Neither do they. And as such, it carries no answers, at least no easy answers. I think that about a lot of things we have to accept that we don't know what to do.

Starting this journal and the reading group was an attempt to combat the paralysis that seemed to have set into progressive politics in Delhi University. The past five months have been about realizing how limited we are and the work required of us. Feminism isn’t a label that we could pick up and wear. It is a process of work, on ourselves and on our surroundings. We’ve had to learn that this can be a very challenging process. I am going to use the space offered by this editorial to raise two of the questions that keep coming up - in discussions with friends, in moments of frustration - questions of how to combat apathy and how to build collectives. I do so in the hope that at least some of you reading this share these questions and that those of us who do can start working on them together. Because even though I said above that we need to accept that we don’t know what to do, we must not get comfortable in this position of not-knowing.

Apathy is mostly what we are confronted with. A few nights ago, when we were just beginning to work on the layout of this issue, we received an email about how representatives of women’s groups were not allowed to meet Soni Sori in Raipur. When we interviewed Dr. Uma Chakravarti in October she told us about a protest demonstration for Soni Sori, to which she had gone. In the time that has passed, the University has seen almost no action against the brutal sexual violence that Soni Sori has suffered in custody. How do we challenge this apathy - in the University and in ourselves?

Perhaps it is helpful to know that the University was not always like this. In this issue we carry the second part of the interview with Dr. Uma Chakravarti in which she gives an account of her involvement with the civil rights movement and a history of struggles in Delhi University. She discusses how college festivals seem to come into being at the time of the Emergency, as a contrast to the political debate that went on in colleges at the time. College festivals are so much a stock, accepted, de rigueur part of Delhi University now, that it is liberating to know of a time when they didn’t exist. Especially since so much student energy is directed towards organizing these festivals and finding the large corporate sponsorships that they require. It is ironic that these festivals are the popular sites of student activity today, given that they are amongst the last places where any challenge to the anti-student policies of the University administration is raised. However, glorifying the political activity that went on in the 60s and 70s is not going to help us much. But perhaps we take instances of how people negotiated their lives and their politics and try and learn that commitment from an interview as sobering as it is inspirational.

Then there is the problem of how to form collectives. Collectives that do not flatten out the histories of those who are part of them, collectives that do not privilege one category - such as gender, over others - such as class or caste. Collectives that do not just mention the intersections between gender, sexuality, caste and class and then go on functioning without beginning to deal with the meanings of these intersections, implicitly privileging one category, while making politically correct allusions to the others. The manner in which Dr. Chakravarti talks of the her Civil Rights activism and feminism as intertwined may offer an example of how to do this, and her work along with Pratiksha Baxi on the idea of sexual governance indicates the possibility and necessity of doing so. The report on Sexual Harassment, produced by the Gender Study Group in 1996, is another example of such work. Shad Naved, in his discussion of Stephen Heath's essay ‘Male Feminism’ for the ‘Classic Re-visited’ column, raises questions in ethics, politics and feminism that are incise and pertinent to where we find ourselves now.

This issue also has the details of two student seminars that the Gender Studies Group is organizing, in January and February, on ‘21 Key Texts in Feminism’, and ‘20 Key Moments in the Indian Women’s Movement’ [end - February]. The January seminar will be held on the 27th and 28th of January, in Delhi University. The list of texts and speakers can be found inside. Both of these seminars are intended to help us get a sense of where we are today through re-visiting the texts that have had a bearing on feminism, and through a deeper understanding of feminism and the women’s movement in India.

The Gender Studies Group has also resumed the weekly Friday (1 - 3 p.m.) discussions that had been suspended in November and December. Previously, we’d been trying to discuss texts around one topic per month. However, this time we’ve begun with texts that broadly discuss questions around gender and history writing, and plan on doing so over two months’ time. The text we began with was Joan Scott’s ‘Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis’, followed by her essay ‘Experience’. We will next be discussing Denise Riley’s book War in the Nursery: Theories of the Child and Mother.

After that, we plan on taking up the topic of feminism and psychoanalysis. As of now our discussions have been an attempt to understand how the subjectively felt and objectively measurable are intertwined in experiences of gender and sexuality. Related questions are also discussed by the Sexualities Reading Group which meets on Saturday, from 2 - 4 p.m. The text being discussed currently is Freud’s ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’. Both groups meet on the DSE lawns, and copies of the readings are available with the DSE photocopy shop. Please email or call if you plan to come, so that we can let you know in case there is any change in timings.

I’d like to thank all the contributors for taking time out to write for the journal. Submissions are invited for our next issue on ‘Film and Media’ and should be emailed to the address provided below.
Could you tell us more about your work in the civil rights movement across these decades? How do you see the connection between that and your academic work?

I think Miranda House was actually an interesting space because despite being a women's college, it was in the campus and therefore participating in and absorbing the atmosphere of the campus. The campus was a very, very active space in the late sixties. The ML movement that sent off people like Dilip Simeon and so on underground, into the villages, had its resonance even in Miranda House. We had a student for instance, who was quite actively engaged with the Naxalites. The Miranda House auditorium was sometimes used by people from outside the college, from students and teachers in the university more generally. We would have plays which were very leftist and quite interesting. People like Maya Rao and Anuradha Kapoor were in Miranda House, and they were transforming the theatre scene in the college quite dramatically.

In Delhi, you had a very active, almost volatile students movement with a strong socialist component. This socialist component, closely linked to the Lohiaites spearheaded a very important movement at that stage for teaching and evaluating in Hindi in the University. They were branded as 'Hindi fanatics' and were regarded by people in the English Department of Miranda House, very snootily, as riff raffs. But actually it was a very valid demand - instruction in the mother tongue up all the way up to the University system. And having taught in Wardha more recently, I realize how important it is that you should actually be able to study in the language that you're comfortable with - or especially write in the language you're comfortable with. You may read in any language but one of the problems with the system today is that students are forced to write in a language that they're not really familiar with so that even students who are intellectually very sensitive aren't able to express themselves properly.

So the sixties and seventies was a great time in the campus - it was full of activity and questioning and resistance. The microcosm of the university reflecting the macrocosm of India was quite nice. Delhi University Teachers Association [DUTA] was especially active in those days. I think its energy has declined now, but it was very active then. So you had this sense of there being a discussion space and there were all sorts of trends that you could see in the University. And in the years before the Emergency the State was increasingly being regarded as lacking legitimacy. It had failed to deliver on its promises, radical transformation had not taken place, so you could actually sense this disappointment and disillusionment with independence as it were, supposedly the political independence that you got, but nothing more.

In 1971, the Bangladesh war happened. Miranda House was reacting to various things. For instance, Nandita Haksar was a student of mine and the Bangladesh war has happened; she drags me off on a demonstration on what's happening in Bangladesh, and we give blood, the two of us. I faint after it, but she gets up and marches off to D-school quite actively. Students - and I often say this, this is an important point for me - students were actually very, very active, engaged politically. And in a sense, anyone who was democratic - a democratic teacher, couldn't stand outside of what they were doing. So we were absorbing all of that. Even before the Emergency came, there were big demonstrations - actually, I remember the movement, which had Mrinal Gore and Pramila Danavate, and the Bombay mobilisation which preceeded the anti price-rise movement in Delhi, and it was very creative in its strategies; it was all part of the discontent with the way the state had performed. And this too was a part of whatever we absorbed. And in that situation, the Emergency was clamped.

The Emergency became a cathartic movement in our lives and increasingly so in Delhi University because, 200 teachers from Delhi University were picked up and put in jail. So it was quite an extraordinary thing. Many of them were supposedly right-wingers, I mean BJP. The DUTA president was at that time a BJP guy called O. P. Kohli. But also it was the heart of the place where dissent was being articulated in multiple ways. So the fact that the university space was actually lost to us as a place of debate was deeply felt by us.

For instance, one of the things that happened was that all elections came to an end. Student elections ended, and we had nominated student bodies. The festival culture which I abhorred as a teacher - you can trace it back to the Emergency and post-Emergency when these cultural festivals were actually created as a contrast to the political debates that were going on. It was not so well sponsored with big money then, but this culture fest itself came at that stage. Miranda House was actually quite interesting at that point, because before that, we are doing everything under the sun. Miranda House was one of the first institutions to participate in the DUSU election process. And people like Kamla Shankaran who teaches in the Law Faculty now was part of that process. She was a Student Counsellor, and as part of that position, had to watch these goons - because it was already goon culture, the DUSU, which she described to us hilariously as chairs flying and things being thrown around. But still Miranda House refused to be outside the political domain [because that would be abdicating a space and putting us into a purdah culture]. During the Emergency, one of my dear colleagues actually had to go underground. She was a socialista and she was constantly breaking down because she had a history of depression, and while she was underground, her sister who had brought her up died. So, they couldn't reach her - they didn't know where she was, so she didn't get this information. And when she came out, she just never got reconciled to that moment, the fact that she'd lost her sister, and she had never got to be there and grieve and so on. So there is this presence of the Emergency right in our life, not only the 200 teachers but here is this college of mine who had gone underground. So the Emergency is experienced very, very dramatically and personally. Anand's younger brother, for a while, was on the fringes of the ML - he was ML, and he was underground and the cops came looking for him to the house. So they actually came to our place in the middle of the night and, it was quite an event - the children were small. Next day they - fortunately for us, we didn't know where he was, but next day they came in the guise of civic - they came in civies with crew cuts, you know these police guys, with the brown keds and little crew cuts and of course even Siddharth could make out that this was not the postman, and they said, there's a money order for Ashok Chakravarti, thinking that because of the money order, the person will come out. And of course he was too smart, he knew what was happening. So, children actually also grew up - Siddharth especially was at that time twelve or thirteen, very much feeling the experience of the Emergency.

It was a terrible time - I remember being in a state of permanent, complete depression, I mean - what have we come to? You couldn't speak in class because there was this rumour that there would be informers and so on. After a while, I think we got so furious with this induced state of fear that we began challenging it and my students and I were being just anachronistically subversive sitting in the class because we couldn't allow our lives to be completely taken over. And then of course the Emergency inexplicably came to its own logical end.

Demonstrations were so common in those days - I had gone to hundreds of demonstrations, before and after the Emergency. One of the best demonstrations that we had was at the end of the Emergency when thousands of people from DU came out and we went on this march through the campus.

Students from Sociology Department had been picked up - there was this one student, Vijay Pratap, I don't know if you've ever heard of him, who was picked up. The socialists were very active. They had made up a poster - they had taken a photograph of Indira Gandhi, and put it into a poster form and just put bars in front of that, i.e. drawn these slats in front of her. And the slogan on that was "We want democracy, not a dictatorship!" That basically, the jail was going to be the last post of this dictator. And some of them got picked up doing this. So Vijay Pratap spent time in jail.
There were two young men from Jaipur who were also picked up. One of them was a colleague of Anand's. So these couple of people from the Department would go to meet these guys in jail - of course the rest of them would not, but at least a few of these teachers went to see their colleagues in jail, along with the Student Union. That's the kind of atmosphere there was. So at the end of that, the need for a strong Civil Rights movement to counter this kind of authoritarian fascism - this was a kind of secular fascist state - was extremely significant for some of us.

A big meeting was held in 35 Ferozeshah Road - in a place that has now been knocked off - that big auditorium is gone, it's a car-park and it's horrible - it was the scene of so many meetings and it was amazing. I can still remember that meeting - that auditorium was jam-packed with some thousands of people, and some people had come from Bombay. The Bombay University had experienced the Emergency in very, very powerful ways - the students from the Department of Sociology in Bombay University had spent time in jail. So there was this big civil rights meeting, and then the PUC and PUDR was formed at that stage. Sudesh [Vaid] whom I knew a little bit before, she'd spent some time in America, done her Ph.D and returned. We had been active in challenging the Delhi University Amendment Bill, in which the clauses were that you could throw out a teacher for 'good and sufficient reason', which was to be defined later on by ordinance. You didn't even have to press charges against them. It was horrible, we thought 'what is this nonsense' and for two months we held a very militant campaign and finally, that bill never came. The Delhi University Amendment Bill was allowed to lapse because of the militant reaction to it but the Emergency came thereafter.

I had got to know Sudesh at that stage, and post the Emergency - I mean, everybody who vaguely had an ounce of democratic sentiment in them was at that big meeting. And we were all then part of PUCL and PUDR – at that time it was the PUCL and that's how it began. Over a period of time, fact-finding was one way we would participate in what was going on - we used the University space to hold meetings at this time. I remember after 1977, Anand Patwardhan's 'Prisoners of Conscience' was shown in Miranda House. I was at that big meeting. And we were all then part of the University. The Bombay University had spent time in jail. So there was discussion groups and there was this famous Delhi University Discussion Society called DUDS. And it used to happen in D-school. That was the space in which it happened. Very liberal - just the position that you have to be engaged, that you have to discuss everything.

But great teachers like Professor Randhir Singh taught in Delhi University all their lives. He used to take a class in the Political Science Department. Here was this man who used to teach Political Theory and he was the expert on Marxism. But he would not be given the course on Marxism, he used to teach a course called 'From Plato to Rousseau'. And he used to teach Plato to Rousseau via Marx. So everything was taught via Marx. Students would be running out of the classes - in those days there used to be attendance, they would sort of jump out of the classroom when the teacher's back was turned; here they would jump into the class because everybody attended those classes - didn't matter whether you were a Political Science student or not. So the University was actually a very, very vital space in terms of discussion, and in terms of activism. We were the first teachers who took to the streets and some of the other teachers - we had to argue with them. Some of them were socialists and said 'No! Teachers should not go on the streets and they should not demonstrate on the streets.' And I said, how can you say this, I mean, you're a socialist and you're a member of the socialist class is out on the streets, why should we not be out there? So you had arguments with your own older mentors. It gave you a lot of space, which is why when the Emergency happened, it was experienced so dramatically in the University. The Emergency was declared and these 200 teachers had been picked up, six of them were ML, supposed to be pro-ML. There was no income coming into their families and they were in bad shape.

The guy we had put into the Academic Council - when I saw him for the first time after the Emergency had been declared, I caught hold of him and I said, 'what're you doing?' And he clucked and the next time he saw me, he crossed the road because he didn't want to see me. Here was this man, we had put him into office and this idiot was backing off. So that sense of this University actually being very, very vibrant space that had not lost its debate and its political edge - that is my memory, my sense of the University.

Right from the late sixties and early seventies, the gender question was being articulated in the University. Women's movement, you talk about civil rights and feminist issues were going simultaneously. So in a sense, civil and democratic rights and feminist issues were going simultaneously, in the lives of many of us women. I often said, when I am in the civil rights camp, I go plead the cause of gender. And when you're sitting in the women's movement, you talk about civil rights and

ed on the basis of their talent and looks or whatever it is. Late sixties, Urvashi Butalia, Madhu Kishwar, Nandita Haksar, Akhila Ramachandran - they're all there at the same time, more or less overlapping with each other. And they're saying, 'what is this nonsense, what is this canon of beauty that says you have to look a certain kind of way, why is my mother not beautiful just because she's got lines on her face, why is the working class woman not beautiful because she's got cracks on her hands and feet...' and they threw the so-called institution out.

So the gender question was actually being raised in very interesting ways right from early seventies onwards. That was retained, I think till - perhaps 1990, which may have been a turning point, and maybe it was the Mandal agitation that killed it. It was the Mandal agitation and the awful position of the Department of Sociology - the stunts of the Department of Sociology at that time took a stand that actually confused the situation. Here were all these scholars who were talking about caste forever, for donkey's years, and then suddenly it becomes - 'why are we being forced into these caste identities?', and they join up with the agitating students. And worse, the agitation was portrayed simplistically as an anti-state one without looking at the strong upper casteist thrust that it had which you couldn't miss if you looked at the posters and the graffiti the agitation produced. So in a sense, in this context, with cultural festivals coming in and more radical positions getting no space the democratic constituency got fractured, I think, especially around questions of caste. In 1984, it had got fractured with the anti-Sikh riots. And yet, it remained an active space for many. I formally retired in 1998, and I can't say that I retired with the feeling that the university had become a dead space. But it's increasingly dead, and I don't see it as having any engagement of serious thought. But through the 70s, 80s and 90s, the issue around sexual harassment had come up in episodic ways - it would come up every now and again. And we did this very constructive work around the Sexual Harassment bill, a sexual harassment policy which we did from the early 2000s.

The Gender Study Group, did their first report in 2001. They did a study - it's actually time to look at that study again. In your journal, you could look at that as a very interesting study – the group worked on it a lot, and they made a very creative theoretical leap in talking about things like the threshold of tolerance arising since it was never regarded seriously as an issue. There were very interesting ideas that the group brought in - the ways in which women themselves don't see some things as harassment because it happens so often that they stop thinking about that, and then only the actual physical violence is the one that they react to. You should look up that report, it's worth looking at, it's quite interesting. That was a sustained work.

Also, the space of the University was active from the point of view of democratic issues being brought to it from outside, whether it's films or theatre. On Swaha (a play) was performed for the first time in JP college. When the 1984 riots took place, Miranda House did this play titled Patas or the 'fall' on the 1984 riots which we performed for the first time in the college hall, and it was very interesting because one of the things we took on was false nationalism of the nation and we actually took on the 'killer' state.
We had a sequence in there, where we improvised upon the four lions symbol that we have, with its slogan saying 'satyameva jayate'. In the improvisation the lions become active, stand up and start killing. And the 'satyameva jayate' turns into 'hatyameva jayate', and that was actually the improvisation of one of the groups that I was put into. I was part of this thing because I was the Dramatic Society’s Advisor that year. So it was a group of us which included the film maker Shonali Bose who then made the film Amu. She was a first-year student that year. So we were all in this play together, and we created these sequences and improvised them, I remember performing it in the D–school lawns also. So the University at that time was actually very vibrant in the 70s and 80s.

I think I was in a demonstration, and I nearly got a brick thrown at my head. This was in 1980, it looked like Mrs. Gandhi was coming back because the Janata Party experiment was over and in shambles. And we were in this little demonstration against a return of the dictatorial possibilities of the Emergency which we take through the Hindu College, and Hindu College is a bastion of the Congress - the hostel particularly. So these guys come out and they start abusing the boys with us and then the women formed a big gang around them and said, ‘have a discussion with us, why are you being violent?’ So we were shoving them off and forming this little rearguard for the men. I began to feel very uncomfortable about the way in which terminology that we been brought together. I began to feel very uncomfortable about the way in which sexual harassment policy, and then later on through her work which is on sexual violence. Her Ph.D work was on rape. And then the way in which, say for instance, Gujarat - the 2002 violence had such a strong, high component of sexual violence. And then of course, this question of caste and gender being brought together. I began to feel very uncomfortable about the way in which terminology that we have received is used by us mechanically. Feminists have right from day one been saying that you can’t use concepts or terms that reproduce patriarchal baggage. And yet, we use this term ‘honour killings’. I was involved with looking at questions of inter-caste marriages, and the violence that goes with them, and the question of abduction - supposed elopements and marriages, and the violence that goes with them. I think it’s one of the nice things that comes out of thinking together - Pratiksha and I shared a lot, I started to get to know her very well at the time of the sexual harassment policy, and then later on through her work which is on sexual violence. Her Ph.D work was on rape. And then the way in which, say for instance, Gujarat - the 2002 violence had such a strong, high component of sexual violence. And then of course, this question of caste and gender being brought together. I began to feel very uncomfortable about the way in which terminology that we have received is used by us mechanically. Feminists have right from day one been saying that you can’t use concepts or terms that reproduce patriarchal baggage. And yet, we use this term ‘honour killings’. I was involved with looking at questions of inter-caste marriages, and the violence that goes with them, and the question of abduction - supposed elopements and whatever.

I’ve been thinking about that a lot; if you go back and look at my book on Ramabai, it begins with that chapter on the Peshwai, which is a lot about sexual governance, except that I never called it sexual governance. In that sense, I don’t think that term ‘fitna’ that I drew upon - ‘fitna’ is used now almost entirely as a way to describe disorder in the state. But ‘fitna’ in its original meaning is actually disorder in the family and it is sexual non-compliance, or adultery and that is at the heart of that notion of ‘fitna’ - disorder. In a sense, disorder, that kind of disorder which is a term, starts from somewhere and becomes something else. Actually you can see the connection between the two and the ways in which governance is actually a better way of thinking about it. So I see sexual governance in that sense as a useful, analytical term to take us a little bit forward in this struggle for understanding the complexity of our society and using analytical terms to describe that complexity.

Recently, you’ve been speaking about the idea of sexual governance, could you tell us more about that?

I think it’s something that I’d like to think through as a very conscientious and a very committed teacher of social history, from a perspective which is wider than the kind of history we inherited as students - the kind of history that I learnt in school was so political- history oriented: political and cultural. Social history was mostly missing. So the challenges for us in the two syllabus revisions were to actually take it out of that kind of framework and make it the history of large aggregates of people. I taught Greek and Roman history, I taught slavery, I taught the French Revolution... It was all very, very exciting. But it was still dealing with aggregates of people and as one began to practice a feminist history - a feminist perspective in history, you could also see the structural constraints in being able to re-write history from a meaningful gender perspective [when you subsumed gender, or women under large aggregates of people in slavery or feudalism or whatever].
The framework of history was divided - it was dominated by two things. One was power - power we were able to challenge by saying we don't want to do this political history type of thing. But the working out of society as divided early on in history between a public and private domain meant that the focus of all history was the public domain - and in that gendered division, you confined women to the history of the inner domain. So you can actually make this inner-out argument - the nationalist question is resolved because it's inner and outer without challenging the fact of what is inner and outer, and why we should accept these categories as the categories within which we have to work. Now it's in that context that - for instance, one of the essays that Kumkum Roy and I wrote together was how beyond a point, you are unable to write a meaningful history of women because when you try and think about it, you're still left with that framework. Were women in political power? Did they participate in agriculture? And you still left a whole section of women's lives out of this framework because it couldn't be included. Political power was completely out, many skills were also completely out, participation in the public sphere for certain categories of women was difficult. This public-private history also corresponded to division between production and reproduction. So the history of production was very important, and that is what dominated the writing of Marxist historians. The history of reproduction is completely left out. I remember saying, that in the end you were stuck - that women are not in history because they did so little in the eyes of historians.

And so, you have this 'add-women and stir' formula which we were stuck with: yeah there was a Razia, yeah there was a Jhansi ki Rani. But that's not the way to look at it. If you look at history as looking at the lives of people and their work and the entire social relations in which they are embedded, this [limited framework] doesn't help. It's that which led me to think that the framework is useless - there's only one point in history where gender was a critical element in precipitating new social relations and that was the moment when women's sexuality came to be seen as a resource for the community and became a critical resource for the construction of other social relations; its central to the new social relations that are created. So in a sense this is what Gerda Lerner does, she flips Engels on his head and she sees the control over women's sexuality as prior to the origin of class and state. In a sense, I think Engels is also saying that family and class are very closely tied to each other. But she's actually going into sexuality itself, and she argues that control over women became a model for control over other men which is the basis of class. So the idea that you could actually subordinate a whole group of people is coming from the control over women. I felt, at least that moment, this question of women's sexuality and the importance of women - controlling women - is acknowledged at that moment with these new social paradigms that generated from the hunting-gathering Neolithic society to class and state society. So now, if that is so, I said if one looks at it like that, and firstly challenges the whole idea of transition as the model, we should look at and re-think the way you can frame questions in history.

It also led me to look at the context of ancient India, and the text that is the best text that you can try to do this with is the Mahabharata - it takes many centuries to unfold its narrative and capsules it together in terms of unfolding a basic storyline and in that a story of the dynasties and of the difficulties of reproduction and creation of other social relations. It actually depicts multiple sexual practices, very diverse and flexible social, sexual practices. So I got quite excited at the idea of looking at the Mahabharata then from this lens and that has been absolutely fascinating because when one is looking at gender, transitions, history and then there is a text like the Mahabharata, to prise it open and see what it's saying about sexual governance is exciting. Sexual governance is at the heart of the matter but because it's a critical moment, the time seems to be much more flexible than it's going to be some centuries down the line in terms of the bounding of the practices, and making them normative or non-normative.

So in the paper that I've done on the transition the last bit is actually dealing with the issue of the abduction of Amba - the three sisters of the Kosal kingdom being abducted, and it's really quite a fascinating enterprise reading the text with this new lens. And I look at caste and class issues also, questions of kinship - who's in, who's out. So it's been quite fascinating to go to the text because it is a very, very complex text, and it's a very fascinating text. So you can engage with your "tradition", and also enjoy the stories but be very critically analytical about what the text is telling you. So that's been quite enjoyable.

I haven't given up on the practice of history and I have to say that despite all the despairing things that happen around at the moment, when you go back to history, you look at a text like the Mahabharata, it's really great to be applying the feminist lens on it. So I often say that my best days are when I don't have to go out because there's some burning issue, I can sit at my computer at 9 in the morning, it's my god, and if I can write, then it's like the best thing that can happen. Writing on the Mahabharata can be fun, actually - I mean, you desperately want to have fun. Also things like making a film. I didn't stop at simply writing, haan ab film bhi banaay chahiye because I enjoy seeing films...
January and February Seminars

The Gender Studies Group is organising two seminars, one in January 2012 and the other in February 2012, in Delhi, to get a sense of the developments in feminism and the women's movement in India. We think that feminist activism in the University is at a low. This is a microcosm of the feminist movement at large in the country. Feminists have noted the NGOisation and domestication of feminism at the hands of the State. The media seems to be almost entirely anti-feminist. Where is the autonomous women's movement? How do we get a sense of its history? What shape will an autonomous feminist movement take now? These are some of the rather intimidating questions that we are confronted with and which we seek answers for. The two seminars will culminate in a march of an independent, autonomous movement on March 8, 2012.

The seminars are an attempt to address these questions through gathering to get a sense of our history and our concerns and develop agendas for a resuscitated autonomous women's movement in India. To this end, we hope to revisit 21 key texts in feminism. A paper with a close reading of each text and its relation to our present will be initiated by a student followed by a discussion.

The texts that we've included are ones that we think are relevant to where we find ourselves today and while they will not be able to represent the range of feminist writing or the range of our concerns, this will amount to a beginning.

The question about the women's movement in India will be addressed by a discussion of 20 key moments in the women's movement in India. The format will be the same as that of the discussion of the key texts.

The first seminar, 20 Key Texts in Feminism, will be held on the 27th and 28th of January.

Poetry

Khusro and Nizam: A villanelle

"The real causes of the loss of the Mughal Empire were some mistakes committed by the elders of that king [Bahadur Shah], and the biggest of them all was that they had separated lover and beloved from each other, by burying Muhammad Shah between the graves of Hazrat Mahboob Elahi and Hazrat Amir Khusro"

- Ahmed Ali, 'Twilight in Delhi'

They parted them in their graves,
for a Mughal to be buried in between.
Khusro and Nizam count the days,
how long before this city's razed?
Part not the lovers, the curse had been,
they parted them in their graves.
Now look from the ridge, all Delhi's ablaze,
"They exiled the king, what do you mean?"
Khusro and Nizam count the days,
till Bahadur Shah looks for a little place
to be buried in, far from home, unseen,
they parted them in their graves.
Setting up the marquee, a worker says,
"They're white as milk, the new king an' queen,"
Khusro and Nizam count the days,
till the time another Delhi pays
its ransom to the lovers that had been,
they parted them in their graves.
Khusro and Nizam count the days.

- Akhil Katyal
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21 Keys Texts in Feminism : 
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Revisiting 1996 Gender Study Group Report on Sexual Harassment

Apoorva Gautam

The Gender Study Group (GSG) was formed by a group of students in Delhi University in 1991, in the wake of increasing hostility and violence towards women in the University campus. The group also came up with a report in 1996, which brought out the opinions and experiences of students, professors and other residents of the campus with regards to sexual harassment. Some important aspects of this report will be discussed in this article.

The report, in the very beginning, identifies the university campus as a workplace. It gives an account of several instances of sexual harassment on campus. It also claims that the issue of such gravity has not received sustained attention from concerned authorities. Further, the report sheds light on the issue of eve-teasing. In popular perception (of both women and men), eve-teasing is seen as a light-hearted, witty, funny act of making remarks at women. The report addresses this issue by stating that eve-teasing also discriminates on the basis of sex and moreover, the blame is shifted upon the victim. The report demands that eve-teasing should also be seen as sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment, in university campus, comprises of harassment of students by teachers, harassment by male members of the peer group and street harassment. Many women reported of being teased, stared at, touched and harassed by men in college canteens and libraries. Apart from the hurt and humiliation, such behaviour tends to restrict the academic and personal growth of women, the report claimed. Harassment on streets was reported by almost all women. In fact 91.7% women reported to have instances of sexual harassment. Instances of lewd remarks, gestures, grabbing, etc on the streets were almost common. Some women even reported of them or their friends being flashed at or pulled into cars. Most women felt unsafe in campus and feared cars and two-wheelers. As the report claims, there was a popular perception of the ‘good’, shy and submissive girl as opposed to the ‘bad’, outgoing and loose girl and it was the latter that faced harassment. On the contrary, women irrespective of their body language and demeanour faced harassment in campus. As given in the report, the agony and trauma of such violence is overwhelming. To experience such hostility on everyday basis is dangerous to the well-being of the women who face it. Many women start to internalise such violence. Such instances undermine the dignity of women and attack directly on their bodily integrity.

With regards to the concerned authorities, the report claims that University authorities almost dismissed such incidents or saw them as normal. The proctorial office also displayed inaction. Police was usually given the charge of security (and still is). Police forces were mostly ill-equipped and made it difficult to complain or lodge FIRs. There were several instances of policemen misbehaving with women as well. The hostel authorities resorted to putting curfews and boarding up women in the name of safety. The report shows gross inaction on the part of authorities.

In terms of suggestions, the report demanded a policy on sexual harassment and sought to hold the university authorities accountable. It also proposes to have a closed campus or at least slow traffic and more public spaces. The report claims that mismanagement of traffic often leads to increase in instances of harassment. In terms of existing laws, the report points out the Ordinance XV- B of University guidelines which deals with indiscipline. The section 3e of this ordinance states that ‘any practise of women’ shall amount to ‘gross indiscipline’ and perpetrators of it shall be expelled. Also, section 354 of Indian Penal Code can be invoked in situations of harassment.

The report in itself is a powerful document that not only presents crucial facts but also puts forward much-required demands. Also, it stresses on essential issues like the contribution of women in the upkeep of patriarchy and the trivialisation of feminism. The findings of the report lay bare the horrific extent of violence and hostility faced by women in workplaces and public spaces. And it also identifies the larger structures behind the repeated, patterned acts of violence against women.

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Sexual torture by security forces in Chhattisgarh

The abhorrently violent and oppressive conduct of Indian security forces towards Adivasis recently manifested itself in the case of Soni Sori, a school teacher from Jabeli, and Podiyam Mara of Kondre village in Chhattisgarh. These two tragic cases bring out in open the extent of sexual violence practiced by security forces in this area.

Soni Sori fled Chhattisgarh in September, 2011, after security forces fired at her on the suspicion of her being a Maoist conduit. She sought refuge in Delhi but was handed over to Chhattisgarh police in October. On being unable to produce her in district court, Chhattisgarh police claimed that she had fallen down in the prison bathroom. Medical examination, however, suggested that she had been beaten and sexually tortured. Stones were recovered from her vagina and rectum.

Podiyam Mara was arrested by CRPF on account of suspicion during an operation. He was handed over to police a day after his arrest. Before being handed over, he was brutally tortured by CRPF personnel. His genitals had been doused with petrol and set on fire. Mara later allegedly committed suicide in the police lock-up. Post mortem report confirmed “swelling over the penis and the lateral part of anus”.

Both these cases exhibit the impunity with which security forces enjoy in Chhattisgarh, and the extent of sexual violence against local people. The lack of attention such incidents receive from the State and civil society is shameful. This bizarre insensitivity towards such gross sexual violence is outrageous.
Stephen Heath is a professor of English and French at the University of Cambridge, who, over the last three decades, has written about literary theory, gender, sexuality and film studies. He is known in particular for his engagements with psychoanalysis, western feminism and deconstruction. In 1984, he wrote an essay ‘Male Feminism’ that discussed, although not for the first time, men’s complicated relationship with feminism. The essay grounds its discussion in several psychoanalytic debates of the time, such as the dissolution of the ecolo freudienne by Jacques Lacan. But my emphasis here will be to highlight the essay’s implications for a feminist politics that speaks to some present concerns. Its aim was not to argue for a special sort of ‘male’ feminism, nor did it claim to give a definitive programme for men’s engagement with feminist theory and politics. In fact, the opening lines of the essay announced that the relation of men to feminism is an ‘impossible’ one. The essay that follows is not an argument for or against the participation of men in feminism. It assumes that this participation is already underway historically because of the force of the women’s movement. But all is not subsumed under a happy coalition of feminist women and male allies. In fact the question precisely is: how do men participate in feminist politics? Allies? Leaders? Distant admirers? While they can be allies, and indeed may think themselves to be so, bearing the male position in a given (patriarchal) society, despite good intentions, does not neutralize the fruits of male privilege. ‘Male position’ here does not mean the biological fact of being born with a particular set of genitals. It refers to the long history of producing knowledge, writing literature, conducting government and dispensing justice in the name/persona of a figure, who is really a male person in the guise of everybody.

It might sound absurd that men could become leaders of feminist movements, but Heath reminds us that this might not be so uncommon. His example comes from the discipline of literary theory where “theory” is the preserve of mostly male academics who implicitly devalue feminist theory as not really theoretical, dependent on other ‘real’ theories such as psychoanalysis and Marxism. In this sense, the male/universal theories are the ground on which feminism stands. Feminism, on its own, is exceptional, too particular and unintellectual. The more benign option seems to be distant admiration. Admiration means not pretending to be master over feminism and not already converted to its thinking such that one’s masculinity is magically dissolved in sympathetic allegiance to it. But when we admire something, does that necessarily mean a questioning of our own behaviour in society? When we admire women’s writing, for example, does a male feminist critic simply cross-dress himself mentally and read like a woman? This can become a self-preserving alibi for the male feminist who stakes nothing in his engagement with the radical implications of feminism. This roster of impossible situations for men as feminists is not meant to be encouraging. But that is the point of male feminism. Men cannot experience feminism and its liberatory power in the same way as women. In fact, the idea that there is some underlying symmetry between the experiences and psyche of women and men goes against the basic premise of feminism which views sexual difference as the cause of women’s oppression. In this regime, women are made to function as images of the ‘other’ vis-à-vis male desires and sexuality. Masculinity itself, despite variations in individual men, functions as if it were stable, universal and in control of itself. Heath gives theoretical support from psychoanalysis and feminist critiques of pornography for this operation of sexual difference. I find this essay to be a classic exposition of feminist theory because of its relentless pursuit of what cannot be accommodated within feminism. No easy assumption here of the union of theory and practice. Heath is prescient in his analysis of the academic domestication of feminism where it becomes an easy path to ‘radicalism’ by courting ‘gender’ issues, especially by male academics, who otherwise don’t touch issues of social marginalization, particularly caste, class and race. This is a historical aspect of contemporary feminism where the criticism of patriarchal images and representations has become academic business as usual. In simplistic terms, today anybody, male or female, can author a ‘feminist’ book. While this mainstreaming is, on the one hand, an achievement of the feminist struggle, on the other hand, it halts feminist analysis at the recognition of gender oppression. But the point is to change things. Unlike other radical political philosophies, feminism is interested in changing the desires of its participants so that the roles of mother, lover, wife, carer etc. do not appear as naturally desirable destinies. While these roles may appear to be abstract structures of oppression for feminist men, for a woman their reality cuts close to the bone and her experience. What male feminists need to realize then is that they have the difficult position of being both objects of feminism (inasmuch as feminism wants to end oppression perpetrated from male positions) and its “points of departure.” Heath reveals, although this is not his language, the overuse of the stakes of an existentialist feminism of the mid-twentieth century which argued that a woman exists for herself (rather than immanently in herself as imagined by patriarchy); the male feminist can easily continue existing for himself while turn his feminist affiliation into an immanent object. The impossibility for the male feminist inheres in this proposition: to stake one’s desire (for affiliation, for women, for social stability, for authority) and think of oneself as an object that has been de-centred from history, language and mastery.

The growing backlash against feminism, whether in the form of right-wing hijacking of feminist rhetoric or academic commodification of its insights, is increasingly heard today in popular discourse as the achievement of equality between men and women. ‘Feminism’s goal has been achieved!’ Heath’s essay usefully deconstructs for us this fiction of equality by expressing it as the central problem of male feminism. I quote him at length: ‘What is difficult for men aware of feminism is not to imagine equality for women but to realize the inequality of their own position: the first is abstract and does not take me out of my position (naturally women should be equal with me); the second is concrete and comes down to the fact that my equality is the masking term for their oppression (women are not equal with me and the struggle is not for that equality).’ [24] In this fiction of equality, equality naturally belongs to men, but women need to be raised to its level. The rhetoric of equality hides the prevailing relations of inequality by preserving men as the subjects/drivers of feminist efforts. Heath’s essay has two codas: the first, written in 1984, casually reveals that this essay was written while he was watching over his dying mother in a women’s ward. In the second coda, added in 1986, Heath criticizes this ending to his essay by pointing out to his succumbing to the desire for self-authorization through a personal anecdote exemplifying his affiliation with his mother’s suffering. He then asks whether the admiring respect for the autonomy of feminism, may not turn both feminism and its autonomy into fetishized objects. While the autonomy of women is the point of feminist struggle, the male feminist must be careful not to translate this autonomy into exclusion (albeit respectful). This conundrum, Heath finally states, is the problem of ethics (respect for the autonomy of the not-me/others) meeting politics (the need to express oneself socially in alliance). The idea of male feminism therefore cannot claim to politically support feminism without questioning and giving an account of its motives and desires for doing so.

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http://genderstudiesgroup.wordpress.com