

Teaching ‘Feminism’ in a UGC Refresher Course

A report on the women’s studies refresher course by Anveshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies conducted with Academic Staff College, Moulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad, January 2019

Anveshi’s proposal for conducting a refresher course in Women’s Studies was met with enthusiasm by the Urdu University, which has a Women’s Studies Cell running an M.A course in Women’s Studies. After an year and a half of discussions, it was decided that the course would be titled ‘Feminism: Theory and Practice in India’ and that its objective would be to introduce the participants to issues and debates raised by the Indian women’s movement over the last twenty five years. It was felt that feminist debates could be understood better when gender is introduced through its constitutive contexts in India such as law, development, health, literature, visual culture and feminist documentary film making and social movements; rather than through the conceptual debates on gender or feminism itself.

Among the seventy five candidates who applied for the course, Staff College selected nearly fifty but twenty four actually turned up for the course. The participants, fourteen women and ten men were from varied disciplines such as literature, economics, political science, geography with one participant from women’s studies. A majority of them were from literature and economics. Ten participants came from four states of Northeast – Meghalaya, Nagaland, Assam and Manipur. Maharastra and Orissa also had a presence. Many had not heard of women’s studies and came merely to fulfill the requirement for their promotion, as per University Grants Commission’s guidelines.

The feminist debates in the constitutive contexts were introduced as follows. The Social Movements section explored the debates on how questions of caste, sexuality, minority figured in the women’s movement; how gender figured in the Dalit movement and in the relation between women’s movements and women’s studies. In the Gender and Literature section, debates on writings of women, on gender and literature, Dalit literature, and the feminist critiques of literary canon were discussed. In the section on Women and Development, important strands of development thinking in India, methodological issues raised by feminist economists about women’s work and economy, debates on self-help groups and informal labour, and well-known experiments such as SEWA and Mahila Samatha programme were discussed. In Health, issues were introduced through debates on population policies and women, politics of nutrition and the implications of HIV-AIDS on women in India. The Law lectures focused on gender and politics of law reform in colonial India, debates on rape law reform in post-Independent India, politics of personal law reforms as well as significant public interest litigations such as the Right to Food and the Right to Information campaigns. Visual culture lectures familiarized the participants to the notion of ‘image’ in cinema and Western art, engendering vision, the debates in film studies, gender in Indian cinema and the issues of censorship. Debates in feminist documentary filmmaking were introduced through a discussion of the concepts of realism and documentary; relation between feminism and documentary film making in India, the notion of body in the feminist documentaries. Several documentary films were

screened as part of this module. Many other resource persons also used visuals, films, short stories, letters etc. in their lectures.

The participants were responsive in general, though quite a few were silent too. When asked for reasons, they replied that as everything was new to them, they needed time to absorb what they were listening to in the classroom, before responding. Many wanted more reading material, as there is a dearth of reading material in the places that they come from. For instance, an English lecturer (who could not speak without quoting Shelley or Wordsworth) from Ganjam, Orissa, said that except Manusmriti, there is not a single book in their college library concerning women. Resource persons, in turn, felt that the participants were an unusual group, listening carefully, asking thoughtful questions and not cynical about women's studies or feminism. Surprisingly there was not a single episode of heated exchange between the participants and resource persons or among the male and female participants over the issues being discussed in the classroom. However, when issues of sexuality and sexual consent were being discussed, one could discern certain discomfort among the male participants, with some even unable to stop their giggling to deal with their discomfort.

In the informal discussions over tea and lunch, the participants noted that in this course, the question of feminism and women's issues was posed in several unexpected ways, from angles that they have not thought before. A few wondered how topics such as Dalit literature or visual culture fit into a 'women's studies' course. A few more expressed the anguish that 'identity' issues such as Dalit and minority may be creating fissures within women's movement thereby 'diluting' the issue of women's oppression. Some strongly felt that such a course should be introduced at the graduate level in all colleges thereby enabling creation of awareness about women's issues. In the feedback forms that they obliged to fill, participants from North East felt that while the course could have included more topics from the northeastern parts of India. A few felt that the course was hectic and the number of lectures could be cut down. In the end, most participants said that they were going back with a feeling of having learnt something new about 'women'.

Refresher course in Women Studies

Week 1

DATE	10.15 am to 11.45 am	12:00 am-1:30 pm	L U N C H	2.15 pm-3:45 pm	4:00 pm-5.30 pm
Day – 1 21.01.09 wedsda y	Registration	Inaugural session Prof. J. A. Patil, Vice-Chancellor, Karnataka State Law University and Prof.Rama Melkote, Anveshi		Introduction to the course - MANUU Dr.Shahida Murtaza and Dr.A.Suneetha	Screening of the film Skin Deep by Madhumeeta Sinha, Researcher, English and Foreign Language University, <u>EFL U Campus, Tarnaka, Hyderabad 9989234536</u>
Day – 2 22.01.08 Thursda y	Women's Movements and the Caste Question - Prof.Susie Tharu, Rt.Professor, English and Foreign Language University, <u>Sainikpuri, Hyderabad - 9393086641</u>	Introducing Visual Culture – Text and Image - Dr.R.Srivatsan, Senior Fellow, Anveshi. <u>Central Excise Colony, New Nallakunta, Hyderabad 9440480762</u>		Dr.Shahida Concepts in Western Feminism	
Day – 3 23.01.09 Friday	Development Thought in India – Dr.R.Srivatsan, Senior Fellow, Anveshi. <u>Central Excise Colony, New Nallakunta, Hyderabad. 9440480762</u>	Gender and Genre in Visual Culture: Indian Cinema – Uma Bhrugubanda, Assistant Professor, English and Foreign Languages University. <u>Sainikpuri, Hyderabad 9949911222</u>		Prof.Rekha Pande - Globalization and ICT	
Day – 4 24.01.09 Satday	Gender and Literature Introduction Prof.Meenakshi Mukherjee, Rt.Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University. <u>Sainikpuri, Hyderabad 04427717242.</u>	Meenakshi Mukherjee - Reading Sepia Tones		Political Mobilization and Participation: Case Study of Self-help Groups from a Gender Perspective - Dr.K.Lalita, Director, Thinksoft Consultants, <u>Habsiguda, Hyderabad 9440011747</u>	
Day – 5 25.01.09 Sunday					
Day – 6					

26.01.09 Monday				
Day - 7 27.01.09 Tuesday	Region and Development – Prof.Rama Melkote, Rt.Professor of Political Science, Osmania University. Sainikpuri, Hyderabad 040 27114769.	Women's Movement and Women's Studies – Dr.Rekha Pappu, Independent Researcher, Hyderabad. Tarnaka, Hyderabad 09989488123	Prof.G.Haragopal - Human Rights Movement and Gender Questions	Library

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Day – 8 28.01.0 9 wedsda y	Gender and Autobiography – Dr.Sharmila Sreekumar, Assistant Professor, IIT, <u>Powai, Mumbai.</u>	On Gender and Labour in the Informal Sector – Dr.Sarath Davala, Trustee, SEWA, Madhya Pradesh. <u>Karkhana, Secunderabad 9491869228</u>		Regional Literatures – Navaneetha M, Researcher, University of Michigan, Michigan, USA. <u>Powai, Mumbai</u>	
Day – 9 29.01.0 8 Thursda y	Women and Health in India General Introduction – Dr.Veena Shatrugna, Public Health Foundation of India. <u>Tarnaka, Hyderabad - 9391111291</u>	Dalit Literature and Literary Canon – Dr.K.Satyanarayana, Assistant Professor, English and Foreign Languages University. EFL U campus, <u>Tarnaka, Hyderabad</u>		Screening of the Stalin’s film India Untouched – Madhumeeta Sinha, <u>EFL U Campus, Tarnaka, Hyderabad</u>	
Day – 10 30.01.0 9 Friday	Childrens’ Literature and Popular Culture – Dr.Deepa Srinivas, Fellow, Anveshi Ameerpet, Hyderabad 9866155203	Women and Population Policies – Prof.Sheela Prasad, Professor, Centre for Regional Studies, Hyderabad Central University, <u>Domalguda, Hyderabad - 9849155420</u>		Prof.Sheela Prasad - Women and HIV problems	Library
Day – 11 31.01.0 9 Satday	Intro to Women and Law – Vasudha Nagaraj, Advocate Fellow, Anveshi Research Centre for Women’s Studies. <u>Karkhana, Secunderabad 9885179287</u>	Women, Law and Social Reform in Colonial Period Dr.A.Suneetha, Coordinator, Anveshi. <u>Padmaraonagar, Secunderabad - 9490804098</u>		Screening of film Something Like a War by Madhumeeta Sinha, EFL Campus, <u>Tarnaka, Hyderabad</u>	IT
Day – 12 01.02.0 9 Sunday					
Day – 13 02.02.0 9 Monday	Gender and Development in India – Prof.Padmini Swaminathan, Director, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai. <u>ECIL X Road, Hyderabad.</u>	Cinema and the Moving Image 1– Dr.Satish Poduval, Associate Professor, English and Foreign Languages University. <u>EFL U Campus, Hyderabad – 040- 27098930</u>		Gender and Development -2 Prof.Padmini Swaminathan	IT

Day – 14 03.02.0 9 Tuesda y	Women's Movement and Sexuality Issue – Chayanika Shah, Mumbai	Law and Minorities in India – Flavia Agnes, <u>Majlis, Mumbai</u>			IT
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Day – 15 04.02.0 9 Wedsda y	Women's movement and minority Question – Flavia Agnes, Majlis, Mumbai	Prof. Yesudasan – Introducing Visual Studies		Right to Food – Supreme Court and the Campaign – Biraj Patnaik, Advisor to the Supreme Court, New Delhi – biraj.patnaik@gmail.com	
Day – 16 05.02.0 8 Thursda y	Right to Food – PIL – Biraj Patnaik, Advisor to the Supreme Court New Delhi	Cinema and the Moving Image 2 Dr.Satish Poduval, EFL U, Tarnaka, Secunderabad		Prof. Yesudasan – Engendering Vision	Library
Day – 17 06.02.0 9 Friday	Women and Nutrition Dr.Veena Shatrugna, PHFI, Tarnaka, Hyderabad			Lecture for group discussion	Group Discussion
Day – 18 07.02.0 9 Satday					
Day – 19 08.02.0 9					

Sunday				
Day – 20	Research proposal presentation	Objective type test		
09.02.0 9 Monday				
Day – 21				
10.02.0 9 Tuesda y				

Director – ASC