

BOOK REVIEW

THE ISSUES AT STAKE – THEORIES AND PRACTICES IN THE CONTEMPORARY WOMEN’S MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

BY

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About the book

First published by „Kali for Women“ in 1992, this book is written by Nandita Shah and Nandita Gandhi (ISBN 81 8510722 X), **The Issues at Stake-Practices In The Contemporary Women’s Movements In India**’s a collection of memories, research, experiences, struggle and suggestions from the author duo.

Summary/ Abstract/ Essence of the Book

The authors begin the book with „Who “we” are”which puts them in the context of their childhood and young age which was influenced by the Nationalist Movement, Charisma od Gandhiji, Alexander Dumas, Maxim Gorky, Mulk Raj Anand, and many other worlds and national phenomena. They also talk about their detachment for the first-hand experiences of the troubled and tortured as they were coming from the upper middle class Hindu savarna families.

In the process of narrowing down the whole idea of movements related to women’s issues, the authors have selected four major areas namely sexual violence, health, work, and legal campaigns. They also excluded the collection of case studies form their preview. By 1984, they came up with their first office with the name” the Women’s Decade Research Collective- WDRC. In 1985, they got a grant from the ISS Holland. By 1986 their struggle started in the various parts of India to collect the stories/ data/ cases and documents. Their train journey from Assam to Benaras to Madhya Pradesh taught them to be a part of the daily struggle put up by the women across India. The action program got strengthened by the little surveys they took and the information and advice they picked up during the journey.

The women’s movement has no beginning or “origin”. It exists as an emotion, anger deep within us. The women’s movement history also is like notes in a cycle of rhythm; each is a separate piece, yet a part of the whole.

PHASES IN THE INDIAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT (IWM)

Emerged as a form of a social reform movement in the 1800s, the Women’s movement became a focused one very soon. By 1829, the prolonged campaign was done against Sati. The first Mahila Mandal’s were organized by Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj. By 1905, women leaders joined the growing nationalist movement as a response to the Swadeshi Movement. They supported boycott of British goods, non-cooperation and civil disobedience movements. They supported Gandhi and other leaders.

THE ALL INDIA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE (AIWC)

In 1924 became the single largest national voice of the divergent groups. By 1955, the constitution of Independent India put forward some of the most progressive laws for women. By 1970, the internal conflicts between landlords and tribals in the areas of Sarvodaya many young volunteers set up the Shramik Sanghatna. By 1973, the Sarvodaya concept leader, Jay Prakash Narayan, launched anti-price rise and anti-corruption movements. Between 1969 and 1975, many trade unions, Left parties, peasants, and laborers started agitation against the system. This created a conscious collective basis for women related movements like Western women's movement. These were the precursors for the 3rd wave of IWM. By 1975, the communist party of India (CPM) introduced the idea of a joint women's conference which happened in Kerala and Pune. In Hyderabad, radical women students founded POW. By 1980, the Stri Mukti Sangathan in Bombay took up issues like the famous Mathura Rape Case and spread its wings in Delhi and Pune.

The book thus talks about characterize and categorize 14 years of activity and issues, organizations, alive or dormant, viewpoints, changing or solidified. Some popular methods used are bracketing a period of time and perceiving events through the selection of representative organizations. The case study approach is used as well and some typologies are used which are based on distinction or ideology. The chapters deal with.

- Violence becomes a political issue
- The campaign against rape
- As powerful as rapists
- Sexual harassment
- Murdering for dowry
- Wife beating-the invisible violence
- Violence on the images of women
- Sex stereotyping In the media
- Beauty contests
- When can obscenity be called pornography
- Theorizing violence
- Process of politicization
- The interaction with the state
- Recognizing the right to health
- Facing the family planning problem

- The campaign against injectable contraceptives
- Politics of reproduction
 1. Laboring for love and wages
 2. Equal wages for equal love
 3. Occupational hazards
 4. The sexual division of labor
 5. Legal campaigns

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THIS BOOK

I think this book is a great repository of the historical dynamics of women's movements in India which also provides a very good critique of the woman as an entity and the movement as the ever-changing dynamics but certain areas like sexual violence, the engagement of the state in these issues, the common Civil Court and the inter-organizational conflicts are not very comprehensively discussed. Many interviews of activists or the victims are providing one-sided stories without any holistic approach. Women's interests are both general and specific and at a class, caste and ethnic level. They are complex and conflicting at the same time. The immediate actions and needs are based on women's existing roles. The organizations are largely covered in urban and semi-urban areas which are giving a biased view at times.

CONCLUSION

The book doesn't have a conclusion because it is about movements, therefore, it requires another rendering by another rendering by another audience. There are many issues, dilemmas, and insights, actions, and thoughts which are not covered in this book or directly or indirectly implied throughout the narrative. The points which are raised here will help further debate and study on the Indian women's movement. This book will help to get an exhaustive idea to anyone and everyone who want to indulge in the complex web of women's movements in India. The Dalit women's movement has a crucial role to play in the analysis of Dalit feminist approach because it is ***"almost impossible to separate the history of action from the history of ideas. In other words, the conceptual debates themselves embodied the history of doing and vice versa."***