation-states:

1. **India-Pakistan Partition (1947)**
    - Systematic rape as "revenge" against opposing communities (Butalia, 2001)
    - Forced pregnancies to alter religious demographics (Menon & Bhasin, 1998)
    - "Honor killings" by families to prevent "pollution" (Butalia, 1998)

2. **Rwandan Genocide (1994)**
    - 250,000-500,000 Tutsi women raped as weapon of ethnic cleansing (Nowrojee, 2005)
    - Sexual mutilation to destroy reproductive capacity (Mukangendo, 2007)
3. **Yugoslav Wars (1990s)**
    - Rape camps established for "Serbianization" of Bosnian women (Allen, 1996)
    - Official records document 20,000-50,000 systematic rapes (Mackinnon, 2006)

The reasons for such violence have been highlighted by Nira Yuval Davis and Floya Anthias (1989). Drawing from different historical experiences, they sum up the ways in which women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to state practices. These are:

a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities.

b) as reproducers of the boundaries of the ethnic/national groups.

c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture.

d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences-as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories.

e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

Thus the symbolic configuration of woman is intertwined with the national identity, yet it also reveals a fundamental contradiction: while women are valorized as symbolic embodiments of cultural identity, they remain systematically excluded from meaningful political and economic participation (As we will see in the upcoming section on state). This paradoxical dynamic, where women are simultaneously revered as cultural icons yet restricted by patriarchal power structures, exposes how nationalist and statist projects reinforce gender hierarchies despite their rhetoric of national unity. The glorification of women's symbolic roles directly manifests in material realities, particularly through rigid gender divisions of labor that confine women to specific social and economic spheres.

14.2.2. The Gendered Division of Labor

The gendered division of labour has been a defining feature of Indian nationalist movement, systematically shaping patriotic participation along gender lines. During India's freedom struggle, women were mobilized as nurturers of the nationalist spirit, maintaining households while male relatives joined protests, providing emotional sustenance to imprisoned activists, and covertly sheltering underground revolutionaries (Forbes, 1996). Their contributions in the home and the world were celebrated, yet the Indian National Congress's leadership remained overwhelmingly male, with only 4% women delegates at the 1931 Karachi Session (Chaudhuri, 1993). The archetype of the "patriotic mother" sending sons to fight colonial rule (for instance Gandhi mobilized women in salt marches

and boycotts, framing them as “custodians of national honor”) coexisted with strict boundaries on women's political leadership (Sinha, 2006).

The gendered division of labor became institutionalized in post-independence India through state-led development initiatives. The Community Development Programme (CDP), launched in 1952, systematically reinforced traditional gender roles by offering differentiated training: while men received instruction in modern agricultural techniques, women were predominantly channeled into “Home Economics” programs focused on domestic crafts like sewing and childcare (Agarwal, 1994). This approach mirrored colonial-era “home science” models, deliberately excluding women from accessing knowledge about agricultural technologies. As Agarwal (1994) critically notes, “The CDP's gendered training reinforced the male farmer-female homemaker binary, systematically excluding women from agricultural resources” (p. 213). Official reports confirm this stark disparity - the Planning Commission's 1956 evaluation documented that 87% of trainees in home economics were women, compared to just 9% in agricultural extension programs (Government of India, 1956, p. 34). This institutionalized segregation had lasting impacts, perpetuating women's economic dependence and limiting their access to critical farming knowledge even as they shouldered significant agricultural workloads in unpaid capacity as mothers, sisters, daughters, and daughter-in-law of the household.

Even in revolutionary contexts like the Telangana Peasant Struggle (1946-51), women combatants were later pressured to return to domestic roles (Stree Shakti Sanghatana, 1989). Similarly, contemporary Self-Help Groups (SHGs) exemplify this tension; while empowering 100 million women economically (NITI Aayog, 2022), they often reinforce traditional caregiving roles through “feminized” welfare schemes (Jakimow, 2020). Indian feminist scholarship reveals this paradox: from the Chipko movement where women's environmental protection was framed as “natural” caregiving (Shiva, 1988) to the 1970s Left movements where female cadres cooked for male comrades (Kannabiran, 2002). As Sangari (1993) argues, nationalist movements instrumentalize women's labour while maintaining patriarchal power structures - a pattern evident when comparing women's massive participation in India's freedom struggle (over 80,000 imprisoned) with their minimal post-independence political representation (5% in first Lok Sabha).

14.2.3. Men as Protectors of the Nation

In contrast to women’s symbolic roles, men were often cast as the “protectors” of the nation, responsible for defending its sovereignty through physical strength, leadership, and political action. Nationalism often goes hand in hand with militarization, as it ties masculinity to the idea of defending the nation, creating pressure on men to conform to rigid gender roles. For example, in many countries, military service is seen as a rite of passage for men, while women are excluded or relegated to provide supportive roles. This not only reinforces gender inequality but also perpetuates violence and conflict. This idea of masculinity as tied to bravery and sacrifice has been central to nationalist discourses, particularly during wars and revolutions. For example, during the American Revolution, men were idealized as citizen-soldiers who fought for liberty and independence, while women were relegated to supporting roles as “republican mothers” who raised patriotic

children (Kerber, 1980). Similarly, in post-revolutionary Iran, the state emphasized men's role as defenders of the Islamic Republic, framing martyrdom as the ultimate expression of masculine duty (Kandiyoti, 1991). This gendered division is not merely symbolic but deeply embedded in how society is organized and how nations are imagined.

Scholarly debates on masculinity and nationalism often focus on the ways in which gendered ideals are used to mobilize men for nationalist causes. While some scholars argue that these ideals can foster a sense of unity and purpose (Mosse, 1985), others caution that they reinforce harmful stereotypes and exclude those who do not conform to traditional gender norms (Connell, 1995). For example, in contemporary Russia, the state's promotion of hyper-masculine ideals has been criticized for marginalizing LGBTQ+ communities and perpetuating gender-based violence (Sperling, 2015). Sometimes these constructions of masculinity also create a lot of pressure against non-traditional and subaltern forms of masculinity, which further leads to a peculiar social crisis. The immense social and cultural pressure on men to conform to rigid ideals of strength and bravery, leaves little room for those who did not fit these expectations. For instance, in post-World War I Germany, the trauma of defeat and economic hardship led to a crisis of masculinity, as veteran men struggled to reconcile their wartime experiences with the demands of a post war society (Theweleit, 1987). This crisis was exploited by nationalist movements, which sought to restore masculine pride through militarism and authoritarianism.

It is also important to highlight that gender roles are not static but are continually renegotiated in response to political and social changes, as seen in the debates over women's participation in the military in Israel, where the integration of women into combat roles has challenged traditional notions of masculinity and national defence (Sasson-Levy, 2003). A landmark manifestation of this evolution occurred during Operation Sindoor (2025), India's high-precision counterterrorism operation against Pakistan's cross border militant activities. This mission achieved symbolic significance through its unprecedented deployment of women officers in leadership roles. Colonel Sofiya Qureshi (Artillery Corps) and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh (Fighter Squadron) not only commanded operational units but also became the public face of the mission, jointly briefing media alongside Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri (Ministry of Defence, 2025). This development reflects broader global patterns where women's military participation transitions from symbolic inclusion to operational leadership (Carreiras, 2021), while simultaneously becoming contested terrain for nationalist discourse (Eager, 2022). On the other hand, we also have states that have altered the notions of masculinity in a different direction. While traditional nationalism often enforces militarized masculinities tied to combat and protection, some states actively reshape masculine ideals to serve new national goals. South Korea exemplifies this shift. Following the 1997 economic crisis, the state strategically promoted "soft masculinity" through its globally influential K-pop industry., where bands like BTS publicly embrace androgynous fashion, emotional vulnerability, and collaborative values, in contrast with Korea's historical "industrial soldier" ideal.

14.2.4. The gendered state: between liberation and control

The modern state is a powerful force in shaping gender relations, simultaneously capable of advancing women's rights and reinforcing patriarchal structures. Its policies,

laws, and ideological frameworks create a tension between liberation (expanding rights, opportunities, and autonomy) and control (regulating women's bodies, labor, and social roles). This dual function makes the state a contested site for feminist struggles, one that can both dismantle and uphold gender hierarchies. In South Asia, postcolonial states have oscillated between challenging patriarchal norms (through progressive legislation) and reinforcing them (via cultural nationalism or economic neglect). The region offers critical examples of how state interventions can both empower and constrain women, depending on political will and ideological leanings. States can actively dismantle gender hierarchies through:

A. Legal Reforms

- Constitutional Guarantees: Across South Asia, constitutional guarantees have provided important foundations for gender equality. India's constitutional framework, for instance, enshrines principles of non-discrimination through Articles 14-16 while Article 39(d) specifically mandates equal pay for equal work. Nepal's 2015 constitution went further by institutionalizing a 33 percent quota for women in all state bodies, creating formal pathways for political participation. India also follows a similar gender-based reservation policy to bring more women to public-political spaces. These legal structures establish important benchmarks for gender justice, though their implementation often lags as compared to their aspirational goals.
- Progressive Legislation: Progressive legislation has periodically challenged deep-rooted gender hierarchies, though frequently facing significant opposition. The passage of India's Hindu Code Bill in the 1950s marked a watershed moment in reforming inheritance, marriage, and divorce laws for Hindu women, despite being framed by opponents as an attack on tradition. The Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005 marked a radical shift in India's inheritance laws by granting daughters equal coparcenary rights in ancestral property, effectively dismantling centuries of patriarchal bias in distribution of resources. However, its implementation faced fierce resistance, revealing the deep-rooted tensions between progressive legal reforms and entrenched social norms. Before 2005, only male members of a Hindu Undivided Family (HUF) were coparceners, entitled to a birthright share in ancestral property. The amendment made daughters equal coparceners, giving them the same inheritance rights as sons. Women could now demand partition, sell, or will their share, a dramatic shift from earlier laws where they had limited claims. Despite its progressive intent, the law faced widespread resistance, as many families pressured daughters to relinquish claims, either through coercion or "voluntary" settlements, some families transferred property before the law's enactment to exclude daughters. Deep-seated beliefs that property should remain with male heirs led to disputes, even within educated urban families. Similarly, Pakistan's 2006 Women's Protection Act modified the controversial Hudood Ordinances to prevent rape victims from being prosecuted for adultery, demonstrating how legal reforms can alter oppressive gender regimes. These legislative battles reveal both the transformative potential of state action and the resilience of patriarchy.

B. Economic & Social Policies

Economic and social policies have created important, if uneven, opportunities for women's advancement. India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) formally mandates equal wages for men and women in rural work programs, while Bangladesh's state-supported garment industry has employed millions of women, albeit often under exploitative conditions (Kabeer, 2000). In the realm of education, Kerala's literacy mission achieved near-universal female literacy through sustained state investment in schools, demonstrating how targeted policies can dramatically alter gender disparities in human development (Devika, 2007).

Yet these progressive measures frequently encounter systemic limitations. India's 73rd Amendment reserving one-third of panchayat seats for women has significantly increased women's political visibility, yet many female representatives face “proxy rule” by male relatives who continue to wield actual power. Nepal's quota system similarly boosted women's numerical representation without necessarily translating into substantive decision-making authority (Acharya, 2016). Similarly, Sri Lanka has reduced maternal mortality via free healthcare, though abortion remains restricted (Jayawardena, 2016). These contradictions highlight how formal policy changes often interact with deeper cultural norms in ways that dilute their transformative potential towards progressive social change.

These contradictions stem from South Asia's complex postcolonial legacy, where modernizing impulses have constantly negotiated with traditionalist resistance. Nehruvian India promoted women's education while avoiding challenges to religious personal laws, while Bangladesh oscillated between secularism and Islamist compromises. Nowhere is this tension starker than in India's Shah Bano case (1985): The 1985 Supreme Court verdict in Mohd. Ahmed Khan v. Shah Bano Begum became a watershed moment for gender justice in India. When the Court upheld Shah Bano’s right to maintenance under Section 125 CrPC—applying secular law uniformly across religions—it affirmed constitutional equality for Muslim women (Agnes, 1999). However, the Rajiv Gandhi government’s subsequent Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act (1986) overturned this victory, restricting maintenance to the iddat period (3 months post-divorce) under pressure from conservative groups (Hasan, 1998). This legislative reversal exposed two critical tensions:

1. The state’s willingness to sacrifice women’s rights for political appeasement.
2. How religious personal laws perpetuate patriarchal control, denying women equal citizenship (Pathak & Sunder Rajan, 1989).

The South Asian experience ultimately reveals the state as neither inherently liberating nor oppressive, but rather as a contested terrain where gender justice is continuously negotiated. Policy gains in areas like political representation and labour rights coexist with persistent gaps in implementation and enforcement. Feminist movements must therefore navigate this complex landscape, simultaneously engaging with state institutions while maintaining pressure from outside to ensure that formal equality translates into substantive change. The challenge remains to transform the state from an architect of gender roles into a genuine catalyst for gender justice.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. In which women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to state practices?.

_____

_____

14.3 CONTEMPORARY ISSUES: GENDER, NATIONALISM, AND THE STATE TODAY

The intersection of gender, nationalism, and state power continues to shape contemporary India in profound ways. Here are some key issues:

14.3.1. Globalization and Gender

Globalization has transformed the ways nations and states operate, creating new challenges and opportunities for gender equality. For example, women's labour is increasingly exploited in the global economy, with many women working in low-paid jobs in factories or as domestic workers. At the same time, feminist movements are using global networks to advocate for women's rights, showing how globalization can both empower and oppress women. Under the pressures of globalization, Indian women have become both beneficiaries and casualties of economic transformation. While the growth of export-oriented industries like garment manufacturing has created employment opportunities for women, with over 12 million now working in India's textile sector, these jobs often involve precarious working conditions, informality, and suppressed wages (Mehrotra & Biggeri, 2007). Simultaneously, transnational feminist networks have empowered Indian activists to challenge discriminatory laws, as seen in the successful campaign to reform Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code on marital rape (Menon, 2018).

14.3.2. Rise of Right-Wing Nationalism

In the past few decades, there has been a rise in right-wing nationalist movements around the world. These movements often promote traditional gender roles, with women expected to focus on family and reproduction, while men are seen as the leaders and protectors of the nation. This has led to a backlash against gender equality, with women's rights being framed as a threat to national identity. The rise of Hindu nationalist politics has intensified gendered notions of citizenship (Sarkar ,2019). The current political climate glorifies women as "dharmic mothers" responsible for reproducing Hindu culture, while aggressively policing interfaith relationships through anti-"love jihad" laws (Sarkar, 2018). Similar ideological project became visible during the Sabarimala protests, where women's reproductive status was weaponized to exclude them from sacred spaces (Sarkar, 2019). The exclusion of menstruating women was framed as 'tradition', but court documents

reveal this was institutionalized only in 1991 as part of rising Hindu nationalism (Sekher, 2020, p. 87)

14.4.3. Gendered Citizenship

Citizenship laws are another area where gender and nationalism intersect. In many countries, women face greater restrictions than men when it comes to passing on citizenship to their children. This reflects broader anxieties about national identity and belonging, showing how the state uses gender to control who is included in the nation. India's citizenship laws equally reveal gendered exclusions. The controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and National Register of Citizens process created unique vulnerabilities for Muslim women, who often lack documentary proof of citizenship due to patriarchal inheritance practices such as absence of property rights (Roy, 2022). These developments demonstrate how the Indian state continues to use gender as a tool for both nationalist mobilization and exclusionary citizenship practices.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

3. What is gendered citizenship?

14.4 SUMMARY

The historical interplay between gender , nationalism, and state reveals the complex ways in which gendered symbols and roles have been used to construct national identities, mobilize populations, and legitimize state power. While women have often been idealized as the body and the soul of the nation, their contributions have frequently been marginalized or confined to the private sphere. Similarly, men have been cast as the “protectors” of the nation, but this role has come at the cost of rigid gender norms that exclude those who do not conform. By examining these dynamics through historical cases and engaging with scholarly debates, we can better understand how gender shapes, and is shaped by nationalist projects and state policies. This critical perspective is essential for advancing gender equality and fostering more inclusive visions of national identity. The relationship between gender, nationalism, and the state is complex and deeply rooted in power dynamics. Gender shapes how nations are built and how states function, while nationalism and the state use gendered ideas to maintain control. By understanding these connections, we can better see how gender impacts our lives and why it matters in discussions about nations and states.

14.5 GLOSSARY

Gender and National Identity : The modern nation has often been imagined through gendered metaphors, particularly of the female body. The many faces of 'mother' are manifested in motherland, mother tongue, motherhood, and have proven to be particularly powerful symbols. As per this interlinkage between the nation and its inhabitants, women as gendered being are frequently idealized as the "soul" or "spiritual core" of the nation, tasked with preserving its culture, traditions, and moral values. This image is evident in various nationalist movements, where women are expected to uphold cultural practices such as language, dress, and family rituals (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

Men as Protectors of the Nation : In contrast to women's symbolic roles, men were often cast as the "protectors" of the nation, responsible for defending its sovereignty through physical strength, leadership, and political action. Nationalism often goes hand in hand with militarization, as it ties masculinity to the idea of defending the nation, creating pressure on men to conform to rigid gender roles. For example, in many countries, military service is seen as a rite of passage for men, while women are excluded or relegated to provide supportive roles. This not only reinforces gender inequality but also perpetuates violence and conflict. This idea of masculinity as tied to bravery and sacrifice has been central to nationalist discourses, particularly during wars and revolutions.

Globalization and Gender : Globalization has transformed the ways nations and states operate, creating new challenges and opportunities for gender equality. For example, women's labour is increasingly exploited in the global economy, with many women working in low-paid jobs in factories or as domestic workers. At the same time, feminist movements are using global networks to advocate for women's rights, showing how globalization can both empower and oppress women. Under the pressures of globalization, Indian women have become both beneficiaries and casualties of economic transformation. While the growth of export-oriented industries like garment manufacturing has created employment opportunities for women, with over 12 million now working in India's textile sector, these jobs often involve precarious working conditions, informality, and suppressed wages (Mehrotra & Biggeri, 2007).

14.6 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Women as Emblems of 'National Culture': Women's bodies and behaviours became sites for asserting national and collective identity, and a metaphor of cultural authenticity, often reinforcing conservative norms. Women's Political Participation as Equal Citizens: While the Constitution promised gender equality, patriarchal structures persisted, limiting substantive representation. Women as Agents and Recipients of Development: The state positioned women as both beneficiaries of welfare policies and active participants in nation-building, yet often within limits.
2. Women have tended to participate in ethnic and national processes and in relation to state practices through: (a) as biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities. (b) as reproducers of the boundaries of the ethnic/national groups. (c) as participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture. (d) as signifiers of ethnic/national differences-as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/national categories. (e) as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.
3. Gendered Citizenship: Citizenship laws are another area where gender and nationalism intersect. In many countries, women face greater restrictions than men when it comes to passing on citizenship to their children. This reflects broader anxieties about national identity and belonging, showing how the state uses gender to control who is included in the nation. India's citizenship laws equally reveal gendered exclusions. The controversial Citizenship Amendment Act (2019) and National Register of Citizens process created unique vulnerabilities for Muslim women, who often lack documentary proof of citizenship due to patriarchal inheritance practices such as absence of property rights (Roy, 2022). These developments demonstrate how the Indian state continues to use gender as a tool for both nationalist mobilization and exclusionary citizenship practices.

14.7 MODEL EXAMINATION QUESTIONS

I. Answer the following questions in about 30 lines each.

1. Analyze how any two South Asian states have used women's bodies as symbols of national identity.
2. "Legal equality doesn't ensure substantive rights." Discuss with Indian examples.

II. Answer the following questions in about 10 lines each.

1. The Hindu Code Bill debates
2. 73rd Amendment's gender paradox

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UNIT-15: EMERGENCE AND EVOLUTION OF WOMEN'S STUDIES IN INDIA

Contents

15.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completion of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Trace the complex historical, social, and political factors: from 19th-century reform movements to the catalytic Towards Equality report (1974) and the emergence of Women's Studies as a distinct academic discipline in India.
- Examine the fundamental tension between the institutionalization of Women's Studies within the university system (primarily through UGC-funded centres) and the parallel existence and vital role of autonomous feminist spaces.
- Understand the multifaceted crises facing the field.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Have you ever paused to consider how the systematic study of women's lives, experiences, struggles, and contributions carved out a legitimate academic space within the often-exclusionary halls of Indian academia? Women's Studies in India did not emerge merely as a polite addition to existing curricula, filling a perceived gap. Its arrival was, and remains, a profound, radical challenge to the very foundations of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, foundations often built upon and reinforcing male centric world view. This is not simply about adding women to existing frameworks; it is about fundamentally interrogating how those frameworks are constructed, how gender operates as a primary axis structuring power relations, cultural norms, economic systems, and social institutions. It demands methodological innovation, pushing scholars to develop tools capable of reconstructing knowledge systems that are genuinely inclusive and reflective of diverse realities (John, 2008).

The evolution of Women's Studies in India is inextricably bound to the nation's own socio-political contradictions. On one hand stood the soaring promises of the Constitutional guarantees of equality before the law (Article 14), non-discrimination by the state (Article 15), equal opportunity in public employment (Article 16), and specific provisions enabling affirmative action for women and children (Article 15(3)). On the other hand, persisted the harsh, grinding reality of systemic marginalization faced by the vast majority of Indian women, particularly those situated at the intersections of gender with caste, class, religion, and rurality (Mazumdar, 1994). This glaring dissonance between constitutional promises and lived reality provided the fertile, albeit troubled, ground from which the discipline grew.

Its roots are deeply embedded in the 1960s and 1970s, a period marked globally by student uprisings, and the powerful second wave of feminism. In India, this era witnessed its own unique confluence of social upheaval: widespread discontent leading up to the Emergency, the rise of powerful peasant and Dalit movements, and crucially, the resurgence of an autonomous women's movement. Women's studies became an inherently interdisciplinary field, analyzing gender and sexuality not as isolated phenomena, but through explicitly feminist and intersectional lenses. While its initial impetus often stemmed from the need to correct the glaring underrepresentation and misrepresentation of women in academic discourse across disciplines, the field rapidly expanded its horizons. It moved beyond mere inclusion to undertake a critical investigation of the very structures of power that produce and sustain inequality and privilege, meticulously examining how sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, age, religion, and a multitude of other social factors intersect with gender to shape human experience.

Dedicated to combating inequality at personal, institutional, structural levels, Women's Studies fosters critical thinking skills essential for navigating a complex world. It deepens our understanding of how gendered power imbalances have operated across diverse cultures and historical epochs, providing crucial conceptual tools not just for analysis, but for envisioning and working towards meaningful social change. A defining feature of its curriculum, setting it apart from many traditional disciplines, is its consistent challenge to the artificial separation between theory and practice that often characterizes

academia. It insists that understanding the world is intrinsically linked to the project of changing it.

Towards Inequality Report: The formal institutionalization of the discipline received a massive impetus from a landmark document: the Towards Equality report published by the Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1974. This report delivered a devastatingly comprehensive indictment of the condition of Indian women nearly three decades after independence. It meticulously documented alarming trends: declining child sex ratios pointing to female foeticide and infanticide, vast disparities in literacy and educational attainment, persistent wage gaps and economic marginalization, and the pervasive shadow of gendered violence. Termed the "Magna Carta of Indian feminism" by legal scholar Flavia Agnes (2004), the report crucially exposed how state-led development frameworks systematically erased women's labour, particularly their unpaid contributions within the household and their crucial role in subsistence agriculture. This stark revelation spurred the creation of dedicated Women's Studies centres, initially supported by bodies like the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and later formalized under the University Grants Commission (UGC) (Desai, Krishnaraj, & Mazumdar, 1984).

However, this very process of institutionalization carried inherent risks: the risk of depoliticizing the field's radical edge, of privileging bureaucratic agendas and measurable "outputs" over the messy and often unquantifiable yet diverse realities of marginalized lives, and of subtly shifting focus away from structural critique towards manageable reform (John, 2008).

Women's Studies in India, therefore, defies any attempt at simplistic categorization or easy parallels with Western feminist traditions. While drawing inspiration and engaging in dialogue with global feminist thought, its evolution has been uniquely symbiotic with grassroots movements across the subcontinent (Mazumdar, 1994). It embodies what historian Uma Chakravarti described as a constant "braiding" of theory and praxis (Chakravarti, 1993). Alongside the university centres, vibrant autonomous collectives sprang up, operating largely outside formal institutional hierarchies. Groups like SPARROW (Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women) in Mumbai dedicated themselves to preserving the ephemeral oral histories of women's resistance – stories often absent from official records. Initiatives like Anveshi in Hyderabad consciously focused their research on the intricate, violent intersections of caste and gender, methodologies born from deep engagement with affected communities. These autonomous spaces, however, constantly faced existential threats, primarily stemming from the denial of crucial funding by state agencies suspicious of their critical stance and activist connections (Jain, Rajput, 2018). This persistent duality between institutional centres and autonomous collectives underscores the field's inherent and enduring tension. It is a tension between seeking legitimacy and resources within established structures and preserving radical independence; between the demands of academic careers and the urgency of activist pathways; and crucially, between the production of abstract theory and the grounded imperatives of practical struggle.

Today, this vital field confronts arguably its most severe existential threats. The relentless advance of neoliberal policies has triggered devastating funding cuts to higher education and social sectors. A stark example is the January 2024 termination of faculty at

the prestigious Tata Institute of Social Sciences' (TISS) Advanced Centre for Women's Studies following the lapse of grants from the Tata Trusts, leaving doctoral students researching critical issues like caste-based sexual violence abruptly abandoned mid-project (The Hindu, 2024). Simultaneously, a potent conservative political backlash actively seeks to delegitimize feminist vocabulary and analysis. Key figures dismiss concepts like "patriarchy" as alien Western imports disconnected from "Indian culture" as exemplified by a Union Minister's derisive 2023 quip, widely reported, asking "What's patriarchy, ya!!" (Indian Express, 2023). Furthermore, within classrooms, the field grapples with replicating the very intersectional hierarchies of caste, class, language, religion, it seeks to analyze and dismantle (Sreenivas, 2023).

This chapter traces the complex, often contentious, trajectory of Women's Studies in India from the seeds sown by 19th-century social reformers through the catalytic moments of the 1970s and the institutional battles of the subsequent decades, right up to the contemporary crises of the 2020s. In doing so, it seeks to answer three pivotal questions:

1. How has Women's Studies navigated the persistent, often fraught, tensions between the demands and compromises of institutionalization and the radical independence of autonomous spaces?
2. What specific roles have the enduring structures of caste and the pervasive forces of neoliberalism played in shaping the methodologies, priorities, and even the exclusions within the field?
3. Can the discipline retain its radical relevance and transformative potential in the face of severe funding austerity, institutional precarity, and overt political hostility?

By focusing relentlessly on these questions, we underscore the discipline's enduring significance. Women's Studies is not merely an academic specialization; it is a crucial site of resistance, a generator of critical knowledge essential for understanding and ultimately challenging the deep-seated systemic inequities that continue to shape Indian society.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

1. Importance of Women's studies in India.

15.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The emergence of Women's Studies as a distinct academic field in India during the 1970s was not a sudden, isolated phenomenon. Its intellectual legitimacy, methodological orientations, and core preoccupations are deeply embedded in the nation's complex social, political, and cultural history, stretching back over a century. Understanding its genesis requires tracing the intricate interplay between early social reform, the politics of anti-

colonial nationalism and subsequent state-building, the stark gap between constitutional promises and lived realities, and finally, the explosive resurgence of feminist activism that directly precipitated the field's formalization. This section delves into these critical roots, highlighting how the "woman question" was engaged with, often contentiously, long before it found a designated academic home.

15.2.1 The 19th Century Reform Movement

The earliest stirrings that would later nourish the soil of Women's Studies can be unequivocally traced to the dynamic social and religious reform movements that swept across India in the 19th century. This was a period of intense intellectual ferment and social churning, significantly influenced by colonial encounters and newly emerging ideas of modernity. Crucially, it witnessed a profound, albeit often contradictory, engagement with the "woman question": a critical, public examination of the status, rights, roles, and very humanity of women within Indian society. This examination was frequently framed within larger debates about tradition versus modernity, national identity, and the criteria for social progress (John, 2008). Pioneering reformers, often from emerging elite and middle-class backgrounds, challenged deeply entrenched patriarchal customs, many of which were brutally oppressive.

- **Confronting Traditions:** Figures like Raja Ram Mohan Roy stand as giants in this early phase. Appalled by the practice of sati (the immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyre), Roy mounted a powerful, sustained campaign against it. His strategy was multifaceted: he argued on humanitarian grounds, emphasizing the inherent cruelty and injustice; he also engaged in rigorous theological debate, challenging orthodox interpretations of Hindu scriptures used to justify the practice. His relentless efforts, coupled with the growing unease of the colonial administration, culminated in the landmark legal abolition of sati by Lord William Bentinck in 1829. Similarly, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, driven by compassion and a reformist zeal, dedicated himself to improving the plight of Hindu widows, who were often condemned to lives of severe social ostracization, economic deprivation, and ritual impurity. His tireless advocacy, based on extensive research into scriptural texts and appeals to reason and compassion, led to the passage of the Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act in 1856, a revolutionary step that legally permitted widows to remarry. Vidyasagar also campaigned vigorously against child marriage, recognizing its devastating impact on young girls' health and autonomy.
- **Education as Primary:** Perhaps the most direct and sustained challenge to the systemic exclusion of women from public life and established knowledge systems came through the fierce battle for female education. Access to education was rightly perceived as fundamental to any notion of empowerment. Here, the contributions of Jyotirao Phule and his wife, Savitribai Phule, were nothing short of revolutionary. Operating in the face of virulent social opposition, particularly from dominant caste elites who saw female education as a threat to the social order, the Phules established India's first school for girls in Pune in 1848. Their vision was radical and explicitly intersectional. Jyotirao Phule linked the oppression of women directly to the oppression of Shudras

and Ati-Shudras (lower castes) within the Brahmanical hierarchy. Education for women, particularly from marginalized castes, was not merely about literacy; it was envisioned as a tool for liberation from caste and gender-based subjugation, enabling critical thinking and active participation in public life. Savitribai Phule, as the school's first female teacher, became an enduring symbol of courage and resistance, facing physical attacks and social boycott for her work. Her poems and letters reveal a fierce commitment to education as a weapon against ignorance and oppression.

- **Social Reform:** It is also vital to recognize that the reformist agenda was far from monolithic or uniformly progressive in its ultimate goals or underlying assumptions. While challenging specific, visible oppressive customs like sati or widowhood taboos, many reformers often operated within a framework that still emphasized, and sometimes even reinforced, women's primary role within the domestic sphere. Education for women, even when advocated, was frequently promoted not primarily as an inherent human right or as a pathway to individual autonomy, intellectual fulfilment, and full public citizenship, but instrumentally to create "enlightened" mothers. These "enlightened" mothers, the argument went, would be better equipped to raise future (male) citizens for the nascent nation and to manage modern, scientifically run households (Desai & Thakkar, 2001). This perspective reflected the reformers' own class and caste positions. Their focus tended to be predominantly on middle and upper-caste Hindu women, often sidelining the specific struggles of women from lower castes, different religious communities, or tribal backgrounds. Furthermore, the nationalist movement later in the century sometimes co-opted the image of the educated, yet tradition-bound, woman as a symbol of authentic Indian culture resisting colonial encroachment, creating its own idealized notions of womanhood tied to nationhood. Nevertheless, despite these limitations and ambiguities, the 19th-century reform movements performed a crucial historical function. They brought the "woman question" forcefully into the heart of public discourse for the first time on a significant scale. They established the vital precedent of female education as a legitimate social goal.

15.3.2. Nationalism, Independence, and the Stark Paradox of Constitutional Equality (1947-1970s)

India's hard-fought independence in 1947 ushered in a new era marked by the ambitious, optimistic project of building a democratic, secular, and socialist republic. The Indian Constitution, adopted in 1950 after intense deliberation, stands as a remarkably progressive document for its time. It enshrined fundamental rights guaranteeing equality before the law (Article 14), prohibiting discrimination by the state on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth (Article 15), and ensuring equality of opportunity in matters of public employment (Article 16). Critically, Article 15(3) explicitly empowered the state to make "special provisions" for women and children, recognizing the need for affirmative action to address historical disadvantage. Furthermore, the Directive Principles of State Policy, while not legally enforceable, set out important goals, including securing "that men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood" (Article 39(a)) and "that there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women" (Article 39(d)). The Hindu Code Bill reforms of the 1950s, though significantly diluted from the

original draft, also aimed to modernize and grant more rights to Hindu women in matters of marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption.

- **The Gap Between Law and Lived Reality:** Despite these progressive constitutional guarantees and legislative steps, the lived realities of the vast majority of Indian women changed remarkably little in the immediate post-independence decades. Deep-seated patriarchal norms, embedded within family structures, religious practices, economic systems, and social customs, continued to enforce profound inequalities. Issues like dowry demands and related harassment and deaths (though the Dowry Prohibition Act was passed in 1961), widespread violence against women (domestic, sexual, public), unequal access to resources (land, credit, technology), alarming gender gaps in health and nutrition indicators, low levels of female literacy and high dropout rates, and severely limited political participation at all levels persisted largely unaddressed by a state machinery primarily focused on broader macroeconomic development, political consolidation, and national security (Agnes, 2004). The state often subsumed women's specific needs and rights under broader, gender-blind welfare policies or family-oriented development schemes. There was a fundamental failure to recognize or address the structural, systemic nature of gender subordination. The dominant social sciences within academia largely mirrored this state neglect. Disciplines like sociology, economics, political science, and history failed almost entirely to incorporate gender as a critical category of analysis. Women remained largely invisible within the dominant discourses of national development, their labour (especially unpaid domestic and care work) uncounted, their political agency ignored, and their experiences marginalized. Academic scholarship reproduced the assumption that the "universal" subject was male, rendering women's lives and contributions analytically insignificant.

15.3.3. The Watershed Moment: The "Towards Equality" Report (1974) and the Resurgence of Grassroots Activism

The early 1970s proved to be the pivotal turning point that directly catalyzed the formal emergence of Women's Studies as a recognized academic field. This period was characterized by significant social, economic, and political upheaval in India. Economic stagnation, rising inflation, widespread unemployment, and growing political disenchantment culminated in massive protests and the declaration of the Internal Emergency (1975-77). Crucially, this ferment also witnessed a powerful resurgence of the women's movement, galvanized by a confluence of international feminist currents (reports of movements in the US and Europe) and pressing, often horrific, local crises. It was within this charged atmosphere that the state itself commissioned a report that would become the bedrock document for feminist scholarship.

- **The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI):** Recognizing belatedly, the persistent and glaring gap between constitutional ideals and women's lived experiences, the Government of India appointed the high-level CSWI in 1971. Chaired by prominent educator Dr. Phulrenu Guha, the committee included activists, academics, and administrators. Its landmark report, Towards Equality, published in

1974, delivered a searing, meticulously researched indictment of the actual condition of Indian women nearly three decades after independence.

- **Key Findings and Catalytic Impact:** The Towards Equality report was groundbreaking in its scope and depth. It moved beyond anecdotal evidence to provide comprehensive, statistically supported documentation of pervasive gender inequality across all critical spheres of life:
  - **Demography:** It highlighted the alarming and declining child sex ratio (number of girls per 1000 boys aged 0-6), pointing towards deep-seated son preference manifesting in sex-selective practices.
  - **Education:** It documented shockingly high rates of female illiteracy, significant gender gaps in school enrolment, and tragically high dropout rates for girls, especially at the secondary level.
  - **Economy:** It revealed severe underrepresentation of women in the formal workforce, their concentration in low-paid, unskilled, and informal sector jobs, significant wage gaps even for similar work, and the systematic invisibility and undervaluation of their unpaid labour within the household and agriculture.
  - **Law:** It exposed the glaring inadequacies and gender biases within existing laws, including discriminatory personal laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and guardianship across different religious communities, and the weak implementation of laws meant to protect women (like the Dowry Prohibition Act).
  - **Health:** It detailed the poor health and nutritional status of women and girls, high maternal mortality rates, and limited access to healthcare, particularly in rural areas.
  - **Politics:** It showed the abysmally low representation of women in Parliament, state legislatures, local bodies (before the 73rd/74th Amendments), and within political party hierarchies.

Critically, the CSWI moved beyond mere description to offer a powerful analysis. It argued unequivocally that women's subordination was not accidental or incidental, but structural – embedded in the very fabric of social, economic, cultural, and political institutions. Perhaps its most significant contribution to the birth of Women's Studies was its explicit identification of the failure of existing academic disciplines. The report stated: "the main objective of the programme of women's studies is the generation and analysis of data with a view to uncovering significant trends in patterns of social and economic organisation which affect women's position in the long run." This was a call from an official body, for a new kind of academic endeavour, one focused specifically towards understanding and challenging the roots of gender inequality through rigorous, interdisciplinary research and analysis. It declared that traditional disciplines had failed women and that a dedicated field was necessary.

- **Synergy with Grassroots Feminist Movements:** The publication of Towards Equality coincided with, and was powerfully amplified by, an unprecedented upsurge in autonomous women's activism across the country. Women were mobilizing not just around abstract principles, but against specific, visceral, and often brutal forms of oppression they faced daily:

- **Violence:** Nationwide protests erupted against custodial rape, exemplified by the horrific Mathura rape case (where a young tribal girl was raped by policemen in a police station), leading to significant legal reforms (Custodial Rape amendments in 1983). Campaigns against rape by landlords, dominant caste men, and rampant domestic violence gained massive momentum. The movement against "dowry deaths" (the murder of brides for failing to bring sufficient dowry) became a defining struggle of the late 1970s and 1980s, forcing the issue onto the national agenda and leading to amendments strengthening the Dowry Prohibition Act and introducing Section 498A IPC (cruelty by husband or relatives).
- **Economic Justice:** Movements highlighted the crisis of women's unemployment, their exploitation in the agricultural sector (as landless labourers), in the growing informal sector (home-based work, domestic work, street vending), and their systematic marginalization within state-led development models that often increased their burdens (e.g., displacement, loss of commons, introduction of technologies that displaced female labour) while offering them little benefit. The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), founded in 1972 by Ela Bhatt, became a powerful model of organizing women in the informal economy around their rights as workers.
- **Feeding New Dimensions into Scholarship:** This vibrant, and highly visible activism directly fed into the nascent field of Women's Studies, compelling it to grapple with urgent, complex issues that demanded new analytical frameworks:

- **Complexities of Violence:** Research had to move beyond simplistic notions to analyze the multifaceted nature of violence against women including domestic violence within the "private" sphere, societal violence including sexual harassment and assault, custodial violence by state agents, and evolving forms of sexual exploitation linked to changing economic and social structures.
- **Intersectionality in Practice:** Activism on the ground, particularly involving Dalit women, Adivasi women, and women from religious minorities, forced a critical focus on how structures of domination based on caste, class, religion, and ethnicity intersected with gender to produce unique and compounded forms of oppression. Scholars like Uma Chakravarti began theorizing "Brahmanical Patriarchy" (Chakravarti, 1993). Furthermore, research emerged on how patriarchal structures were being actively reasserted and reshaped within the rising tide of revivalist, fundamentalist, communal, and ethnic movements across the country.
- **Peasant and Rural Women:** Investigations into the crucial but often invisible economic contributions of peasant women (in farming, animal husbandry, forest produce collection) and their "undiscovered history" of resistance raised fundamental questions about rural economies, exploitation, and ecological sustainability. This created natural alignments with emerging concerns of ecological and environmental movements about the gendered impact of large-scale development projects (dams, mining, deforestation) on livelihoods and resources.
- **Systemic Marginalization Exposed:** Research systematically exposed women's marginalization and exploitation within the formal and informal economy, their

experiences of discrimination and stereotyping within the educational system, their representation (or more often, misrepresentation and commodification) in media and communication, and their exclusion from meaningful participation in the political process and decision-making bodies.

- **Critique of Development Paradigms:** Cumulatively, this body of research transformed Women's Studies into one of the most potent and consistent critics of the prevailing "development" paradigm. Scholars meticulously documented how state policies and economic models often reinforced existing gender inequalities or created new forms of disadvantage, failing systematically to address women's specific needs, rights, and contributions. It highlighted the gender-blindness of planning and the detrimental impact of structural adjustment programs later imposed in the 1990s.

It was precisely amidst these powerful "activist incursions" into the public sphere, responding to state neglect of gender-based violence, economic marginalization, and institutionalized misogyny, that Women's Studies crystallized as the scholarly and analytical front of India's resurgent women's movement. The Towards Equality report provided the official diagnosis and mandate; the women's movements provided the urgent questions, the lived experiences, and the political energy. Women's Studies emerged to bridge the gap, to provide the rigorous analysis needed to understand and dismantle the structures of oppression revealed by both.

15.3 INSTITUTIONALIZATION: FOUNDING CENTRES AND SEEKING ACADEMIC LEGITIMACY

The powerful momentum generated by the Towards Equality report and the surging women's movement quickly translated into concrete institutional forms dedicated to the nascent field of Women's Studies. The late 1970s and 1980s saw the establishment of pioneering centres:

• SNDT Women's University, Bombay (1974): Holding a unique position as a university established specifically for women (founded in 1916 during the social reform era by Dhondo Keshav Karve), SNDT was a natural pioneer. In 1974, directly responding to the CSWI's call, it established the Research Centre for Women's Studies (RCWS), recognized as the first such dedicated centre in India and indeed, South Asia. Its initial mandate, reflecting the report's emphasis on data gaps, focused heavily on the systematic documentation of various aspects of women's lives – their work, health, education, legal status – aiming to build a robust, empirical knowledge base that had been glaringly absent. This foundational work of data collection was crucial.

• Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), New Delhi (1976): Founded shortly after SNDT's RCWS, ISST emerged as an independent research institution committed explicitly to undertaking new, policy-relevant research on women within the context of India's ongoing socio-economic and political transformation. It aimed from the outset to bridge the gap between research and action, focusing on issues like women's work, poverty, and the impact of development policies. Its independence allowed for a degree of critical flexibility.

• Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), New Delhi (1980): Established

with a strong interdisciplinary mandate and close links to the government (initially under the umbrella of the Indian Council of Social Science Research - ICSSR), CWDS rapidly became a major national hub for research on women's issues. It developed significant programmes focusing on critical areas like women's labour (both formal and informal), health, education, law, and political participation, often adopting an action-research approach that sought to directly inform policy and empower communities (Kumar, 1993). Its location in the capital and government links gave it significant visibility.

• Integration into University Structures: Alongside these dedicated research centres, the 1980s saw the crucial, though gradual, integration of Women's Studies into the formal curricula of mainstream universities. This was a vital step in legitimizing it as an academic discipline worthy of teaching and degrees. Pioneering institutions included the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Bombay, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, and the University of Hyderabad. This involved the challenging work of developing specialized courses, designing postgraduate programmes (initially at MA and MPhil levels), and fostering faculty research explicitly focused on gender. The University Grants Commission (UGC), the primary funding body for higher education in India, later played a significant role in supporting this integration through its own initiatives, notably the establishment of a scheme for UGC-funded Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) in universities and colleges starting in 1986.

15.4 THE RISE OF AUTONOMOUS FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP: ALTERNATIVE SPACES AND CRITICAL VOICES

Parallel to, and sometimes critically observing, the establishment of university-linked centres, the late 1980s and 1990s witnessed the emergence of autonomous feminist research, documentation, and publishing initiatives. These often arose organically from the women's movement itself or from academics disillusioned with institutional constraints. They sought spaces less bound by university bureaucracy, funding conditionalities, and hierarchical structures, and more directly connected to activism, marginalized communities, and critical intellectual traditions.

- **SPARROW (Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women), Mumbai (1988):** Founded by academics Neera Desai, Kamalini Bhansali, and C.S. Lakshmi (writing as Ambai), SPARROW recognized the ephemeral nature of much of the women's movement's history and women's everyday experiences. Traditional archives were often silent on these. SPARROW pioneered the systematic use of oral histories, photographs, posters, pamphlets, songs, speeches, and other audiovisual materials, capturing the voices, narratives, and visual culture of resistance and lived experience that were conspicuously absent from official and academic records. Their work was foundational in preserving movement history.
- **Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad (1995):** Explicitly committed to interdisciplinary research and critical theory, Anveshi gained significant recognition for its rigorous engagement with the complex intersections of caste and gender, drawing inspiration from Dalit and anti-caste intellectual traditions. It developed innovative, often community-based methodologies (like community sammelans - dialogues) and produced scholarship that challenged dominant upper-caste, middle-

class feminist frameworks, focusing intently on the experiences and theorizations of Dalit, Muslim, and other marginalized women. Its bilingual journal (Anveshi Broadsheet later Bhoomika) was crucial for dissemination.

- **Challenges of Autonomy:** Operating outside the formal university structure provided invaluable independence and flexibility, allowing for more politically engaged and experimental work. However, it also presented significant, often existential, challenges. The most persistent was securing sustained funding. These autonomous centers frequently faced rejection of funding proposals by government agencies like ICSSR or UGC, or by large foundations. Officials sometimes dismissed their critical, often activist-oriented, community-linked work as "non-priority," lacking "academic rigor," or being "too political" (The Hindu, 2021). This forced them to rely on smaller grants, individual donations, or income-generating activities (like SPARROW's art postcard sales), making long-term planning and stability extremely difficult. Despite these formidable hurdles, they carved out vital intellectual spaces, enriching the field with diverse perspectives, critical methodologies, and a commitment to knowledge production rooted in struggle, which were often less visible or constrained within mainstream academia.

Thus, the roots of Women's Studies in India are thus deep, tangled, and multifaceted. It emerged not as a top-down academic imposition driven by abstract theory, but as a necessary, often urgent, intellectual response to over a century of grappling with the "woman question." This journey began with the social reformers' challenges to barbaric traditions and the fight for female education; navigated the profound paradoxes of constitutional equality unmet in the harsh realities of everyday life for most women; and culminated in the explosive synergy of the Towards Equality report's devastating diagnosis and the vibrant, diverse, and often confrontational activism of the resurgent women's movement of the 1970s. Its institutionalization, beginning with pioneering centers like SNDT's RCWS, ISST, and CWDS, and later within mainstream universities like TISS, JNU, and UoH (supported eventually by the UGC scheme), provided the essential academic legitimacy, infrastructure, and pathways for teaching and degrees. Simultaneously, the rise of autonomous centers like SPARROW and Anveshi ensured the persistence of critical, independent voices and methodologies focused on preserving marginalized histories, amplifying subaltern voices, and rigorously addressing complex intersections like caste. Born from the urgent need to understand and dismantle structures of oppression revealed by activism and the CSWI report, Women's Studies in India was fundamentally established as the scholarly arm of the broader struggle for gender justice, critically interrogating every facet of Indian society – its history, economy, polity, culture, and its chosen path of development.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

2. Explain the importance of Towards Equality Report.

15.5 INSTITUTIONALIZATION VS. AUTONOMOUS SPACES

i) Institutionalization of Feminist Knowledge

The formal establishment of Women's Studies Centres (WSCs) under University Grants Commission (UGC) funding in 1986 fundamentally reconfigured the field's radical potential. While positioning itself as an institutional victory, the UGC's mandate of "extension activity as the crucial interventionist role for societal improvement" (University Grants Commission, 1986, Sec. 4.2) redirected feminist scholarship toward state-approved community service. This shift from knowledge revolution to policy implementation exemplified what scholar Maithreyi Krishna Raj termed the "dilemma of institutional legitimacy versus movement accountability" (as cited in John, 2008, p. 72). Centers like the Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS) became hubs for empirical studies on women's labour or health but avoided structural critiques of caste-patriarchy or neoliberal economics to retain funding (Sreenivas, 2023). For instance, CWDS research on agricultural workers documented wage gaps but stopped short of analyzing how corporate land grabs disproportionately displaced Dalit women, a silence reflecting institutional self-censorship (Kumar, 1993). The bureaucratic demand for "non-controversial" outputs reduced feminist pedagogy to technical skill-building (e.g., literacy camps) rather than consciousness-raising about systemic oppression. This transformed Women's Studies into "a depoliticized instrument of state development goals" (Sreenivas, 2023, p. 12), severing its roots in the anti-rape and anti-dowry movements of the 1970s-80s, which had deeper scholarly roots in issues of power and subordination.

ii) Autonomous Feminist Spaces

While institutional centres navigated bureaucratic constraints, independent collectives emerged to preserve voices erased by academia. SPARROW (Sound & Picture Archives for Research on Women), founded in 1988 by academics Neera Desai and Kamalini Bhansali, employed radical methodologies that rejected UGC's positivist frameworks. Their archival work documented Dalit women's protest songs against caste violence and oral histories of the Mathura rape case agitations (1978) – narratives absent in university syllabi. When seeking government grants, officials dismissed this work as "non-priority chit-chat" (The Hindu, 2021), forcing SPARROW to crowdfund through art postcard sales (Jain et al., 2018). Similarly, Hyderabad's Anveshi Research Centre (1995) facilitated community sammelans (dialogues) where Muslim and Dalit women testified

about police brutality, publishing findings in Telugu to bypass English-language gatekeeping (Chaudhuri, 2012). Their existence constituted a direct challenge to institutional Women's Studies, proving feminist knowledge could thrive beyond institutionalised academia under the auspices of state.

15.6 CONTEMPORARY CRISES: NEOLIBERAL ERASURE AND POLITICAL BACKLASH

The fragile equilibrium between institutional and autonomous Women's Studies, always under strain, faces unprecedented challenges in the contemporary era. A confluence of neoliberal economic policies reshaping higher education and a resurgent, often aggressively anti-feminist, political nationalism poses an existential threat to the field's infrastructure, intellectual freedom, and very survival.

1. Institutional Precarity: The TISS Watershed and the Neoliberal University

The crisis engulfing the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) in early 2024 serves as a stark, emblematic case study of the vulnerability of Women's Studies Centres under the neoliberal model. TISS, a premier institution with a long history of commitment to social justice, houses the Advanced Centre for Women's Studies (ACWS), a leading hub for feminist research and teaching, particularly known for its work on caste, sexuality, and violence. In January 2024, TISS administration terminated the contracts of 55 staff members. This drastic action followed the lapse of grants from the Tata Education Trust (TET), which had been funding these positions. Doctoral students, deeply engaged in critical research found themselves abruptly abandoned mid-project, their supervisors gone, their academic futures thrown into jeopardy.

This crisis brutally exposed how "contractualization exploits feminist labour" (Ray & Bano, 2024, p. 89) within the contemporary university model. Core academic functions like teaching, research supervision, running critical programmes were made dependent on precarious, project-based, external funding rather than being secured as essential, permanent commitments of the university. When corporate philanthropy withdrew, the entire structure of the knowledge system collapsed overnight. The fact that it was the Women's Studies centre that bore the brunt was not incidental; fields focused on critical social analysis and marginalized groups are often deemed less "viable" or "productive" in neoliberal metrics than technical or management fields. Only sustained nationwide student protests under the banner #SaveTISS and solidarity strikes by faculty forced a temporary, fragile reprieve, a six-month restoration of contracts. This illustrates the field's institutional fragility and its dependence on the whims of funders and the priorities of university administrations increasingly modelled on corporate lines (The Indian Express, 2024; The Hindu, 2024).

2. Systematic Defunding and Delegitimization of Autonomous Spaces

Simultaneously, autonomous feminist spaces faced intensified, systematic pressure from the state apparatus, choking off vital resources and attempting to silence critical voices.

- Senior government figures have engaged in overt delegitimization of feminist

frameworks and vocabulary. A Union Minister's derisive 2023 comment, widely reported, scoffing "What's patriarchy, ya! First tell me in Indian languages!" (Indian Express, 2023), epitomizes this attitude. It frames feminist concepts as alien, Western imports irrelevant to "authentic" Indian culture, dismissing decades of indigenous feminist scholarship and struggle. This fuels a broader climate of hostility towards gender justice activism.

- Government audits starkly reveal the chasm between rhetoric and action on women's issues, diverting resources away from essential services:
- The Rs. 1,000 crore (10 billion rupees) Nirbhaya Fund, established in 2013 following the horrific Delhi gang-rape to support initiatives for women's safety, remained a shocking 92% unspent as of 2022, according to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) of India (CAG Report No. 18, 2022). This bureaucratic paralysis occurred amidst persistently high and often escalating levels of sexual and gender-based violence.

  o Studies of state-level mechanisms, like Tamil Nadu's Gender Budget Cells, exposed grotesque inefficiency and neglect, with 31% of allocated funds for women's welfare schemes simply lapsing due to "improper budgetary processes" and lack of political will (Anandhi & Swaminathan, 2006, p. 114). This pattern repeats across states, reflecting systemic under-prioritization.

3. The Triple Crisis and its Impact

This confluence of the institutional precarity exemplified by TISS and affecting other WSCs facing budget cuts and pressure to demonstrate "market relevance"; the systematic defunding and delegitimization of autonomous spaces; and the state neglect and underutilization of resources meant for gender justice, as seen with the Nirbhaya Fund, constitutes a triple crisis. It threatens not just individual centres or groups, but the very ecosystem of feminist knowledge production in India. Decades of accumulated scholarship, archival material, pedagogical expertise, and activist networks built through immense struggle face potential erasure. The space for critical feminist analysis, particularly that which challenges dominant power structures (state, caste, capital), is being actively constricted. The ability to train new generations of feminist scholars and activists is severely compromised. The contemporary crisis underscores how neoliberalism and majoritarian politics converge to undermine the foundations of a field dedicated to exposing and challenging inequality.

Self-Assessment Question (SAQ)

Note: (a) Space is given below for writing your answer.
(b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this unit.

3. A Note on importance of autonomous feminist spaces

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